

POLITICAL FACTORS INFLUENCING WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT:
THE CASE OF KITUI DISTRICT RURAL WATER SUPPLY

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ABSTRACT

This study represents an effort to investigate political determinants of women participation in rural water supply using data drawn from the Kitui District of Kenya. The question asked throughout the study is: What political factors influence women participation in rural water supply? In an attempt to answer this question, this study holds that, two broad sets of factors namely, women's personal ability and political environment determine the nature and level of women participation in rural water supply. Both these sets of factors are treated as the independent variables while the phenomenon under investigation i.e. women participation is treated as the dependent variable. Social-cultural variables are treated largely as the intervening variables mediating the relationship between women participation and political variables.

The study was primarily based on field interviews of beneficiaries of water projects selected from a cross-section of the entire study area. Observed variation in women participation was then related to the above set of variables. A sample of 140 project participants were randomly chosen and interviewed by the use of a structured questionnaire. A further 22 government officers were also interviewed. For the latter, we used unstructured interviews.

The major objective of the study was to investigate and establish the political factors that influence women participation and role in the development of rural water supply.

Three sets of Hypotheses were tested in an attempt to establish relationships that are existing. It was hypothesized that women personal ability, women involvement in decision making roles, Government support and lack of external control and influence, determine the nature and level of women participation in the development of rural water supply.

Variables under examination were found to influence women participation with varying significance. Amongst the major findings of the study, desire for water was unexpectedly found to have a negative association with women participation. The ability of women to manage water technology was found to be positively correlated to women participation, while lack of adequate government support was found to inhibit full women participation in rural water supply projects.

Various policy recommendations were made. For instance, based on structures of political institutions through which women participated, it was recommended that a re-organisation be done in way of facilitating women's accessibility to influential positions of the decision-making mechanisms.