

The role of political parties' women's wings towards inclusive leadership in Tanzania

Ben Sanga¹
Matilda Demzee²
Ambiliasia Mosha³
Adam Kihaka⁴

¹ben.sanga@yahoo.com
²demzeematilda@gmail.com
³ambimosha@gmail.com
⁴kihakaadamu@gmail.com

^{1,2,3,4}The Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy, ^{1,2,3,4}Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

Political parties' women's wings are established to promote women's political participation, leadership development, and representation in decision-making processes within political parties and national governance structures. Despite these efforts, women in Tanzania continue to be underrepresented in key leadership positions. This reflects persistent gender disparities within the political sphere. This study examines the role of political parties' women's wings in advancing inclusive leadership in Tanzania. Specifically, the study explored the status quo, functions, challenges and the untapped opportunities of political parties' women's wings in enhancing inclusive political leadership in Tanzania. Guided by Feminist Theory, the study employed qualitative research approach and a case study research design. The study's population involved all women members of political parties which have women's wings in Tanzania, whereby, sample of 72 respondents, gathered through purposive and snowball sampling techniques, were involved in data collection through interviews and focus group discussions. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze data. The study revealed that women's wings were formally established in all political parties, with significant differences in their degree of institutionalization, operational capacity, and availability of resources. Besides, women's wings continue to face persistent barriers such as patriarchal norms, inadequate resources, weak policy implementation, male-dominated gatekeeping, and sexualized stereotypes. The study recommends political parties in Tanzania, policymakers, and relevant stakeholders to strengthen women's wings beyond symbolic representation by ensuring adequate financial resources, institutional autonomy, enforceable gender quotas, and meaningful inclusion of women in party decision-making structures.

Keywords: Challenges, Inclusive Leadership, Opportunities, Political Parties, Tanzania, Women's Wings

I. INTRODUCTION

Participation of women in leadership of a country is crucial given the fact that it is through it that policies are made and gender-balanced representation is more beneficial than not. Comprising about a half of world's population, women's voice in decisions that affect their lives is imperative since policies made determine service distribution and redistribution, thus affecting developmental needs of the recipients, women inclusive (Gletsu, 2012). One of the most basic means through which women can get involved is through the political parties (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), 2014). As a gateway to decision making forums, political parties do play an instrumental role of recruiting decision makers via various mechanisms including establishing and nurturing women's wings also known as women branches (iKNOW Politics, 2023). Women's wings in political parties play an influential role of ensuring among other things, they empower women in the society to take part in politics. Moreover, they advocate and articulate women interests, amplifying women voices in decision making structures and combine efforts so as to penetrate the male-dominated political system and acquire leadership pots within the party and in the wider political system (Cowell-Mayer, 2017; United Nations Development Program (UNDP) & National Democratic Institute (NDI), 2012). Another role includes reaching out to large number of women voters in the society and thus guarantees a strong fan base for the concerned party. It is therefore within political parties, that women get a chance to access the policy making posts since these are the recruitment gateways.

Whereas women's wings roles differ from country to country, their determination in pushing women's agenda in the male-dominated politics within the parties becomes the overarching goal (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network,

2023). Women's wings such as the Conservative Women's Organization (CWO), in the United Kingdom, Women's League of the African National Congress in South Africa and The National Action Party (PAN) Women's wing of Mexico, stand out as good examples to be mimicked by other wings (UNDP & NDI, 2012). Their strong membership, resource stability and shared vision are spoken as their winning strategy. However, unlike in the existing few good examples, women's wings are generally considered to be weak, too ambitious, divided, and which have failed to stand for what they were created for (Osei-Afful, 2014). This is translated in the global, regional and national trends which show a small number of women in leadership posts within the political parties and in key policy making instruments such as parliament and others. This questions the whole functioning of women's wings in enhancing women to attain leadership positions.

Taking a look at various reports that show leadership statistics by gender in policy making structures globally, it is easily noticeable that the gap between women and men is enormous. Despite the fact that through women's wings political parties have played part in raising the number of women, the balance is still desired. For instance, the increase of proportion of women in parliamentary seats globally by 0.6% in January 2021 from 25.5% to 26.1 in 2022 shows achievements in parties' women's wings. However, the Inter-parliamentary Union Report of 2023 show that in the year 2022 only 34.7% of parliamentary seats were held by women globally and this remains just a small proportion comparing to the efforts invested in attaining the same. In Sub-Saharan Africa it is reported that by the year 2022 only 26.3% of parliamentary seats were held by women with Americas leading with 34.7% (Ferrell, 2026). Additionally, 40% of women hold representative seats in parliament in only 26 countries alone while 71 countries have less than 7% of the seat to date (Ferrell, 2026). With these statistics, women's wings effectiveness remains questionable.

Various studies conducted to assess women in leadership through women's wings has identified several challenges that these group face. A study conducted by Gletsu (2012) in Ghana found that while women's wings remain the major recruitment agency in the country, women comprise of only 8.3% of all parliamentary seats. The main obstacle is male domination system and lack of feminist consciousness within the party. A study by Sulley (2020) found out that intra party nomination process undermines women hence denying their chances in contesting and finally hold the leadership posts. A study by National Democratic Institute and FIDA-Kenya (2018) in Kenya show that only 8.7% of women who contested for elections in Kenya were women, blames being attributed to lack of support from their political parties among other factors. Additionally, of the 31 parties surveyed by in Kenya, chairman position was taken by only four women, vice chairmanship was held by only 10, and only five as secretary generals UNDP and NDI (2012) and National Democratic Institute and FIDA-Kenya (2018). In all these and similar studies, the role of women's wings or branches towards inclusive leadership have been given little consideration.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

It is undeniable that women's wings have played a tremendous role in enhancing women participation in political leadership within political parties and in other higher political posts in Tanzania. The essence of most women branches is anchored on their solidarity and strength in aggregating and articulating their needs but most importantly to hold leadership position within and outside the party structure hence have a say in policy making. Several studies portray an increase of number of women in the parliament via special seats forum. For instance, in the year 2015, Tanzania is said to have surpassed the 30 percent SADC Gender Protocol Barometer and the Beijing Platform for Action's target by having 34 percent (Strachan, 2015). This has also resulted to having the women leaders in highly reputable position such as presidency and speakership. However, this is a small number compare to male. Leadership in the parliament and within political parties seems to still be male-dominated faults being partly attributed to political system within and between political parties among other factors (Babeiya, 2011). Whereas political parties as gatekeepers and recruitment agencies for women to access leadership posts receive significance criticisms, little efforts are vested in exploring how women's wings venture in supporting their fellow women towards inclusive leadership. For instance, women's wings are largely seen to be active in searching for membership during election period for the aim of maximizing parties' members as a winning strategy while efforts to prepare women for taking leadership posts remains less visible (Sulley, 2020). This raises questions about the function of women's wings towards inclusive political leadership. Additionally, only a few studies have been conducted to appraise the role of women's wings towards elevating women in political party and policy making leadership positions.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To explore the status quo of political parties' women's wings in Tanzania
- ii. To examine the functions of political parties' women's wings in enhancing inclusive political leadership in Tanzania.
- iii. To identify the challenges encountered by political parties' women's wings in increasing inclusive political leadership in Tanzania.

- iv. To find out the untapped opportunities by political parties' women's wings in enhancing inclusive political leadership in Tanzania.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The current study is guided by Feminist Theory. The theory has been drawn with its assumption that both, men and women, are equal and should be regarded and treated equally without any kind of imbalances. The particular thought attempts to demonstrate the way women's personal authority appears to be significantly under the restrictions of relative powerlessness (Msangi, 2015). Besides, the idea tends to provide a critical framework for understanding the existence of power dynamics and gender inequalities that do exist. As well, the theory recognizes the present subordination of women within social and political structures. Feminist theory, therefore, serves as lens. Such lens helps understanding of the existing complex interplay between gender, power, and leadership, which ultimately guides efforts to foster inclusive leadership practices. This certainly helps to empower individuals of all gender and create more equitable societies (Meng & Neill, 2021). Gender equality, along with women's empowerment have sincerely gained increasing attention worldwide, while necessitating an examination of how political parties can contribute to inclusive leadership (Lihiru, 2023). The fact is facilitated by the truth that political parties play a vital role in shaping making of policies. As integral components of political parties, women's wings have the enormous opportunity and potential, as well, to advance gender-inclusive leadership. This enables the ability to address barriers and facilitating women's full participation and engagement. The present feminist theory, thus, provide guidance and direction of the need for challenging traditional notions of leadership, while advocating for equitable representation and participation of all genders. As assumed by the theory, power is not evenly distributed within society. Instead, patriarchal systems, ordinarily perpetuate gender disparities. Feminist theory provides a reason behind the need to study the way women structures within political parties can garner efforts to challenge the said status quo through dismantling traditional hierarchies, at the same time, promoting shared decision-making processes (Sweetman, 2013). Employing feminist theory into discussions on inclusive leadership, facilitates challenging of traditional power structures and promote gender equality. The situation also creates environments that intensively value diverse perspectives and experiences.

2.2 Empirical Review

In examining the status quo of women's wings in Tanzania, in the context of political parties, studies mentioned active membership mobilization and limited influence in advancing women into substantive leadership positions, as among the features. In examining constitutions of major political parties, the study done by Lihiru (2023) found that parties such as CCM and CHADEMA primarily recognize women's participation through women's wings and membership recruitment structures. They also offer few concrete and operational mechanisms to promote women's leadership and decision-making roles. Lihiru further cemented that gender equality commitments often end with much of establishing women's wings rather than translating into meaningful and actual leadership opportunities for all women. Research presented through the Tanzania Centre for Democracy (2023) had similar observation. The mentioned study revealed that political parties have largely focused on recruiting women and maintaining women's wings, as a major focus, instead of putting deliberate efforts to strengthen women's representation in leadership structures. The findings are with a view that women's wings continue to function mainly as instruments for political mobilization and electoral support. Less is done to consider women's wings as effective platforms for nurturing female leaders and influencing party decision-making processes, as well.

The study has assessed functions of political parties' women's wings and largely noted them as important structures and platforms for promoting women's participation and representation in political leadership. In Tanzania, a study by UNDP and NDI (2012) came to find out that women's wings facilitate political education and leadership development. It further mentioned mobilization of female party members by increasing women's engagement in political processes as among the other significant function of political parties' women's wings. Limited resources and inadequate influence in party decision-making structures, however, and to the larger extent, limited its effectiveness. Similarly, Jackson (2025)'s study reported women's wings under CCM party have shown firm contribution towards women's political awareness and participation in local government leadership and hence, served women much. Nevertheless, limitations have been noted. Presence of socio-cultural barrier and, of course, male-dominated leadership structures, in particular, mark as resistance towards women's advancement into influential political positions. It's therefore suggested by the studies that the capacity to promote women's presentation is still limited, although women's wings play significant part in contributing to inclusive political leadership.

On challenges encountering political parties' women's wings, several issues were raised by studies. The study by BBC Media Action (2023), for example, found discriminatory social norms, along with gender stereotypes and negative perceptions of women leaders as enormous hindrance toward women's political advancement in Tanzania.



These societal attitudes often and to the larger extent discourage women from seeking leadership positions as comparing to the counterpart, men. Such circumstances as well, reduces public support for female candidates to the larger extent. Similarly, Krook and Hubbard (2018), in their study, revealed that significant number of women in political parties frequently encounter intimidations. Not only that but also harassment and various forms of political violence, has been reported whereby, it restricts their participation and influence within party structures. These challenges, collectively, undermine the ability of women's wings to seriously and effectively champion women's leadership. This makes a call for the need of institutional reforms and supportive environments that foster gender-inclusive political participation.

Several opportunities remain underutilized by women's wings in an effort to promote inclusive political leadership in Tanzania, as examined by the study. The study by BBC Media Action (2023) had an observation on the named issue. BBC Media Action saw the increasing public awareness and the act of challenging discriminatory social norms by means of civic education and media engagement strengthening mechanism towards women's participation and acceptance in leadership positions. Additionally, iKNOW Politics (2023) pointed out loudly and keenly that women's wings can instantly enhance their impact and strength by a means of leadership training expansion and things like mentorship programs. As well, strategic partnerships with civil society organizations to prepare more women for political leadership is of the outermost importance. The same study further noted that once the digital platforms are effectively deployed and utilized, the possibility for improvement of women's visibility and political influence is assured. Besides, access to leadership opportunities is surely a result of digital and networking initiatives, a thing that may result to enhancement of the role of women's wings in fostering inclusive political leadership in Tanzania.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Approach and Design

This study employed qualitative research approach. Qualitative research approach involves gathering and analyzing data in the form of words instead of numbers (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Punch, 2013). This approach was employed in this study based on the rationale that, nature, functions and status-quo of the women's wings among political parties appears heterogeneously and less known, to the sense that, detailed and in-depth gathering of qualitative data is of the outermost importance. This approach also provided a wider range of contrary opinions on the problem under consideration, and made the data gathered richer in the study. As well, this study used a case study research design. A case study design aims to convey a unity in depth, context, and in a comprehensive way. The study employed a case study design because women involvement in political parties' leaderships and the challenges facing political parties' women's wings are relatively different from those of opposite gender and other political unions within political parties, hence, needed detailed examination, as far as Tanzanian environment on political parties' operations is concerned.

3.2 Study Area

The study took place in Tanzania, and specifically and narrowly, it took place in the purposely selected region namely Dar es Salaam. The rationale for selection of the named region to be involved in the study is the fact that, offices, headquarters and branches of most of popular political parties with their women's wings in Tanzania are found (CCM, 2020; Paget, 2019). Presence of political parties' women's wings platforms in Dar es Salaam gave assurance to the presence of key informants of this study.

3.3 Target Population

Population for this study involves all women members of political parties which have women's wings, namely CCM, ACT Wazalendo and CHAUMA from Dar es Salaam. The named population was important in this study since it made part and parcel of the execution and operation of women's wings within political parties and hence, believed to have knowledge and awareness on their status-quos, functions, challenges and various opportunities available to enhance inclusive political leadership

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The study involved a sample of 72 respondents. These involved three (03) national party secretaries, one from each selected political parties with women's wings. Additionally, the study involved three (03) national women's wings' secretaries, one from each selected political party with women's wings. The study also involved three (03) regional women's wing secretaries and three (03) district women's wing secretaries of political parties' women's wings, one from each selected political party, respectively. As well, a total of 60 women members of political parties were selected, where, 20 women members came from each three selected political parties, within the study areas. With



that distribution therefore, the total sample of the study was 72 respondents. Secretaries of political parties' women's wings was involved as key respondents in this study because they were the key actors of all affairs within such women political parties' wings. Women members of political parties were involved in the study as well since, they were the major stakeholders of women's wings within political parties. Table 1 reveals a study's sample size.

Table 1

Respondents of the Study

S/N	Type of respondent	Number of Respondents	Data Collection Method
1	National Party secretaries	3	Interview
2	National Women's wings Secretaries	3	Interview
3	Regional women's wing secretaries	3	Interview
4	District Party Secretaries	3	Interview
5	Women Political Parties' Members	60	Focus Group Discussion
Total		72	

The study used purposive and snowball sampling techniques to get the respondents to be involved in the study. Purposive sampling technique was employed to get 12 secretaries of political parties' women's wings from national, regional and district levels within the selected areas. The rationale for using purposive sampling technique is the fact that the type and number of expected respondents is fixed and reflects the knowledge the study was looking for. On the other hands, a snowball sampling technique was employed to get 60 women political parties' members to participate in the study. The choice of snowball sampling technique was based on the fact that, finding participants who were women members from all selected political parties was difficulty and challenging, hence, fellow participants assisted researchers to get other participants.

3.5 Data Collection Methods and Procedures

The study used interviews and focus group discussions to collect data. Interview method was employed to collect data from a total of 12 respondents who were secretaries of political parties' women's wings in all selected political parties with women's wings of a selected study area. As well, the study used focus group discussion method to gather data from 60 women political parties' members. Hence, four (04) FGDs with five (05) participants each were conducted from each three (03) selected political parties, making a total of 15 FGDs. The rationale for the choice of these data collection methods was the fact that the named informants had richer information and assumed to be more comfortable to share their views on the study verbally; hence, an interview and focus group discussion methods, respectively, was appropriate data collection methods.

3.6 Data Analysis

Thematic data analysis was employed to examine data on the four objectives namely, examining the status-quo, functions, challenges and opportunities of political parties' women's wings in enhancing inclusive in Tanzania. The Nvivo 12 statistical software package and Word Processor/Microsoft Word was used to process data by marking themes in texts and retrieve exemplars of themes on demand. Specifically, collected data was transcribed and uploaded in the Nvivo software. Thematic analysis began by creating codes which represent main ideas from each respondent. These codes were later be collapsed or expanded according to similarity and differences of the main idea carried therein and they were transformed to key themes of the findings. The analysis was performed by running queries using mind mapping, framework matrix and coding matrix. Findings were presented as text of quotations and elaborations via the Word Processor/Microsoft Word software. Numerical values were presented in tables of figures to show various statistics on number of women in different leadership posts followed by text explanations.

3.7 Ethical Consideration

The researcher adhered to established ethical principles throughout the study. Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the research was obtained from the relevant authorities. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study and took part voluntarily after providing informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained, with participants' identities and responses kept private and used solely for academic purposes.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 The Status Quo of Political Parties' Women's Wings in Tanzania

The first specific objective aimed at analyzing the existing situation of the women's wings of the Tanzanian political parties. The results showed that women organizations are formally established in all political parties included in the study. However, participants noted significant differences in their degree of institutionalization, operational capacity, and availability of resources. The Umoja wa Wanawake wa Tanzania (UWT), the women's wing of Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), emerged as the most institutionalized and historically established among the parties studied. Participants associated this with its organized structure, long existence, and recognized place within the party hierarchy. When asked whether their respective parties had women organizations, three among participants responded respectively as follows:

"Yes, our party has a women's organization that deals with women's issues and mobilizes them to participate in party activities" (FGD Participant 1, 02/03/2026), *"Yes, it exists and is one of the three organizations within CCM. UWT has been very important in mobilizing women to participate in party activities"* (FGD Participant 2, 02/03/2026), *"Yes, it exists and often serves as a platform for empowering women politically and giving them a chance to express themselves"* (FGD Participant 3)

Regarding the historical background of Umoja wa Wanawake wa Tanzania (UWT), respondents consistently traced its origins to the early development of Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM). They explained that the women's wing was intentionally created as an institutional mechanism to integrate women into party affairs, mobilize women at the grassroots level, and provide avenues for women's political representation and leadership. This historical placement demonstrates that women organizational structures have long been embedded within Tanzania's dominant political party, although questions remain regarding the extent of their influence in party decision-making.

Participants explained the historical foundation of UWT as follows:

"...It was established at the beginning of the party to ensure women get opportunities in political leadership" (FGD Participant 1, 02/03/2026). The other respondent replied, *"...It was established in 1977 as part of strengthening women's participation in the party"* (FGD Participant 2, 02/03/2026)

Organizationally, UWT operates through a hierarchical structure extending from the grassroots to the national level. One interviewee explained:

"It is a participatory structure that moves from the bottom to the top, including Branch, Ward, District, Region, National level." (KII-01, 05/03/2026).

Another respondent elaborated on the leadership composition within these structures:

"There is a chairperson, a secretary, and committee members who coordinate different activities of the organization" (FGD Participant 2, 02/03/2026)

In terms of membership, participants described broad but inconsistent participation. Sources of funding for the women's wings were identified as including member contributions, party support, donor assistance, and social or economic activities:

"Contributions from members" (FGD Participant 1, 02/03/2026), *"Support from the party"* (FGD Participant 2, 02/03/2026), *"Donors and various projects"* (FGD Participant 3, 02/03/2026) and *"Social and economic activities"* (FGD Participant 4, 02/03/2026)

Concerning the effectiveness of the women's wings, participants expressed cautious optimism while acknowledging persistent structural challenges:

"To some extent yes, although there are challenges such as lack of resources and negative attitudes like patriarchy in society." (FGD Participant 1, 02/03/2026), *"Sometimes implementation is weak"* (FGD Participant 3, 02/03/2026).

The findings indicate the existence of institutional depth alongside implementation gaps. UWT, founded in 1977 as part of CCM, remains one of the most organized women's wings in Tanzania's political history (KII-04, 05/03/2026). Its multi-layered structure, extending from branch to national level, reflects a strong organizational framework. Nevertheless, participants acknowledged that structural existence does not necessarily translate into functional empowerment. Although the women's wings rely on diverse financial sources, including member contributions, party support, donor funding, and income-generating activities, respondents consistently emphasized that resources remain inadequate for implementing all intended programs. The women's wings of ACT-WAZALENDU and CHAUMA were described as comparatively less institutionalized than UWT, reflecting the broader historical and structural gap between the long-dominant CCM and newer political parties. This observation aligns with feminist theoretical perspectives that institutional visibility does not automatically guarantee substantive power.



Overall, the institutionalization of women's wings in Tanzanian political parties can be described as formalized but not fully empowered (KII-07, 05/03/2026).

While these organizations exist and remain operational, persistent constraints such as limited resources, unequal participation, weak implementation, and patriarchal attitudes continue to undermine their effectiveness and restrict their capacity to influence political processes substantively. The establishment of UWT in 1977 during Tanzania's socialist one-party era under Ujamaa further reflects a political formation grounded more in partisan mobilization than independent feminist activism. This historical background helps explain why UWT activities often emphasize party mobilization rather than autonomous gender advocacy, a tension that continues to emerge throughout the findings of this chapter.

4.1.2 The Functions of Political Parties' Women's Wings in Enhancing Inclusive Political Leadership

The second specific objective looked at the role played by the women's wings of political parties in ensuring inclusive political leadership is promoted. The subjects of the three parties spoke about a wide set of duties, which included mobilization and education on one end and advocacy and direct political assistance on the other. Discussing the primary duties of the women organization in their party, the participants provided the following answers:

"Bringing women together for party matters. Educating women. Holding party meetings to discuss challenges" (KII-01, 05/03/2026), *"Serving as a special body to unite all women in Tanzania, maintaining peace, building and sustaining revolutionary ideas according to the 2022 regulations"* (KII-01, 05/03/2026). Other duties mentioned included; *"Mobilizing women to join the party; building women's capacity so they can become leaders; representing women in meetings within the party and serving as the voice of women within the party"* (KII-04, 05/03/2026).

Respondents also expanded on the role of finding and developing women leaders:

"Having vision and foresight to identify capable individuals and encourage them to join the party" (KII-01, 05/03/2026), *"Identifying and nurturing potential via programs like Mabinti CCM"* (KII-03, 05/03/2026), and *"encouraging women to believe in their abilities and recognize leadership opportunities within the party and the country."* (KII-02, 05/03/2026)

Regarding the aspect of empowering women to challenge leadership and elective offices, participants asserted that:

"By persuading and guiding women on the importance of being involved in the party" (KII-03, 05/03/2026), *"guiding women to collect nomination forms for leadership positions"* (KII-07, 05/03/2026), as well as *"advocating strongly for women to obtain positions even when competing with many male candidates."* (KII-06, 05/03/2026).

There are also counter-stereotypes by the wings of women: As mentioned by a respondent, it includes

"Fighting negative perceptions, for example the misconception that women must provide sexual favors to contest for positions; rather, leadership depends on ability" (KII-02, 05/03/2026). As an indication of demonstrable accomplishment, one respondent mentioned: *"Successfully helped women secure ward councilor positions in Ndugumbi, Mbezi Juu, Mikocheni, Wazo, and Hananasifu"* (KII-04, 05/03/2026).

Additionally, respondents reported such functions as financial and technical support: Respectively, the views included; *"Providing financial support to women contesting for positions,"* (KII-01, 05/03/2026), *"providing technical support, such as guiding candidates on filling out nomination forms and educating them on available positions"* (KII-07, 05/03/2026), and *"they help mobilize women and youth to participate in politics."* (FGD Participant 4, 02/03/2026).

The functions of the women's wings, as revealed by the study, can be organized into two broad categories: supportive functions and transformative functions. Supportive functions include voter mobilization, campaign support, party fundraising, and acting as logistical wings during elections. These activities, while important to party machinery, position women's wings primarily as service organs that benefit the party rather than as autonomous agents of women's empowerment.

Transformative functions are more directly tied to promoting inclusive leadership, include capacity building through education and training programs such as Mabinti CCM, advocacy for women in candidate selection processes, mentorship and identification of future women leaders, and counter-narrative work to dispel harmful stereotypes. These activities reflect the kind of feminist activism that feminist theory envisions when it calls for the dismantling of systems that subordinate women.

The dual nature of these functions, as found by the study, creates an inherent tension: women's wings must balance loyalty to party goals with the advocacy of gender interests that sometimes challenge existing power dynamics within the same parties. This tension was evident in the responses of participants who, while celebrating the wings' achievements, also acknowledged that their influence in candidate selection remained limited and dependent on the disposition of predominantly male party leadership.

4.1.3 Challenges Encountered by Political Parties' Women's Wings in Increasing Inclusive Political Leadership

The third specific objective aimed to determine the challenges which prevent the inclusive political leadership to be well developed in the women's wings of political parties. The respondents of all parties and groups explained a correspondingly intricate and interrelated network of issues of cultural, financial, structural, and psychological nature. The most widespread and constantly mentioned challenge was patriarchy. Respondents had the following to reveal:

"A male-dominated leadership system (patriarchy), and negative perceptions by men who think women involved in politics are immoral or doing inappropriate things" (I-FGD Participant 3, 02/03/2026), "Patriarchal systems (for example, it was difficult to contest in Kibamba). Religious beliefs (for example, some interpretations in Islam do not support women as leaders)" (KII-04, 05/03/2026) and "Lack of confidence among some men who fear their wives might be approached or harassed if they enter politics" (KII-12, 05/03/2026)

Other respondents, added:

"Lack of financial resources and even vehicles to conduct activities such as visits to reach women in their areas, especially at lower levels" (K-FGD Participant 5, 02/03/2026), "They hinder the implementation of projects, for example sewing machine projects and related training" (KII-10, 05/03/2026), "Party structures that do not necessarily prioritize gender equality but rely on the goodwill and judgment of the chairperson" (KII-09, 05/03/2026), and "Limited financial resources to run the political process" (KII-11, 05/03/2026).

The political parties were characterized as having structural obstacles that were as powerful. These were revealed by one of the respondents:

"...some women were removed due to political reasons or pressure from powerful men within the party" (KII-06, 05/03/2026). The other respondent had the following to say; "personal sabotage and ethical issues leading to removal of women from contests" (KII-08, 05/03/2026).

Internal challenges that were identified were low participation and lack of confidence among women:

"Low participation of women, especially in contesting leadership positions. For example, within the party, positions like regional chairperson are held by very few women" (FGD Participant 5, 02/03/2026). Another respondent added; "Lack of confidence among potential women leaders" (KII-11, 05/03/2026).

The study has grouped challenges encountered by political parties' women's wings, as revealed by the participants, into three general categories, namely, socio-cultural barriers, institutional barriers, and resource-based barriers. Socio-cultural factors, which lie based on patriarchal ideology, religious interpretation, and highly ingrained gender norms, are what the feminist theory refers to as the ideological superstructure that perpetuates gender inequality. The multiple mentions of the patriarchy of all groups of participants and political affiliations and groups make it clear that it is a widespread phenomenon in social life and a political tool of exclusion. The way the fear of their wives joining politics, especially fears of harassment, are voiced by some men, demonstrates the mechanism of patriarchal control over the body and mobility of women that serves to limit political participation.

Similarly, as further examined by the study, institutional constraints such as structural reliance on goodwill of male leaders, self-sabotage by influential members of the party, and absence of formalized gender parity systems constitute failure of the political parties to incorporate feminist themes in their own governance systems. The realization that women have been progressing based on the goodwill and judgments of the chairperson is especially eye-opening; it implies that the political progress of women in the political parties in Tanzania is still dependent on personality and not on the system.

Resource based barriers, on the other hand, such as vehicle scarcity, insufficient funding and training, influence the operational capabilities of women's wings in all levels although the ultimate effects are this is different at the grassroots branch and ward level where most of the political mobilization is executed. The difficulties facing women's wings in political parties depict a systemic trend of exclusion which exists at all three levels of ideological, institutional, and material. The continuation of the patriarchal mindset, both outside, in society, and inside, in party systems, marked an indicator that women's wings have a battle on two or more fronts, without always having the institutional support to win.

4.1.4 The Untapped Opportunities by Political Parties' Women's Wings in Enhancing Inclusive Political Leadership

The fourth specific objective researched areas that political parties had not exhausted in empowering women's wings to achieve inclusive leadership. Respondents distinguished multiple opportunities that were emerging in the technological, institutional, inter-organizational and policy arenas. During FGD sessions, some respondents recommended the application of technology:

"Use of technology in mobilization" (K-FGD Participant 2, 02/03/2026).

Inter-party and civil society co-operation became a key but underused chance of promoting inclusive political leadership (I-FGD Participant 3, 02/03/2026).

As further revealed by the study, any collaborative effort should take into consideration the various levels of barriers to women based on class, age, education, religion, and locality and this should be the collective effort to include the women who are at the elite levels as well as those who are at the grassroots and those who are at the social fringe. This was also emphasized by one participant who emphasized:

“... Leveraging existing collaborations between women's organizations from different political parties.” (KII-06, 05/03/2026)

Participants emphasized the need for building on existing partnership of women organizations across political parties. Individuals such as the secretary of Women Organization must possess communication abilities to facilitate seamless coordination among members of the organization. It was contended that people like the secretary of Women Organization should have communicational skills to ensure that there is smooth coordination within the organization (KII-07, 05/03/2026).

Furthermore, professional development was viewed as pivotal within the organization. Such initiative would involve the training of employees and management to enhance their skills in managing risk factors (KII-12, 05/03/2026). Additionally, KII-12 said that where possible, there should be vocational training and education for party members. Additionally, such training/education programmes would expand to the party's grassroot branches. Not only that but also, KII-12 raised the need to have a policy of gender and quota system. Such policies are needed to make more people participate in decision-making. The secretary went further, explaining that the reforms of law and institutions are very important as a way of empowering and uplifting women; “... Legal or institutional reforms to empower and uplift women (KII-12, 05/03/2026).

Participants further were of the view that there should be the economic empowerment and self-sufficiency of women. Women should be encouraged to be self-reliant, as women organizations should do:

“Women's organizations should focus on motivating women to become self-reliant” (KII-08, 05/03/2026).

Expanding the explanations, KII-08 said, women should have access to the capital to run the activities of the organization.

Furthermore, respondents insisted that there is also the need to increase membership in local organizations. The few women holding leadership roles such as in the Parents' Association (Jumuiya ya Wazazi) is an opportunity to increase the representation of women. Such initiative would concurrently go together with establishing cross-party agendas for having the unity to promote women interest. It was commented that no party ideology should act as a constraint; Development agenda should be created and propagated irrespective of party affiliation (KII-05, 05/03/2026).

4.2 Discussion

The discussion of findings reveals that women's wings in Tanzanian political parties operate within a political environment deeply shaped by both; patriarchal norms, institutional inequalities as well as emotional burdens. The named factors, categorically, affect women's political participation. Although women's wings provide formal platforms for inclusion and mobilization, participants consistently described presence of frustration, discomfort, discouragement, and institutional weakness experiences. Statements such as “to some extent yes, although there are challenges such as lack of resources and negative attitudes like patriarchy in society” (FGD Participant 1, 02/03/2026) and “sometimes implementation is weak” (FGD Participant 3, 02/03/2026), really demonstrate presence of a gap between formal representation and substantive empowerment. These findings correspond with the observations of Meena et al. (2017). Meena et al. argued that Tanzanian politics, in fact, remains highly masculinized despite the formal adoption of gender equality principles in party constitutions and policies. Similarly, BBC Media Action (2023) notes that discriminatory social norms continue to portray politics as an inappropriate domain for women. This exposes them to gossip, reputational attacks, as well as expectations that prioritize domestic responsibilities over political leadership. The findings, therefore, suggest that emotional discomfort among women politicians is not merely personal but structurally produced through patriarchal political arrangements.

The study further demonstrates that women's participation in politics customarily involves substantial emotional labour associated with rebuilding confidence, legitimacy, and political self-worth as well. The finding's statement on “encouraging women to believe in their abilities and recognize leadership opportunities within the party and the country” reflects the existence of self-doubt. Internalized insecurity shaped by long-standing exclusionary practices was observed as well. This finding is consistent with Meng and Neill (2021), who contend that gender-based barriers and exclusionary organizational practices can leave women feeling undervalued and overlooked, thereby limiting their ability to fully participate in leadership and decision-making processes. This concurs with BBC Media



Action (2023). BBC Media Action found that women in Tanzanian politics are frequently required to prove their morality, competence, and credibility more than men. The findings imply that women's wings do not simply function as organizational structures for mobilization. The wings function as emotional spaces that help restore confidence, belonging, and political legitimacy among women, as well. In this regard, emotional support becomes an essential component of inclusive leadership and women's political advancement.

The findings also reveal that political competition within party structures is experienced as emotionally unequal and psychologically demanding for women. Participants described women's candidacy as requiring "strong advocacy" in contexts dominated by male candidates, suggesting that women must exert greater effort simply to receive recognition within political competition. These findings support the arguments of Meena et al. (2017) that political parties in Tanzania function as gatekeepers that often limit women's access to candidacy and leadership opportunities. Likewise, BBC Media Action (2023) reports low public confidence in female candidates and widespread assumptions that women are less qualified for leadership. Feminist institutionalist perspectives advanced by Kenny (2014) and Mackay and Murtagh (2019) further explain that exclusion is maintained not only through formal rules but also through informal gendered norms that define who appears legitimate within political spaces. Consequently, the study suggests that women's political participation occurs within systems that generate anxiety, pressure, and defensive persistence as women navigate structurally unequal competition.

Another significant finding involved the role of shame, humiliation, and sexualized political stereotyping in hindering participation of women in politics. Participants strongly rejected perceptions that women must provide sexual favours in order to obtain political positions. It was, instead, emphasized that leadership should depend on ability and competence (KII-02). The findings, as well, indicated that women's political ambition is often delegitimized through moralized and sexualized narratives. Such narratives portray politically active women as immoral or promiscuous. These observations are consistent with the studies by Meng and Neill (2021) and Fischer (2018), who explain shame as a political and gendered mechanism of social control. Similarly, in his study, Krook and Hubbard (2018) argues that women in politics frequently experience sexualized coercion, reputational attacks, and humiliating insinuations designed to undermine their legitimacy. Evidence from BBC Media Action (2023) further confirms that Tanzanian women politicians are often subjected to moral surveillance and stigmatization. The named situation happens when they interacting with male political actors. The findings therefore reveal that political exclusion extends beyond institutional barriers. It goes further to include symbolic violence, reputational harm, and emotional humiliation that discourage women from political engagement.

The study additionally identified fear, harassment, uncertainty, and sabotage as major emotional realities that shapes women's experiences in politics. Women's participation was frequently associated not only with insecurity, but also other harassment, and fears of reputational damage. These suggests that politics is framed as a risky and morally dangerous environment for women. These findings correspond with studies by IPU and APU (2021) and Alanis (2020). The mentioned studies document widespread psychological violence, sexual harassment, reputational attacks, and online abuse targeting women in politics across African contexts. Furthermore, the findings on sabotage and exclusion from political competition support feminist institutionalist arguments by Kenny (2014) and Mackay and Murtagh (2019). Such arguments reveal that informal networks and backstage power relations often override formal democratic procedures. Similar observations were made by Strachan (2015) and Ocran (2014), who found that Tanzanian political parties remain male-dominated institutions. In these institutions, male elite patronage and informal support systems heavily influence women's political opportunities. These dynamics unquestionably create feelings of betrayal, humiliation, mistrust, and emotional exhaustion among women participants.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that women's political participation in Tanzania is shaped not only by institutional structures. It is as well facilitated by emotional realities linked to patriarchy, resource deprivation, fear, stigma, and persistent gender inequality. Participants repeatedly associated low participation and weak implementation with inadequate financial support and lack of training opportunities. Insufficient institutional commitment contributes the situation as well. These findings reinforce the arguments of Strachan (2015) and Ocran (2014) that weak financial foundations, limited political networks, and poor party support agreeably continue to constrain women's effective participation in Tanzanian politics. The discussion therefore shows that, while women's wings remain constrained by inadequate resources and patriarchal systems, they, in fact, provide important spaces for solidarity, emotional restoration, advocacy, and resistance against gendered exclusion. Collectively, the findings support the broader conclusion that inclusive political leadership is not only an institutional matter. It is an affective one, requiring attention to the emotional experiences of women regarding dignity, legitimacy, security, belonging, and political confidence.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that women's wings in Tanzanian political parties occupy an important yet structurally constrained position within the present political system. Although women's wings exist formally across all parties studied, particularly the Umoja wa Wanawake wa Tanzania (UWT) within CCM, their levels of institutionalization, operational effectiveness, and access to resources differ significantly. UWT remains the most historically established and organizationally structure. Despite their roles in mobilization, mentorship, leadership promotion, and capacity building, women's wings continue to face persistent barriers. Such barriers included patriarchal norms, inadequate resources, weak policy implementation, male-dominated gatekeeping, and sexualized stereotypes. The barriers, certainly, undermine women's political legitimacy. The study further reveals that women's political participation is not only shaped by institutional exclusion. It is shaped by emotional experiences such as frustration, self-doubt, anxiety, humiliation, fear, and reputational insecurity, which collectively discourage women from fully engaging in political leadership. Consequently, while women's wings provide important spaces for solidarity, confidence-building, and resistance against stigma, their transformative potential remains limited by deeply rooted structural and emotional architectures of exclusion. The study therefore concludes that meaningful inclusive political leadership in Tanzania requires not only strengthening the formal capacities of women's wings. It is as well, entails transforming the institutional cultures, gendered norms, and emotional conditions that determine who is perceived as a legitimate and worthy political leader.

5.2 Recommendation

The study recommends that political parties in Tanzania, policymakers, and relevant stakeholders to strengthen women's wings beyond symbolic representation by ensuring adequate financial resources, institutional autonomy, enforceable gender quotas, and meaningful inclusion of women in party decision-making structures. Also, efforts to promote women's political participation should move beyond formal mobilization activities and address the deeper structural and emotional barriers that discourage women from political leadership. This includes patriarchal norms, gender stereotypes, sexualized political stigmatization, harassment, and unequal access to political opportunities. Political parties should, as well, institutionalize mentorship programs, leadership training, psychosocial support systems, and anti-harassment mechanisms that protect women from reputational attacks and political intimidation. Furthermore, civic education and public awareness initiatives should be expanded to challenge discriminatory social attitudes that portray politics as inappropriate for women. Strengthening women's wings in this manner would enhance their transformative capacity, improve women's political confidence and participation, and contribute to building a more inclusive, equitable, and gender-responsive political system in Tanzania.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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