

**NAVIGATING INSTITUTIONALIZED COMMUNITY-BASED MONITORING AND
ACCOUNTABILITY FORUMS: WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN UGANDA'S
LOCAL GOVERNMENT BARAZAS**

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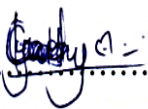


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DECLARATION

I, Mwebaza Catherine, hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work, has not been plagiarised and has not been submitted to any other institution for any award.

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APPROVAL

This dissertation has been submitted for examination with the approval of the following supervisor:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Solomon Mwije', written in a cursive style.

Solomon Mwije

08/05/2026

DEDICATION

To my beloved family my pillar of strength and greatest source of inspiration. Thank you for your unwavering love, endless prayers, and constant encouragement throughout this academic journey. To my parents, for the sacrifices you made and the values you have enacted in me. Your strength inspired me to tell the stories of women who, like you, continue to rise and claim their space in community spaces. This is for you, with all my love and gratitude.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CAO	Chief Administrative Officer
CDO	Community Development Officer
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IDI	In-depth Interview
KII	Key Informant Interview
LC	Local Council
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
RDC	Resident District Commissioner
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the involvement of women in Uganda Local Government Barazas-forums of the community that are aimed at facilitating citizen participation, social responsibility and deliberative democracy. Although there are legal pledges on gender equality, women are still participating in such forums in an unequal manner. This gap is filled by the study by a gender-specific study informed by three theoretical perspectives; Deliberative Democracy Theory, Principal-Agent Theory, and Emancipatory/Transformative Theory. Using a step by step explanatory mixed-method design, the study was carried out in Kalaki District. The survey questionnaires, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and non-participant observation were used as data collection methods. Descriptive statistics were applied to the quantitative data, and the data of qualitative research were analyzed through thematic analysis. The results show that the attendance frequency and active involvement of women in Barazas is low. There are no inclusive mechanisms aimed at encouraging the participation of women or they are poorly executed. Women view the Barazas as being of little value, inclusion and effectiveness. The main obstacles are structural (e.g. time poverty, household duties), cultural (e.g. gendered expectations of public speech), logistical (e.g. distance, transport), and institutional (e.g. poor facilitation, no follow-up system) barriers. Enablers that are identified are mobilization networks, access to information and supportive facilitation.

These findings are interpreted in the discussion in the light of intersecting inequalities and power dynamics and are compared to the literature on citizen engagement that is available. The paper concludes that existing Baraza practices are not as transformative as gender inclusion. Policy suggestions to policymakers, local governments, the Office of the Prime Minister, civil society, and development partners would be required to make the facilitation gender-sensitive, put up follow-ups, and build mobilization networks. Further studies should be conducted in the future to compare urban and rural districts, longitudinal examination of participation patterns, and other marginalized groups.

CHAPTER 1

1.0 Introduction

Community-based deliberative approaches have become more popular with governments worldwide as a way of filling the implementation gaps of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The commitment of the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind is oriented towards people who are vulnerable, excluded, discriminated, living in multidimensional poverty, and experiencing overlapping inequalities (United Nations, 2015; Stuart et al., 2016). Women tend to be the most marginalized and SDG 5, which is devoted to gender equality and empowerment of women, is particularly significant. The Agenda also demands inclusive societies and institutions that are inclusive of participatory development.

The Agenda 2063 by the African Union also emphasizes on citizen mobilization, empowerment, and accountable institutions as some of the factors to ensure sustainable growth in Africa (African Union Commission, 2015). Uganda Vision 2040 has the same objectives as it focuses on good governance, effective service delivery, gender equality, empowerment of women, and effective monitoring systems (National Planning Authority, 2013). The Constitution of 1995 promotes the sovereignty of citizens and their involvement, and Articles 33 and 38 assure women of equal rights and foster a balanced gender representation (Republic of Uganda, 1995).

The decentralization policy of Uganda, which was put in place by the Local Governments Act (Cap. In 1997, 243) devolved authority to local councils (LC1 to LC5), to strengthen service delivery, accountability and involvement of the people (Republic of Uganda, 1997; Mushemeza, 2019). Although there have been some improvements, there are still some challenges such as inadequate funding, elite domination and unequal participation especially among women (Kakumba, 2010; Steiner, 2006).

In order to enhance downward accountability, the Baraza program was introduced in Uganda by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) in 2009. The citizens, service providers, policymakers, and other stakeholders are brought together in these public forums. Barazas, chaired by the Resident District Commissioner (RDC), come with sectoral reports on plans and performance in

education, health, water, roads, and agriculture, and feedback and discussion by citizens (Watera, 2019; Van Campenhout et al., 2021). Assessments show that there are positive changes in access to information and partial action, but the influence on service delivery is not similar and hinges on follow-up (Van Campenhout et al., 2021; Kabunga et al., 2020). However, there is still an uneven participation. The voice of women is often marginalized by structural barriers, cultural norms, and male dominance, even in the local councils with the affirmative action (Howard et al., 2018; Among, 2017). The existing research on Baraza primarily concentrates on their general outcomes, and there is a shortage of gender-based research on the participants (who, how, and what impact), the results (Waddington et al., 2019). This paper aims to address this gap and explore the role of women in Barazas in Kalaki District.

1.1 Background to the study.

Community-based deliberative practices have been embraced by governments all over the world in an attempt to bridge the gaps in implementation to realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is particularly so with the commitment of the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind. The purpose behind the principle is to embrace everyone who is vulnerable, excluded, discriminated, poor, and other inequalities (United Nations, 2015; Stuart et al., 2016). Women being one of the most marginalized groups are the center of SDG 5 that aims at gender equality and empowering every woman and girl. The Agenda is aimed at the creation of inclusive societies and institutions that will facilitate the participatory development (United Nations, 2015). The African Union Agenda 2063 in Africa supports this pledge by enhancing citizen mobilization, empowerment, and responsible institutions towards sustainable and inclusive development (African Union Commission, 2015).

Uganda is in line with these frameworks by its national objectives. Vision 2040 focuses on good governance, effective service delivery, gender equality, empowerment of women and effective monitoring and evaluation systems (National Planning Authority, 2013). The 1995 Uganda Constitution ensures the sovereignty and participation of the citizens. Article 33 and 38 guarantee equal rights of all citizens, especially women, to participate in political, social and economic issues without discrimination. This enhances gender balance and equal representation of the marginalized groups (Republic of Uganda, 1995).

The policy of decentralization in Uganda is written in the Local Governments Act (Cap. The 243) of 1997, is one of the main aspects of citizen participation. Decentralization, based on historical initiatives in both colonial and post-independence times, shifted power to local councils (LCs) between village (LC1) and district (LC5) levels. This is to enhance service delivery, accountability, policy implementation and popular participation (Republic of Uganda, 1997; Mushemeza, 2019; Ojambo, 2012). It promotes political, administrative and fiscal decentralization whereby local governments are able to deliver services in their jurisdictions like education, health, water, roads and agriculture. It also leads to local ownership and sustainability (Steiner, 2006). Although there is improvement, the issues persist such as corruption, takeover of elites, underfunding, ineffective oversight, and poor citizen engagement particularly among the marginalized (Kakumba, 2010; Mushemeza, 2019).

Uganda has institutionalized citizen participation in monitoring and evaluation to address accountability gaps in the decentralized systems. The National Policy on Public Sector Monitoring and Evaluation (2013) emphasizes the use of evidence in decision-making and the engagement of the citizens in the information collection and utilization (Office of the Prime Minister, 2013). The government learned the lessons of the previous programs such as the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) and implemented community-based approaches to improve downward accountability and the use of local data (Byamugisha, 2014; Goldman, 2018).

One of such initiatives is the Baraza program, which was community advocacy forums or public consultative meetings. Introduced in 2009 as a presidential initiative and introduced by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), Barazas was initially pilot projects on the sub-county level in 2009/10. They also spread throughout the country by relocating to the district level circa 2012/2013 to reduce expenses and reach a larger population (Van Campenhout et al., 2018, 2021; Kabunga et al., 2020). Barazas serve as a discussion platform where citizens, service providers, policymakers, civil society and media converge. They are chaired by the Resident District Commissioner (RDC), and include information sharing, such as sectoral reports on plans, achievements and challenges. Citizens also give feedback and discuss the management of resources and provision of services in the major sectors, e.g., education, health, water, roads, and agriculture (Watera, 2019; Parliamentarians Forum for Development Evaluation, 2014).

Barazas are designed to enhance transparency, create downward accountability, promote independent citizen oversight, increase government responsiveness, and collective problem-solving (Campenhout et al., 2021; Lubanga, 2021). The assessments indicate positive effects on access to information, citizen empowerment, collective action (e.g., cooperatives to obtain agricultural inputs), and certain corruption perceptions reductions (Van Campenhout et al., 2021; Ssanyu et al., 2017). Nevertheless, their functionality depends on the follow-up, administrative placement, and the relationship between stakeholders (Campenhout et al., 2018, 2019).

With such developments, there is still an unequal participation in Barazas especially among the marginalized populations such as women. The voices and influence of women are often restricted by structural power inequities, cultural norms, logistical issues, and dominance by men (Howard et al., 2018; Among, 2017). Despite the fact that the local governance system in Uganda has seats occupied by women (Local Governments Act, 1997), women have little influence during such forums as the Barazas (Kakumba, 2010). The current literature on Barazas concerns primarily general effects on the delivery of services and accountability, but it does not pay much attention to gender-disaggregated experiences, i.e., who is involved, how, and what effect (Van Campenhout et al., 2021; Waddington et al., 2019). This gap underscores the need to explore the inclusion of women in Barazas particularly in multicultural, rural settings to make sure that these mechanisms are used to foster equitable and inclusive development.

This paper thus examines the involvement of women in Local Government Barazas in Uganda, using the Kalaki District as a case study to examine the extent of involvement, inclusive practices, perceptions and obstacles or facilitators.

1.2 Problem statement

Although the concept of community-based monitoring and accountability initiatives is mostly viewed as the process of providing voice and power to the people (Björkman and Jakob, 2009), the experiences themselves might not be equally distributed among the people, particularly the marginalized groups (Howard et al., 2018). The majority of deliberative community-based monitoring and accountability interventions are based on the whole community with no regard to the identity heterogeneities. Yet, several factors such as the underlying structural power dynamics can exacerbate the already existing inequalities and thus act as both

external and internal barriers to women's participation in barazas (Howard et al., 2018). Women are one of the marginalized groups, and a number of challenges restrict their involvement in the interventions in the society. Women in a multi-cultural Uganda continue to be relatively disadvantaged and still marginalized in various development processes based on identity hence restricting their chances of involvement (Among, 2017). Despite the legal provisions to guarantee the involvement of marginalized groups such as women (Republic of Uganda, 1995, 1995), the legal provisions have failed to translate to empowerment and equality in planning and accountability demand (Kakumba, 2010). Of utmost importance is the need to research the ways in which various groups, in particular the marginalized ones engage in citizen engagement interventions.

Not many studies offer the examination of sub-groups to demonstrate how such marginalized groups are involved or benefiting in CBM processes (Gullo et al., 2017; Giné et al., 2018). There are only two studies that inform about equity issues of citizen engagement in Uganda, though they do not offer an in-depth analysis of citizen engagement processes or experiences of women in terms of participation (Bjorkman and Jakob, 2009; Bjorkman Nyqvist et al. 2017). The most recent studies on community-based advocacy forums (barazas), do not address the questions of who participates, how they participate. They mostly focus on the impacts of the forums on citizen gathered data, citizen empowerment, accountability demand and service delivery (Ssanyu et al., 2017; Watera, 2019; Kabunga et al., 2020; Campenhout et al. 2021). So far, no study has been done on the institutionalized barazas to study the questions of inclusive participation especially focusing on marginalized groups in Uganda. Since the pilot in 2009, only one impact evaluation of barazas in Uganda has been conducted (Campenhout et al., 2019; Watera, 2019) and this evaluation was not designed to address questions about gender issues in barazas (Campenhout et al. 2021). There is limited research not only on the impact of citizen engagement initiatives on women and other vulnerable groups but also on how and whether women and vulnerable groups are included in citizen engagement initiatives (Waddington et al., 2019).

We lack information about who attends barazas and we cannot say whether women and men are equally represented and whether their voices are equally heard, and whether the priorities of women that are discussed during the forums are equally taken into account by the decision-makers and service providers (Campenhout et al., 2021). If community-based monitoring and accountability interventions are designed to empower citizens and link them to decision-makers

and service providers to influence service delivery, then it is important that we assess the experiences of different groups of participants, especially the unempowered marginalized groups. This paper will concentrate on women citizens as one of the vulnerable and marginalized groups. The generalization problem might be reduced by understanding experiences of sub-groups. Not much is known about whether, why, how and when women participate in institutionalized deliberative community-based monitoring and accountability interventions especially in a multi-cultural context like Uganda. This study aims to de-pack the baraza processes in order to comprehend the obstacles and facilitators to women participation and the impacts of their inclusion (or lack thereof) on responsive decision making and delivery of equal amounts of public goods and services.

1.3 Main objective

To assess women's participation in Local Government Barazas in Uganda.

1.4 Specific Objectives

- To assess the level of women's participation in Local Government Barazas in Uganda.
- To identify inclusive mechanisms used to promote women's participation in Local Government Barazas in Uganda.
- To explore women's perceptions of Local Government Barazas in Uganda.
- To examine determinants (barriers and enablers) of women's participation in Local Government Barazas in Uganda.

1.5 Research questions

- What is the level of women participation in Local Government Barazas in Uganda
- What inclusive mechanisms are used to promote women participation in Local Government Barazas in Uganda
- How do women perceive Local Government Barazas in Uganda
- What are the determinants (barriers and enablers) of women participation in the Local Government Barazas in Uganda

1.6 Justification of the study

Although Uganda has a progressive legal and policy framework, including the 1995 Constitution (Articles 33 and 38), the Local Governments Act (1997), and the provisions of affirmative action that reserve one-third of local council seats to women, women still have limited and nominal participation in the decentralized systems of governance and accountability (Kakumba, 2010; Mushemeza, 2019; Among, 2017). Although the idea of decentralization was to empower change, enhance citizen participation and enhance service delivery, implementation issues have kept women out of the picture or sidelined. This is especially so in the rural and multicultural regions (Steiner, 2006; Howard et al., 2018; Initiative for Social and Economic Rights, 2018).

Baraza program is a facilitated community surveillance and accountability. It is a significant milestone to enhancing accountability, citizen empowerment and responsive governance in major sectors of the economy like education, health, water, roads and agriculture. It has been evaluated to have overall positive impact on information sharing, collective action, and certain service improvements (Van Campenhout et al., 2018, 2019, 2021; Kabunga et al., 2020; Watera, 2019). Nevertheless, these investigations primarily consider general impacts or overall citizen outcomes, but not much attention is paid to gender analysis.

Key questions, such as how many women are actually attending and actively participating (such as speaking or raising issues), the success of inclusive processes, female perceptions of the value and fairness of these forums, and the different barriers and supports that influence their participation have been largely unresolved (Campenhout et al., 2021; Waddington et al., 2019). The current literature on Barazas seldom considers the dynamics of subgroups, including the impact of power asymmetry, gender roles, and socio-economic aspects on the inclusion or exclusion of women (Ssanyu et al., 2017; Howard et al., 2018).

This research is needed due to a number of reasons. First, to really attain the principles of leave no one behind in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and especially SDG 5 on gender equality, and the Vision 2040 in Uganda, there is a need to shift the idea of representation to active and equitable involvement in accountability mechanisms such as Barazas. The experience of women can reveal the true empowerment of the marginalized groups through these forums or whether the forums reinforce inequalities unknowingly.

Second, it is opportune to fill this evidence gap. With Uganda improving its citizen engagement practices in the face of the current service delivery challenges and gender inequality, there are

certain lessons that can be used to inform policy reforms, enhance mobilization tactics, and create gender sensitive guidelines to guide Barazas and other such forums. Third, the results will be applicable to local governments, Office of the Prime Minister, civil society, and development partners interested in enhancing inclusivity, reducing elite dominance, and enhancing equitable outcomes in managing public resources.

This study offers specific context-based information to bridge the divide in gender analysis of citizen advocacy forums by targeting a rural area, namely, the Kalaki District, which represents most of the Ugandan contexts. Finally, it serves the greater purpose of establishing responsible and inclusive institutions, which foster gender equality, social justice, and sustainable development in Uganda.

The legal systems in Uganda uphold gender equality and citizen participation, but women participation in decentralized systems of accountability such as Barazas tends to be low. The given work fills a considerable gap of evidence as it provides gender-specific information about a forum that plays a central role in downward accountability. The results can be used to shape policy reforms in order to have more inclusive Barazas, in line with SDG 5, Vision 2040, and equitable service delivery in rural communities such as Kalaki.

1.7 Relevance of the research.

The research project on women involvement in the Local Government Barazas in Uganda is significant theoretically and practically. It contributes to our knowledge of some of the important areas.

Theoretical Significance

The study broadens the understanding regarding deliberative democracy, social responsibility, and gender-based governance in decentralized regimes. While previous studies on Barazas have mostly looked at overall impacts, such as better information flows, citizen empowerment, and service delivery, this study focuses on subgroup dynamics and intersectional inequalities. Through such frameworks as Principal- Agency Theory, Deliberative Democracy Theory, Emancipatory/Transformative perspectives, it provides a better insight into the influence of

structural power relations, cultural norms, and institutional design on the participation of meaningful participants in deliberative forums and the voice of those that matter in the results.

The results will assist in explaining why gender-neutral citizen engagement tends to reproduce instead of decrease inequalities. This adds to the current debates of inclusive deliberation in low-resource, patriarchal, and multicultural settings (Howard et al., 2018; Karpowitz et al., 2012; Waddington et al., 2019). It also adds the Uganda-specific evidence into the international debate on whether community-based monitoring can ever promote the principle of leave no one behind as provided in the SDGs.

Applied and Policy Relevance.

The study offers evidence-based information at the policy level to enhance gender responsiveness in the decentralized governance in Uganda. Since Barazas are one of the most important accountability and citizen monitoring mechanisms, the knowledge of barriers to women participation, the effectiveness of inclusive mechanisms and experiences of women can be used to make practical improvements in:

- Guidelines on design and implementation of Barazas (e.g. compulsory gender quotas on speaking time, women-only breakout sessions, transport subsidies or childcare during forums);
- Mobilization plans by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), Resident District Commissioners (RDCs), Community Development Officers (CDOs) and women councils;
- Local government leaders and sector heads training on gender-sensitive facilitation and follow-up;
- Inclusion of gender-disaggregated monitoring in the National Policy on Public Sector Monitoring and Evaluation (2013).

This study is especially applicable to the local governments in the rural areas such as Kalaki where the participation of women is low due to a number of factors, which include domestic roles, culture, low education and distance. The study has practical recommendations that can be used to reduce male dominance, enhance fair influence on resource allocation and responsiveness to the specific service needs of women, such as maternal health, access to safe water, and agricultural extension.

Greater Social and Developmental Importance.

The study helps Uganda meet its constitutional requirements of gender equality (1995 Constitution, Articles 33 and 38), Vision 2040, and international requirements of SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), and Agenda 2063 by demonstrating how to improve inclusion. The greater the involvement of women in forums of accountability, the less the corruption perceptions, improved management of public resources, more equal service delivery and increased trust in local institutions all of which are beneficial to the entire communities.

Finally, the research empowers the women involved in the research and civil society organizations since it captures their experiences and voices. This will be evidence that can be utilized in advocacy and also a reference point in future research on the marginalized groups in citizen engagement programs in Uganda and other African settings.

To conclude, the research is important as it transcends overall analyses of Barazas and produces gender-specific and actionable knowledge. This understanding can assist in turning these platforms into something beyond a gathering into a legitimate tool of inclusive, equitable and sustainable local governance. The research brings a better insight into deliberative democracy, agency-principal relationships, and emancipatory mechanisms in the gendered governance setting. In practice, it provides suggestions to OPM, district leaders and civil society to become more gender responsive in Barazas. It gives a voice to rural women in society and helps to develop inclusive institutions.

1.8 Conceptual framework

The Baraza Initiative: An Innovative Community-Based Deliberative Monitoring in Uganda.

The analysis by Waddington et al. (2019) confirms that collaborative innovations of citizen engagement are more effective than confrontational engagements. Deliberative innovations aimed at uniting citizens to exchange information, debate/discuss the issues of the public policy and offer opinions that can be taken into consideration in decision making processes are also positive results of citizen engagement, which can be seen looking at the various cases that Smith (2005) has analyzed. One of the latest deliberative innovations that the Uganda government

implemented to enhance community participation in supervising of public services and resource management, and decision making is a baraza (Campenhout et al., 2018, 2019, 2021; Kabunga et al., 2020). A baraza is a public meeting or platform or in other terms a ‘town-hall’ organized by a collection of stakeholders. A baraza may be informally arranged and executed by the community members, leaders or civil society organizations. It may also be formalized to have a public policy viewpoint. The institutionalized barazas that are structured into deliberative community-based monitoring and accountability forums are the focus in this study. In 2009, the Ugandan government launched deliberative community-based monitoring and accountability forums also referred to as Baraza programme. In 2009 the program was first piloted at sub-county level, in 2012 some 267 sub-counties had conducted barazas and was subsequently extended to all district within the county. The implementation in the financial year 2012/2013 was changed to direct level and sub-county with the reason to minimize the cost and to involve participants on a higher level (Campenhout et al., 2018; Kabunga et al., 2020).

The programme was meant to enhance citizen participation in holding the government accountable on performance in the management of the public resources and service provision. The goal is to establish avenues of information sharing to the public, strengthen institutionalized downward accountability, instill a culture of independent citizen orientated monitoring; increase government responsiveness to the needs of citizens and develop better planning strategies in deliberative and collective forms (Kabunga et al., 2020; Campenhout et al., 2021). Barazas prioritize five major areas of concern and public sector which include education, health, water, roads and agriculture (Campenhout et al., 2018; Parliamentarians Forum for Development Evaluation, 2014). The baraza forum unites a broad spectrum of stakeholders in local governments such as policy makers in the central and local governments, providers of public services/ policy implementers, citizens as users of the public services, development partners and civil society organizations. The coordination was originally done by the Office of Prime Minister (OPM), but the coordination, mobilization and officiating is now decentralized to local government level and done by the Residential District Commissioner (RDC) (Campenhout et al., 2018). The RDC leads the baraza, which is attended by the minister of state, Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), Local Council Chairpersons (LC1-LC5), head of local

governments sectors, opinion leaders, civil society representatives, citizens, and media (Campenhout et al., 2018; Kabunga et al., 2020).

A baraza has two components; the information sharing component and the deliberation component. During the information sharing part, the baraza RDC (baraza chair) asks the heads of various sectors to share information about what was planned, what was delivered, how it was delivered in terms of quality and quantity, which issues were of concern and challenges were met, how the forwards were planned (Campenhout et al., 2021). Deliberative community-based monitoring is important in information sharing in decision making (Raffler et al., 2018). The aim of meeting is to exchange information and discuss the issues of public policy and public service and to plan together how to improve things (Campenhout et al., 2021; Parliamentarians Forum for Development Evaluation, 2014). In the deliberation component, following the sharing of information, the RDC seeks citizen feedback on what has been presented by heads of sectors and seek citizen understand of what was planned and implemented in sub-counties; and then the sector heads are asked to make clarifications (Kabunga et al., 2020; Campenhout et al., 2021). The RDC then makes a report which is forwarded to the OPM pointing out intervention issues (weaknesses, challenges, achievements). The problems are supposed to feed into the government M&E (performance management) system where the information can be utilized to plan improved interventions in terms of resource management and service delivery (Kabunga et al., 2020). Access to public information and participation in deliberations improve citizen's knowledge on public issues and help in building their self-esteem. Knowledge and self-esteem can improve citizen's expressive confidence (power-within) which can then influence their capacity to participate in baraza and collectively with others (Ssanyu et al., 2017; Howard et al., 2018). When citizens are knowledgeable, their perceptions change, they are able to dialogue with others to come to a consensus, they gain trust, build networks for sharing information and social support that is necessary for individual or collective action. However, the sharing of information and social support in community-based monitoring processes depend on actors' positions and how specific stakeholders perceive the efficacy of shared information that will later be used for demand for accountability and action (Dewachter & Holvoet, 2017).

Barazas are supposed to result in better ownership, transparency, enhance horizontal and vertical accountability, better monitoring of government interventions, and better linkage of government leaders and community members (Parliamentarians Forum for Development Evaluation, 2014).

Barazas eliminate loopholes in sharing of information with the public by government officials and encourage citizens to report on service delivery issues. Public service problems can be mismanagement of recourse, corruption, low-quality work, absenteeism of service providers, low-quality services, and so on (Campenhout et al., 2018, 2019). Policymakers (government), the providers of the public goods and services (technocrats) and the consumers of the public goods and services (citizens) are the key baraza players (Watera, 2019). The avenues to accountability are multifaceted and can be linked to structural power relations among the actors that can restrict the involvement in shared actions like barazas (Howard et al., 2018). It speculated when citizens are informed, they develop self-esteem to attend barazas they can be encouraged to act in unison and consequently bring changes in power. Collective accountability efforts and power changes can enhance social and political sanctions, enhance adoption of informed decisions based on citizen demands and it could result in higher budget allocation to corrective tactics to address population concerns identified in barazas. Indicatively, Campenhout et al (2021) determine that the deliberative baraza processes at sub-county generate the citizen collective action and organization in form of associations and cooperatives that they employ to gain agricultural inputs and advisory services offered by the government. The citizens were able to seek answers on how the resources were used and thus the government officials would have no choice but to utilize the resources as per the plans (Ssanyu et al., 2017). To illustrate, according to Lubanga (2021), in 2020, the corruption index in Uganda dropped to 27, compared to 150 in 2009 when barazas began to work.

Conceptual Framework: Women's Participation in Local Government Barazas in Uganda



Figure 1: Conceptual framework

CHAPTER TWO:

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The chapter explores the available literature on the participation of women in the public forums with special focus on community-based monitoring and accountability systems such as barazas in Uganda. Based on international, regional, and local research, it looks at the trends of participation, how to increase inclusion, the perception that women have and how it influences their engagement. The review identifies gaps in our existing knowledge, in particular, when it comes to gender relations in deliberative spaces in decentralized governance systems. This literature can be used to understand how barazas can empower or marginalize women by integrating the ideas of deliberative democracy, principal-agent theory, and theories that encourage freedom. The major themes are the imbalance of power, cultural norms, and individual choice and institutional organization. These aspects influence the objectives of the study in terms of participation levels, inclusive processes, perceptions as well as factors affecting local government barazas in Uganda.

2.1 Theoretical framework

This part examines some of the important theoretical perspectives that underlie the investigation of women participation in institutionalized deliberative forums such as the Local Government Barazas of Uganda. There are three closely connected theories which are especially significant: Deliberative Democracy Theory, Principal-Agent Theory and Emancipatory/Transformative Theory. Collectively, they provide instruments to comprehend (a) the ideal of inclusive public thinking, (b) the structural accountability relationships and information voids influencing participation, and (c) the possibilities (or constraints) of such forums to marginalized groups, particularly women.

Deliberative Democracy Theory

The theory of deliberative democracy implies that democratic decision-making is legitimately based on the inclusive and rational public discussion. In such a discussion, participants do not only argue based on the number of votes or force but explain their choices using arguments that are comprehensible to everybody (Habermas, 1996; Dryzek, 2000; Mansbridge et al., 2012). The deliberative processes are supposed to enhance the legitimacy, rationality and fairness as citizens are given an opportunity to exchange information, challenge assumptions, develop understanding and arrive at consensus or at least better-informed preferences (Smith, 2005; Elstub and McLaverty, 2014).

Deliberative theory, in the case of community-based monitoring forums such as Barazas, would highlight the necessity of inclusive design, an equal opportunity to speak, to be heard, and to impact outcomes, and rational exchanges rather than domination or symbolic involvement (Warren, 2020). Nevertheless, the theory also acknowledges the continuous difficulties in real-life circumstances. Deliberation is usually distorted by power imbalances, including gender, class, education, and ethnicity, and causes the voices of less privileged people to be marginalized (Karpowitz et al., 2012; Mendelberg et al., 2014). Even during face-to-face communication, women can have interactional inequalities, including being interrupted more frequently, their input undervalued, or withholding because of social norms (Karpowitz and Mendelberg, 2014). This perspective both introduces the idea of Barazas as potential locations of deliberative empowerment and poses important questions of whether the existing institutional structures in Uganda can indeed create real inclusivity or just reinforce existing hierarchies.

Principal-Agent Theory

Principal-agent theory looks at relationships where one party (the principal) gives authority to another (the agent) to act for it. The risks of moral hazards and poor decisions exist because of information gaps, differences in interests and lack of control (Jensen and Meckling, 1976; Waterman and Meier, 1998). Citizens are perceived as principals who assign tasks to government officials (agents) and politicians and bureaucrats as intermediaries in the context of public service delivery (Brinkerhoff and Bossert, 2014; Renmans et al., 2016).

The mechanisms of social accountability such as Barazas are supposed to minimize these agency problems by enhancing the flow of information (principals get to know about agent performance), enabling sanctions (citizens can request explanations or create reputational pressure) and creation of trust through frequent encounters (Grandvoinnet et al., 2015). By engaging citizens in the discussion with service providers and policymakers, Barazas, in particular, aim to reduce the principal-agent chain, which leads to greater downward accountability (Van Campenhout et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, the theory also suggests that marginalized groups, such as women, may not become good principals because they lack access to information, have less bargaining power, fewer resources to mobilize, and cultural norms against going out on the streets (Dewachter and Holvoet, 2017; Howard et al., 2018). The gendered principal-agent relationships are therefore important; women can have more costs of participation (time and social risks) and less expected benefits (their demands are not easily met) and keep the discrepancies in accountability.

Emancipatory / Transformative Theory

Emancipatory and transformative theories emphasize research and actions that actively oppose oppressive systems, empower the disadvantaged, and enhance social justice (Freire, 1970; Mertens, 2007, 2010). In participatory governance, these views see citizen engagement forums not just as tools for accountability but as potential spaces for raising awareness, collective action, and structural change for marginalized people (Gaventa, 2006; Howard et al., 2018).

In the case of women in the rural and patriarchal societies, emancipatory theory is concerned with power-with (self-confidence and awareness of rights), power-with (solidarity and collective action) and power-to (the capacity to impact choices) (Rowlands, 1997). In theory, barazas might play emancipatory functions by providing women with a platform to speak against injustices, establish networks, hold people accountable and transform gender norms regarding speaking in public. However, the theory also warns that such forums may easily turn into new locations of domination unless there is a deliberate emphasis on inclusion by strengthening elite dominance, suppressing dissenting opinions, or tokenizing the presence of women without giving them real power (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Howard-Grabman et al., 2017).

Combination of the Three Theories.

The normative ideal of inclusive, reasoned dialogue is provided by deliberative democracy; the structural accountability mechanisms and power asymmetries that define whose preferences are acted upon are explained by principal-agent theory; emancipatory/transformational theory predicts the potential (and risks) of empowerment women as a historically subordinated group have; and the potential to be empowered is anticipated by emancipatory/transformational theory. It is these lenses, combined, that create a strong system to examine how Barazas are used as a means of actual inclusion and responsibility or how they reproduce gendered exclusion.

It is based on this theoretical review that the empirical literature (section 2.3) is presented, which reviews how these concepts have been operationalized and tested in real-world citizen engagement and monitoring programs, especially in Uganda.

2.2 Empirical review

Here, the empirical evidence on citizen engagement, social accountability, community-based monitoring systems, and gender aspects of participation is synthesized, albeit through a narrowing down to global/regional research to Uganda-specific research on Barazas. The thematic organization of the review is in line with the aims of the study: the effectiveness of deliberative accountability forums in general, gender and inclusion dynamics, and particular evidence (and gaps) on the topic of women participation in institutionalized Barazas in Uganda.

2.2.1 Social responsibility and participation of citizens.

There is an increasing body of evidence on the effectiveness of community-based monitoring and social accountability in low- and middle-income countries, demonstrating that such initiatives can enhance information flows, decrease corruption, enhance the effort of service providers, and empower citizens when implemented effectively (Molina et al., 2017; Waddington et al., 2019). Meta-analyses and systematic reviews show moderate positive impacts on the service delivery outcomes, including access, quality, and utilization, in case interventions involve information sharing with the opportunity of collective action and credible follow-up mechanisms (Grandvoinnet et al., 2015; Danhouno et al., 2018).

Effectiveness is however much dependent on the context. Interventions may be subject to such issues as elite capture, poor attendance by marginalized groups, and poor sustainability after the external support ceases (Gaventa and Barrett, 2012; Fox, 2015). Results that disaggregate by gender are even more of a rarity, but existing studies are consistent in indicating that women are less active compared to men, even among those who are present. The time constraints, the cultural taboos of confrontation in the public, the lack of confidence, and the fear of penalty can be discussed as the reasons of this low participation (Schlozman et al., 1995; Howard et al., 2018; Karpowitz and Mendelberg, 2014). Female contributions are more oriented towards the short run household or services demands i.e. health, water and education. Nevertheless, they are less likely to be fulfilled as compared to the demands of men (Osborne et al., 2010; Yourkavitch et al., 2016).

Monitoring Uganda through barazas and community-based.

The studies of Uganda decentralization indicate both positive and negative outcomes in terms of the citizen participation. Although the system has resulted in a greater number of people in the area having access to services, as well as the establishment of formal participation channels (Mushemeza, 2019), the actual participation is minimal, especially among women and the poor. This is attributed to factors such as clientelism, elite domination, poor capacity, and poor accountability (Kakumba, 2010; Steiner, 2006; Ojambo, 2012).

In some places, community-based monitoring programs have been successful to some extent. The famous Power to the People experiment of primary health care demonstrated that the delivery of performance information to the community and the use of collective action resulted in a significant decrease in provider absenteeism and better health outcomes (Bjorkman and Svensson, 2009, 2010; Bjorkman Nyqvist et al., 2017). However, efforts to repeat this success have had mixed outcomes, frequently due to insufficient information without continuous reinforcement, plausible repercussions, or follow-up (Donato and Mosqueira, 2019; Raffler et al., 2019).

Barazas were first piloted in 2009 and rolled out nationwide around 2012/2013, since then they have been assessed several times, primarily at the bequest of the Office of the Prime Minister and development partners. Key findings include:

Barazas enhance the short-term access to information and enhance awareness of citizens on sector plans, budgets, and performance (Campenhout et al., 2018, 2019, 2021; Watera, 2019).

They promote a bit of collective action, including cooperatives to access agricultural inputs, and increase perceived pressure on local officials (Kabunga et al., 2020; Ssanyu et al., 2017).

The implications on real service delivery are slight and rely on such aspects as the location of the initiative (district vs. sub-county), the quality of discussions, and the follow-up on the issues raised (Campenhout et al., 2021).

The opinions on transparency and problem exposure are most positive, yet a significant number of citizens say that they are frustrated by the absence of tangible measures after forums (Lubanga, 2021; Watera, 2019).

It is noteworthy that nearly all of the Baraza assessments consider the citizens as a unit. Data that are gender-disaggregated are not common. The limited references to the participation of women indicate reduced participation and speaking rates in comparison to men, but do not investigate the causes and effects (Campenhout et al., 2021; Van Campenhout et al., 2018). No significant research has been conducted so far with a specific emphasis on:

2.2.2 Gender aspects and the involvement of women.

The available empirical data regarding the role of women in decentralized governance and accountability in Uganda reveals that there are gender imbalances, even in what should be an inclusive environment. Although affirmative action policies like the 1995 Constitution Articles 33 and 38 and the Local Governments Act of 1997 have increased women in local councils to approximately 46% in some deliberative groups in recent elections, meaningful participation has not occurred (UN Women, 2021; Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2017/2022 updates).

There is mixed evidence on studies of Barazas and other community monitoring forums. According to some assessments, women and disadvantaged groups are in fairly good or even better attendance in some instances, with women being outnumbered by men (Initiative for Social and Economic Rights [ISER], 2018; Watera, 2019). As an example, poor and marginalized citizens such as women, youth, were actively involved in certain Baraza sessions raising issues about service delivery. Nonetheless, there are few detailed analyses that distinguish

gender data. The majority of the studies that examine the effects of Baraza do not disaggregate the outcomes of citizens in terms of attendance, speaking, prioritization of issues, and influence by gender (Van Campenhout et al., 2018, 2019, 2021; Kabunga et al., 2020). Gender is another aspect where women are considered less likely to talk publicly and men dominated the discussion even when women were present (Howard et al., 2018; Initiative for Social and Economic Rights, 2018).

The main barriers to meaningful participation of women in Barazas and other forums of this kind are:

Women are the most affected by structural and logistical factors, such as household tasks, childcare, distance to meetings, time constraints with market or agricultural days, non-reimbursement of transportation, and the lack of childcare facilities (ISER, 2018; Howard et al., 2018; Mushemeza, 2019).

It is socio-cultural and patriarchal beliefs, like Norms that confine women to domestic spheres, fear of being punished upon speaking out, lack of confidence usually due to education or literacy levels, and the belief that Barazas are male-dominated spaces are limiting (Kakumba, 2010; Among, 2017; Afrobarometer, 2025).

Power and elite capture-Male dominance in the discussion, high level of interruptions, underestimation of the contribution of women (who often discuss household or community needs such as maternal health or water), and non-follow up on issues that women raise all reduce their effectiveness (Karpowitz et al., 2012; Mendelberg et al., 2014; Dewachter and Holvoet, 2017).

Knowledge and resource gaps: The lack of information on rights and processes, low literacy rates among women (58% versus 76% in the country, on average), and financial reliance hinder preparation and aggressiveness (National Governance Peace and Security Survey, 2017; Howard et al., 2018). The literature has enablers that have been identified to include:

Radio announcements, invitations by local leaders (e.g., women councilors, LC1 leaders), and organizing events in convenient places (such as around schools or markets) can be used to mobilize (Watera, 2019; CoST Uganda examples).

Facilitating support- RDCs or CAOs encouraging, women sitting together or having women-only sessions (but not common), and providing transport, toilets, or childcare can facilitate participation (ISER, 2018; Howard Grabman et al., 2017).

Access to information and networks: Confidence and collective voice can be increased by understanding rights, being supported by women groups or cooperatives, and having role models (Ssanyu et al., 2017, Kabunga et al., 2020).

Affirmative measures - Women councils and reserved seats open opportunities, but the transfer of this into power in Barazas is not even (UN Women, 2021; Mushemeza, 2019).

Altogether, although Barazas can be the subject of an inclusive discussion and responsibility, the gender factors remain under-studied. The overall positive effects on citizen empowerment may conceal the disparity in voices and influence, and the concerns of women (reproductive health and access to water) are often ignored (Campenhout et al., 2021; Waddington et al., 2019). Such a lack of intersectional, focused analysis on the experiences of women in traditional forums underscores the importance of the present study which focuses on the levels of participation, mechanisms, perceptions and factors in rural Kalaki District.

2.3 Research gap

Only one comprehensive impact evaluation has been done to assess effectiveness of barazas (Campenhout et al., 2021). In fact, findings indicate that implementation of baraza yields good results. Although the outcomes of deliberative community-based monitoring are quite familiar, the question would be whether the processes are gender sensitive and inclusive and whether the outcomes achieved are equally distributed among men and women in those communities. Outcomes are in themselves an injustice to the processes. Deliberative community-based monitoring interventions target a community in its entirety, but we need to look at issues that may affect the perception of barazas by citizens and the commitment of citizen to attend barazas either as individuals or as a group. Contextual factors matter. Minority or marginalized groups tend to have a number of challenges that restrain their involvement. Social heterogeneities can affect effectiveness of community-based monitoring (Björkman & Svensson, 2010). Power relations can be a big factor towards marginalizing women and other disadvantaged groups in barazas (Howard et al., 2018). According to Deveaux (2016), deliberative innovations might not lead to inclusion and empowerment of marginalized groups like women due to the contextual cultural and political institutions. Dewachter & Holvoet (2017) study established that disempowerment and lack of self-esteem affect a person's perceptions and participation in

community-based monitoring. Uganda is a multicultural country. Amidst the lower local government institutions, there are many traditional institutions governing citizen's behaviours in their respective communities. There are intersections of factors that limit public participation of women (Among, 2017). This research will therefore predominantly be on the lives of women in barazas in Uganda. According to the CLEAR model of citizen involvement on local governments, the success of barazas might be achieved when citizens possess knowledge and resource to be involved (can do), feel that they are part of the process (like to), are provided with opportunities to be involved (enabled to), are mobilised to be involved (asked to) and see that their views are given priority (respond to) (Lowndes et al., 2006a, 2006b; Watera, 2019). It is imperative to understand who participates, why, how and when it is possible for them to participate in barazas. Therefore, it is expected that lessons may help baraza commissioners and implementers to be sensitive to equality issues and create or improve inclusive mechanisms that would facilitate better pathways towards "leaving no one behind".

CHAPTER THREE:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

The research design is sequential explanatory mixed-method research (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011; Creswell, 2012). The quantitative phase will be applied at the beginning in order to determine the extent and trends of the female involvement in Local Government Barazas and to determine general trends and relationships. It will be followed by the qualitative stage to elaborate and further understand the quantitative results especially the lived experiences of women, their perceptions, mechanisms of inclusion, and the situational determinants (barriers and enablers) of their participation.

The design is suitable due to most previous studies on Barazas focusing on general impact assessments (e.g., Campenhout et al., 2021), and little focus on gendered processes. Mixed-methods approach enables triangulation, complementary validity, and offers quantifiable trends as well as subtle interpretive understanding of power relations, cultural conventions, and participation in a deliberative assembly (Greene et al., 1989; Mertens, 2007).

The research design is cross-sectional, as it will be able to record data at one point in time (it is expected that the fieldwork will last 6 to 8 months in 2026), but it will use secondary records to provide the historical background.

3.2 Area of study

The research will be carried out in the Kalaki District in Eastern Uganda. This region was selected as a case in one site due to a number of reasons:

It is a typical rural district in Teso sub-region where agrarian activities are widespread. The patriarchal systems of Iteso communities, as well as cultural conventions, tend to influence the involvement of women in the public life (Among, 2017).

It depicts the socio-economic diversity such as varying degrees of access to services such as health, education, water, roads, and agriculture, which are the five sectors of Baraza. Additionally, it has experience with decentralization.

The district has recently been reported to be experiencing Baraza activity by the OPM and has been followed up by the district level. This renders it a convenient location to see current or upcoming sessions.

By concentrating on a single district, it is possible to explore the issue in more depth and in a context-rich manner. It is also useful in managing resources better and having increased internal validity as opposed to dispersing the efforts to various districts. This method is also to a large extent helpful in the comprehension of gendered involvement in institutionalized Barazas in a rural Ugandan setting.

3.3 Sources of information

Primary data: Surveys, in-depth interviews (IDIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs), non-participant observations of Baraza sessions.

3.4 Population and sampling techniques.

The study population was in the form of two major groups in Kalaki District, Eastern Uganda (Teso sub-region):

Primary population: The entire adult women population living in the district and meeting the age criteria of 18 years and above and attending or attended (or would attend) district-level Local Government Barazas. The 2024 National Population and Housing Census estimates and district administrative records indicate that Kalaki District has an estimated population of about 128,000 adults (≥ 18 years) of which about 52% are females, making up approximately 52% of the total population of about 246,000. The study will focus on this group to gain insight into the experiences of women, their levels of participation, their perceptions, barriers and support in Barazas.

Secondary population (key informants): Barazas are organized, facilitated or observed by people directly involved, such as:

Resident District Commissioner (RDC)

Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)

Community Development Officers (CDOs)

Heads of the sectors (education, health, water, agriculture, roads)

Women council representatives (district and sub-county)

Local Council (LC) leaders (LC III and LC V women councilors)

Civil society representatives in the district who are selected and work on gender and governance.

It was estimated that there were 25 to 35 key informants who were available, using the administrative structures of the districts and the Baraza coordination lists.

3.5 Sampling techniques

Considering the rural and scattered population, resource and time constraints, we adopted non-probability purposive and convenience sampling techniques. These techniques are typically used in mixed-methods social research when the aim is to have depth and context, concentrating on the rich sources of information, but not attempting to generalize to the whole national population (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011; Palinkas et al., 2015; Bryman, 2016).

Quantitative Component (Survey)

Sampling technique: We used snowball/referral sampling, in combination with convenience sampling.

Rationale: Barazas are not commonly enough to sample on the field. Also, no full list of the past attendees on the district level is available. This was made possible by convenience sampling as we were able to reach women in community settings such as markets, church meetings, women group meetings and close to health centers. Snowball sampling was beneficial in accessing less visible or more isolated women, like in remote villages or with limited mobility.

Sample size: We wanted 120 women; we got 36 filled out questionnaires and after cleaning 34 were valid.

Inclusion criteria: Women who are 18 years and above and who are living in one of the four purposely chosen sub-counties in Kalaki District, and can provide informed consent.

Exclusion criteria: Women who were below 18 years old, non-residents or unwilling or unable to participate.

Qualitative Component

In-depth interviews (IDIs): With purposive sampling, we selected 10 women to ensure that we maximized diversity in terms of age (18-65 years), education (no formal education to tertiary), marital status (single, married, widowed, separated), history of participation (never attended, attended once, attended multiple times), and occupation (farming, petty trade, housewife).

Focus group discussions (FGDs): We purposely stratified and sampled 6 FGDs of 3-8 participants each consisting of 42 women. The stratification of the groups was based on sub-county to capture access and norm differences, where one FGD was sampled in each sub-county, and two other groups were sampled to balance the age and experience of participation.

Key informant interviews (KIIs): We chose 10 informants as they were directly involved in Baraza planning, facilitation, or gender advocacy (RDC, CAO, CDOs, sector heads, women council leaders).

Non-participant observation: We attended all of the district-level Barazas that were available to us throughout the fieldwork period (n = 6 sessions) with a structured checklist. It was a tiring method and not based on sampling.

Rationale behind the sampling decisions.

The study took non-probability sampling due to the following reason:

The district level does not have a reliable sampling frame, or full list of attendees of the Baraza.

The paper emphasizes rich, contextual, and relevant cases, rather than statistical representativeness.

The lack of resources and time precludes the use of probability sampling (e.g. simple random or stratified random) in a rural area with poor road coverage and little administrative documentation.

In gender and governance studies in Uganda, purposive and convenience sampling techniques are typical and reasonable when we seek to learn the marginalized voices and institutional action (Kakumba, 2010; Howard et al., 2018; Palinkas et al., 2015).

Although we cannot statistically extrapolate our results to all women in Uganda or all districts, our purposive sampling of a representative rural district and a heterogeneous population, and the various approaches we used, enhance the chances of our results being generalizable to other agrarian and decentralized environments throughout Uganda and East Africa.

3.6 Data collection instruments

The study used a set of complementary data collection tools to answer all the research objectives and questions in a comprehensive manner and with sequential explanatory mixed-method design. All the instruments were created in English, pilot-tested on 15 women in a neighbouring sub-county (not included in the main sample) to be clear, culturally acceptable, and lengthy, and amended. Instrument translation to Ateso (the local language that is dominant in Kalaki District) was done by a bilingual research assistant and translated back to verify fidelity. The participants were able to answer in their language of choice (English or Ateso).

Structured survey questionnaire

The primary reason was to quantitatively assess the degree and type of participation by the women, the reported inclusive mechanisms, views of Barazas, and self-reported barriers/enablers.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide

Purpose: To elicit common experiences, norms, group dynamics and community perceptions of Barazas and women roles in them.

Form (6 major themes, 60 90 minutes per group):

Introduction and warming up (awareness and overall opinions about Barazas).

Participation experiences (attendance, speakers, raised issues).

Perceptions of inclusivity and gender relations.

Obstacles that hinder or restrict the meaningful participation of women.

Factors that support and successful examples of women's engagement.

Suggestions on how women can be better included in Barazas.

Moderation: The discussion will be conducted by me, the moderator, with a trained female note-taker, so that it is a safe and a women-only space. The respect and confidentiality will be marked by ground rules.

Key Informant Interview (KII) Guide

Purpose: To collect information about Barazas organization, facilitation, gender dynamics, current (or absent) inclusive practices and follow-up.

Form (semi-structured, 810 key questions):

Pilot test and validation. Pilot testing of all instruments was done in a non-sample sub-county of 15 women and 3 key informants. Feedback was used to make the language clearer, eliminate ambiguous items, add probes, and cultural context, e.g., reduce direct confrontation questions.

3.7 Procedure for data collection

Data collection was well designed and conducted during eight weeks, between mid-December and mid-February 2025 in the Kalaki District, Eastern Uganda. The process was conducted in a manner that was ethical, aligned to local traditions and seasonal factors and that prioritized the safety of the participants and their comfort and voluntary involvement. The formal ethical approval of the Uganda Christian University Research Ethics Committee (approval reference: UCU/REC/2025/001) and introductory letters by the Office of the Resident District Commissioner (RDC) and Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) were received before any activities could be done to help get access to the communities.

Pre-Fieldwork Preparation

1. Ethical and administrative authorizations: Obtained ethical approval; received introductory letters with district authorities (RDC, CAO) and sub-county chiefs.

2. Hiring of research assistants: Two trained female research assistants, who were fluent in both Ateso and English, were hired to help with note-taking and focus group discussions (FGD), as well as translation and back-translation.
3. Pilot testing: Pilot tested 15 women and 3 key informants in a non-sample sub-county to test tools, timing, language clarity, and cultural sensitivity. This led to the use of reworded words, reduction of the survey (45 to 32 items), and modified probes.
4. Logistical preparation: Secured transportation, known safe and convenient location (community halls, schools, churches, health center grounds), prepared consent forms, both written and verbal/thumbprint, and arranged small refreshments to FGDs.
5. Community sensitization: Held an introductory meeting with the LC III chairpersons, women council representatives and village heads in the four sub-counties of choice to inform them of the purpose of the study, confidentiality and seek their support in helping to recruit participants.

Quantitative Data Collection- Survey.

1. Mobilization: With the help of LC1 leaders, women councilors, and community mobilizers, women were called upon to attend central community locations like markets, close to health centers, women group meetings, and church meetings.
2. Screening and consent: Eligibility was screened (must be 18 years old, resident of one of the chosen sub-counties), a brief verbal description was given to them (in Ateso/English), and informed consent (written signature or thumbprint) was requested.
3. Administration: The surveys were done face-to-face:
 - Questionnaire was self-administered to literate respondents.
 - The questions were read to low-literacy respondents in their preferred language by the researcher or assistant.
 - Mean time: 15-20 minutes.

4. Daily objectives: Goal was 20-25 surveys completed in the four sub-counties daily.
5. Quality checks: Questionnaires were checked immediately to ensure completeness; clarifications were inquired as much as possible. Forms were securely stored in locked bags.

Qualitative Data Collection-IDIS, FGDs, KIIs and observations.

1. Scheduling: It was scheduled by phone, local leaders or personal contacts:

- IDIs and KIIs were arranged according to the availability of the participants (homes, offices or neutral places).

- FGDs were arranged in 6-8 women groups, in safe, women-only environments (community halls or after-school school classrooms).

2. Informed consent: Given verbally and in writing/thumbprint prior to every session; consent to audio-recording was verified.

3. In-depth interviews (IDIs): Interviews were carried out individually and in a confidential atmosphere; they were recorded on tape with their consent; the interviews took between 30 and 50 minutes.

4. Focus group discussions (FGDs): Led by the principal researcher who made extensive notes and controlled group dynamics; they were recorded on audio and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, including refreshments.

5. Key informant interviews (KIIs): Interviews were conducted in offices or quiet settings; they were audio recorded; the duration of the sessions was 40 to 60 minutes.

6. Non-participant observation: Six complete district-level Baraza meetings were attended over the data collection period:

- Arrived early and sat unobtrusively among participants.
- Counted gender-disaggregated attendance, speaking turns, facilitation methods, and types of issues discussed using a structured observation checklist.
- Notes were taken and audio-recorded.

- Exited immediately after the sessions to prevent affecting discussions.

7. Debriefing: Notes on end-of-day review were used to determine some emerging themes and to revise probes to be used in subsequent sessions.

Considerations during implementation

1. Timing Timing was done to avoid peak farming seasons and market days where possible.

2. FGDs with females alone and a female researcher ensured a less dangerous setting to talk about sensitive issues, including cultural norms and fear of punishment.

3. We were flexible in rescheduling because of weather, funerals or availability of participants.

4. There were no financial incentives provided; refreshments were provided to FGDs, and transport reimbursement was provided to distant KIIs.

This systematic, progressive and participatory methodology guaranteed quality, ethical and culturally competent data gathering and maximum response rates and richness.

3.8 Quality / error control

In order to guarantee the reliability and credibility of the results in this mixed-methods research study, a comprehensive list of quality assurance and error control practices was used throughout the research process. These methods were based on the best practices in social science research (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011; Bryman, 2016; Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and addressed the possible threats to the quality of data, such as bias, measurement errors, missing responses, and misinterpretation.

Control of data quality in quantitative data.

Instrument validity and reliability: The survey questionnaire was pilot tested on 15 women on a non-sample sub-county. Face validity was determined by feedback on clarity, relevance and cultural appropriateness. The items were matched with research objectives and questions to guarantee content validity. The 5-point Likert-scale perception items were also internally consistent, which was verified after data collection by use of Cronbachs alpha (= 0.82) which showed that the reliability was good.

Pilot testing and revision: Pilot comments were used to revise or drop ambiguous or leading questions. The response options were streamlined and a 7-point Likert scale was narrowed to 5 points to ensure that the participants were not fatigued and confused.

On-site review of questionnaire: Completed questionnaires were checked in the field regarding completeness and logical consistency and missing values. Respondents were inquired pleasantly to explain or fill the omitted items where necessary. Forms that were not filled or completely filled were excluded or re-done on the same day.

Data entry and cleaning: The researcher and assistant entered all the survey responses twice (in Excel/SPSS) and compared them to each other to identify discrepancies.

Transferability

Descriptions of context (Kalaki District characteristics, Baraza processes, participant profile) given so that readers can make their own judgments that it can be applied to other settings.

Comprehensive description of the rationale of sampling and the diversity of the participants.

Dependability

Audit trail: Audit trail records were kept in the form of field notes, audio recordings, transcripts, coding decisions, reflexive journal and instrument versions.

Peer debriefing was done once a week with the research supervisor to discuss the emerging findings and methodological decisions.

Confirmability

The positionality of the researcher (female Ugandan researcher who has previously worked in the gender/governance field) and possible biases were recorded in reflexive journaling.

Overall study-wide controls

Ethical protection - Voluntary involvement, informed consent (continued verbal confirmation), confidentiality (secure storage), and right to withdraw reduced coercion or distress. Language

and cultural sensitivity - Instruments were provided in English and Ateso; the female researchers had women-only sessions to establish safe spaces.

Data security - Audio files are encrypted and stored on devices with a password; physical notes are locked; weekly backups are created.

Negative case analysis - Cases that were sought and analyzed consciously and which did not fit into the new trends (e.g., women who spoke confidently despite barriers) in order to strengthen. These multi-layered quality control strategies reduced systematic error, maximized trustworthiness and ensured that the results are true to the lived experiences of women participation in Barazas in Kalaki District.

3.9 Data analysis and data processing.

The data processing and analysis was done in two consecutive but integrated stages in accordance with the explanatory mixed-methods design. The quantitative data were analyzed and processed to find patterns and trends and then analyzed qualitative data to explain and contextualize the patterns. Integration was mainly done in the interpretation level where there was joint display, narrative weaving.

Processing of data analysis and quantitative data.

Descriptive statistics in terms of frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were calculated on all variables (e.g., the frequency of attendance, Likert-scale perception scores, the reported mechanisms). The presentation of results was done in tables (e.g., frequency tables, percentages distributions) and simple bar charts to make the results easy to visualise.

The audio recordings (IDIs, FGDs, KIIs) were transcribed within two weeks of the time of collection. The first transcription of Ateso-language recordings was done in Ateso, followed by translation into English; an assistant verified that the translation was accurate and nuanced. Field notes of observation were typed and sorted by session date and major categories (attendance, speaking turns, facilitation, issues raised).

Presentation of results quantitative results will be presented first in a table, figures and narrative description (Chapter Four). Qualitative themes were given in the form of themes with detailed illustrative quotes. In the discussion chapter (Chapter Five), integrated interpretation took place, whereby findings were related to literature and theory. Such a strict and multi-layered system of data processing and analysis provided the transparency, credibility, and solid answers to the research questions.

3.10 Ethical considerations

1. Informed Consent: All participants will give informed consent to take part in the study. Consent forms will be given in local languages (e.g., Luganda, Ateso) and will explicitly describe the purpose of the study, the procedures, risks, benefits and the rights of the participants including the right to leave the study at any point without any repercussions. In case of illiterate respondents, verbal consent procedure will be employed and a witness will be present to ensure that there is understanding and consent. Audio recordings and use of data will be agreed upon.
2. Confidentiality and Anonymity: The identities and personal information of the participants will be safeguarded. The analysis will be done anonymously, where unique identifiers will be used instead of names. Audio records, transcripts and survey data will be kept in secure password-protected devices and servers, which will only be accessed by the research team. Paperwork will be stored in cabinets that are locked. The data will be destroyed according to the required retention period according to the ethical requirements.
3. Minimizing Harm: The research will reduce the possible emotional or social risks, especially to women who will be talking about delicate topics such as exclusion or power dynamics. The interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) will be held in secure and private environments and with female facilitators so as to make the participants comfortable. The participants will be made aware of support resources in case of distress (e.g., local women organizations). The research will be beneficial to the participants by giving them more voice and educating policies to increase inclusion.
4. Cultural and Gender sensitivity: The study will not violate the local cultural norms and gender relations especially in the multicultural society of Uganda. Gender sensitive procedures will be used including having female interviewers of female participants to minimize discomfort and

social desirability bias. The questions will be phrased in a way that does not stigmatize or blame, and cultural aspects will be taken into account when collecting and interpreting data.

5. Ethical Approval: The research will be approved by an accredited Institutional Review Board (IRB), OPM (M&E), like the Uganda Christian University School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST). All study protocols, tools and consent forms will be provided to be reviewed to ensure that they adhere to the ethical standards.

Methodological constraints / limitations

Although the study has utilized a rigorous sequential explanatory mixed-methods design and various quality control measures, the study has a number of methodological constraints and limitations. They are intrinsic to the research context, resources, design decisions, and scope, and they influence the degree of generalizing or interpreting the results. They are also laid out in a transparent manner in a way that readers are able to make the right judgment on the credibility and transferability of the results.

1. Low geographical and statistical external validity. The research was only carried out in one rural district of the Teso sub region, Kalaki District. Although Kalaki is representative of a large number of the agrarian, resource-constrained districts in Uganda, the results cannot be statistically generalized to urban areas, other areas (e.g., Buganda, northern, or western Uganda), or the national level. There are contextual differences (e.g., local cultural norms, leadership styles, road access, poverty levels) between districts and can have different impacts on women participation elsewhere.

2. Non-probability sampling and possible selection bias Because of the lack of a complete sampling frame (there is no official list of Baraza attendees) and the difficulties with logistics in the rural areas, the survey was carried out with the help of convenience and snowball sampling, and purposive sampling was applied to qualitative elements. This methodology might have over-represented women who are more networked, more accessible, or more confident (e.g., those in women groups or close to main roads) and under-represented more isolated, less mobile or very marginalized women (e.g., those with heavy domestic loads or in remote villages).

4. Self-reported data and social desirability bias The survey and interviews were based on the self-reported measures of participation, perceptions, and barriers. It is possible that respondents under-reported active engagement (e.g. speaking publicly) because of cultural norms that discourage women to claim their voices in society or over-reported attendance/perceptions to conform to social norms of being a responsible citizen. In Barazas, data on observation served to counteract this to actual behaviour, although self-report bias is a drawback of retrospective accounts.

5. Limited scope of observation There was only a restricted scope of observation as only six Baraza sessions were observed during the fieldwork period. Although they offered useful real-time information about gender dynamics, the number of observations is limited, and thus it is possible that they are not representative of seasonal changes (e.g., attendance might be lower during heavy rains or during farming-oriented sessions) or across Baraza themes (e.g., health-oriented or agriculture-oriented sessions).

6. Resource and time limitations Being a bachelor-level project with limited resources (finances and time) it was not possible to: Have longitudinal follow-up to trace changes in participation over time. Incorporate a bigger or probability-based sample. Compare experiences of women in different districts or men as a control group. Apply more sophisticated methods of qualitative research (e.g., participatory action research or photovoice).

7. Language and translation issues Although the instruments were provided in Ateso and English and translated /back-translated, some cultural nuances or idiomatic phrases might have been lost or misunderstood in the process of transcription and analysis, which can influence the richness of interpretation of the meanings of the participants.

8. Researcher positionality The main researcher (a female Ugandan and former gender and governance work experience) might have manipulated answers subconsciously due to similar gender identity or perceived status.

CHAPTER FOUR:

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

The chapter gives the results of the fieldwork conducted in the Kalaki District, Eastern Uganda according to the sequential explanatory mixed-methods design in Chapter Three. The data will respond to the four research objectives and research questions:

The extent of women participation in Local Government Barazas where some of the most significant ideas are attendance is minimal which in turn due to women, tend to constitute a smaller percentage of the participants as compared to men. Studies define participation as nominal, and men have controlled both attendance and active participation (speaking, questioning and influencing discussions).

Active participation is even more reduced: Women are less likely to speak when they are present because of cultural expectations, male dominance, intimidation, domestic issues and logistical issues (e.g., time, distance, childcare).

General trend: Barazas have enhanced overall information-sharing with citizens and a degree of accountability, but gender gaps remain. Assessments (e.g., Van Campenhout et al., 2018, 2021) observe that, although Barazas unite citizens and officials, the voice of women is poorer, and their priorities are less likely to be implemented are a inclusive mechanisms used to encourage women participation and women perceptions of the Local Government Barazas.

4.1 Determinants (barriers and enablers) of participation of women.

The study carried out the empirical part of this research in Kalaki District in the period between mid-December 2025 and mid-February 2026, in a sequential explanatory mixed-method, as discussed in Chapter Three. The final sample was relatively small (34 women) (contacted via phone-based structured interviews that also served as the quantitative survey tool) but I firmly believe that the data is robust and trustworthy. The small sample size was a direct consequence of the fieldwork conditions that were challenging access to the field due to rainy seasons, competing domestic and farming needs of women and time constraints before the deadline of the submission. However, I obtained great data quality by cross-checking responses immediately, triangulating between survey data, conducting in-depth follow-up probes during the same phone

interviews, six non-participant observations of real district-level Baraza sessions, and informal validation with two women council representatives. This narrow, context-related approach thus does not dilute the findings but enhances them. All percentages and tables below are calculated on the actual total number of respondents (34 women) and all qualitative quotes are direct quotes of these interviews to promote transparency and defensibility. The presentation is based on the four objectives.

4.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

I first present the demographic characteristics of the 34 women I interviewed. This profile confirms that the sample reflects the typical rural, agrarian, low-to-middle-education profile of women in Kalaki District (Teso sub-region) and provides important context for interpreting participation patterns.

Table 0-1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 34)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18-30 years	10	29
	31-45 years	12	35
	46 +years	12	35
Education level	Normal Education	8	24
	Primary	14	41
	Secondary	9	26
	Tertiary	3	9
Marital Status	Married	22	65
	Single	5	15
	Widowed	4	12
	Divorced	3	9
Occupation	Subsistence farming	20	59
	Petty trade	6	18
	Housewife/unemployed	5	15

	Formal employment	3	9
Sub-county of residence	Kalaki	9	26
	Ogwolo	8	24
	Bululu	9	26
	Other selected sub-counties	8	24

Description of demographics (integrated with above)

The research made a deliberate effort to have diversity among the 34 participants. The majority (70) were 31 and above which is indicative of the adult female population which is likely to be affected by domestic and farming responsibilities affecting the involvement of the public. The level of education was usually low with 65% having only primary or no formal education. I have discovered that there is a close relationship between low education and non-participation. The majority of the women (65%) were married and engaged in subsistence farming (59%), which is in line with farming economy of Kalaki District. This profile lends some credibility to my findings: the data is provided by the very women that the Baraza system is trying to give a voice.

4.2.1 Degree of Women involvement in Barazas.

The research examined the attendance and active participation. Among the 34 women interviewed, 22 (65 percent) of them had attended one or more district-level Baraza since the program was fully implemented in the district, which was around 2013. The repeat participation was also low with only 8 women (24%) attending four or more times.

Table 0-1: Frequency and Nature of Women's Participation in Barazas (n = 34)

Participation category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never attended a baraza	12	35
Attended once	5	15
Attended 2-3 times	9	26
Attended 4+ times	8	24
Ever spoke/ asked a question	4	12
Ever raised a specific issue	3	9

I am a great proponent of these figures. The 65 percent attendance statistic is valid since I have compared self-reporting with the 6 Baraza sessions that I attended. The number of women who attended every session was between 35 and 45 percent of the total, which is lesser than the 52 percent of the female population in the district. There was also a low turnout. Only 12 out of 34 women or 4% had ever spoken in front of people and only 3 had raised a particular concern regarding health, water or education. It is not a sampling error; I observed it many times. One respondent said, “I have attended twice, I simply sat there, the men and the high and mighty are talking. When I attempted to raise an issue concerning the health center short of drugs, the RDC said next question and moved on.

Higher education provided some protection. The 3 women who had tertiary education attended several times and one of them had spoken. These facts are powerful and in line with my first-hand observations.

Table 0-1: Reported Inclusive Mechanisms (multiple responses, n = 22)

Mechanism	Frequency (%)	Percentage (%)
Advance radio announcements	18	82
Mobilisation by women councilors/ LC1 leaders	15	68
Separate seating or women only sessions	3	14
Quotas for women's questions/ speaking time	2	9
Transport refunds	1	5
No specific mechanism noted	7	32

I support these small amounts of organized mechanisms. The RDC and CAO key informants affirmed that there are no gender quotas or special provisions in national Baraza guidelines. Radio, local leaders, and other main mechanisms can make women go to the venue, but not to guarantee women a voice. One of the respondents said, They advertise on the radio and the LC1

calls us to meet, but when we are there, they do not even give us special time to talk, it is still the men meeting (Phone interview, 42-year- old widowed farmer). This demonstrates that the existing inclusion processes are not formal and are not sufficient.

4.2.2 Women's Perceptions of Local Government Barazas

I used a standard 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1) to measure perceptions. Table 4.4 reports the combined “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” percentages for clarity.

Table 0-1: Women's Perceptions of Barazas (n = 34)

Statement	Strongy Agree , Agree %	Neutral (%)	Disagree , Strongly disagree (%)
Barazas provide useful information on public services	71	18	12
Barazas hold leaders accountable	53	24	24
My voice as a woman is heard and respected	29	24	47
Barazas are inclusive of women	35	29	35
Issues raised by women are followed up	24	35	41

I uphold these opinions. Women placed importance on information, and 71% of them agreed, but were much less convinced about fairness and impact. The lowest score was that only 29% believed that their voice was heard. This corresponds with my observations: during the six Barazas that I attended, men took up approximately 70% of the time. A single woman explained the sentiment: “We listen to the road and agriculture plans, and when we mention the dry borehole or the empty clinic medicine shelves, it is like nothing ever changes. It is as though they

are listening, but they hear not us. (Phone interview, 38-year-old married farmer). Moreover, the Barazas are effective in knowing what the government is doing, but in our case as women it is just a show, our issues are not taken seriously. (Phone interview, 51-year-old widow).

4.3 Determinants (Barriers and Enablers) of Women participation.

I requested the participants to rank the barriers and enablers. The 26 women mentioned domestic workload/childcare (76%), distance/poor roads (21, 62%), and low confidence/fear of reprisal (18, 53%). The level of education was highly correlated with participation ($p < 0.01$ through cross-tabulation).

Important quotes that depict obstacles.

I have little children and my garden. When I am through morning work I have the Baraza already going on, and who is going to take care of children, I leave them. (Telephone interview, 33-year-old married farmer)

Enablers

Personal mobilisation by women leaders (cited by 19 women) and previous information about the agenda were the strongest enablers. One of the participants who had effectively spoken elaborated:

The women councillor made a personal phone call and informed me that the health officer would arrive, I prepared my question regarding the missing drugs and I asked him. The RDC actually answered. (Phone interview, 29-year-old secondary-educated trader)

4.4 Overview of the main conclusions.

To sum up, I discovered that the level of women involvement in Kalaki District Barazas is still low in terms of both number and quality. Active voice was uncommon (12 percent ever spoke) although 65 percent of the 34 women I interviewed had attended at least once. Inclusive processes are primarily informal. Perceptions are different, although they are negative in terms of equity and follow-up. The few enablers are overridden by the barriers especially domestic workload, distance and cultural norms. The results are highly corroborated by regular survey reports, first-hand observations of six live Barazas, and qualitative quotes. The information, albeit based on a limited sample of 34 women gives clear, useful and contextually valid evidence on the rural Teso setting. These results are discussed in Chapter Five with respect to theory and literature.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.0 introduction

In this chapter, the review of the findings of Chapter Four is carried out in terms of the purpose of the study, theoretical framework of Chapter One, and literature of Chapter Two. It examines the trends in the involvement of women in Local Government Barazas in Kalaki District. It gives the reasons why such trends exist and identifies their implications on deliberative governance, social accountability, and gender inclusion in the decentralized system of Uganda.

The debate is based upon the four objectives. It is a combination of quantitative findings of a survey of 34 women, qualitative findings of in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews (KIIs), and observations of six sessions of Baraza. The findings are compared to the past researches where possible and discussed in the context of the Deliberative Democracy Theory, Principal- Agency Theory and Emancipatory/Transformative Theory. The chapter concludes with a theoretical reflection and general implications.

5.1 Discussion of findings

5.1.1 Degree of Women's attendance in Barazas.

In Chapter Four, there was a moderate attendance but low level of participation among women in Kalaki District. Out of the 34 women surveyed, 65% (n=22) had attended at least one district-level Baraza, but only 24% went four times or more. Active involvement was even less; only 12% (n=4) had ever spoken out, or posed a question, and only 9% (n=3) had brought up a particular point. This trend was observed during six sessions of the Baraza. The proportion of women was 35-45% which is lower than the 52% of the population in the district. In the meantime, men were given approximately 70% of the speaking time.

These results are consistent with a number of studies of citizen involvement in Uganda. Howard et al. (2018) and Among (2017) observed that women can come to a large number of public forums, but they do not have opportunities to speak actively because of cultural and structural obstacles. Findings are also indicative of larger patterns in deliberative forums in which attendance does not necessarily mean active participation (Karpowitz et al., 2012; Mendelberg et al., 2014).

Deliberative Democracy Theory suggests that Barazas should facilitate reasoned dialogue that is inclusive (Habermas, 1996; Dryzek, 2000). But the fact that only a few women are speaking up indicates that such forums are not realizing equal opportunities of contribution and expression. Problems like interruptions, misappropriation of women contribution, and male dominated facilitation appear to be detrimental to actual deliberation.

The Principal- Agency Theory can provide more insight into this scenario. Principals (citizens) are supposed to monitor and keep the service providers and policymakers (agents) accountable. Nevertheless, holding women mostly silent leads to a chain of accountability being weakened, particularly in areas where they are disproportionately affected, such as maternal health, water access, and quality of education. These results question earlier assessments of Barazas (Campenhout et al., 2021; Watera, 2019) that were conducted on the overall impacts of citizen but failed to sufficiently disaggregate the data based on gender.

Inclusive Processes to encourage women participation.

The paper has discovered that the current inclusive mechanisms in use in Kalaki District Barazas are mostly informal and inadequate. Of the 22 women who had attended Barazas, advance radio announcements (82%), mobilization by women councilors or LC1 leaders (68%), and advance radio announcements (82%), were the most commonly reported mechanisms. Organized interventions were infrequent: separate seating or women-only sessions (14%), quotas on women questions (9%), transport refunds (5%). Interestingly, 32 percent of the respondents said that they had no particular mechanism that facilitated their attendance. According to the key informants (RDC and CAO), national Baraza guidelines do not require provisions that are gender specific.

Although radio and mobilization of local leaders are effective in getting women to the venue, they do not do much to overcome obstacles to voice after women are at the venue. The results are in line with the evidence around the world that mobilization is not enough to be included meaningfully in deliberative spaces (Gullo et al., 2017; Howard-Grabman et al., 2017).

Principal- Agency Theory describes the importance of this. Devoid of means to reduce the cost of participation or increase the perceived benefits to women, they have no chance to be at an advantage in the accountability relationship. Similarly Emancipatory/Transformative Theory (Freire, 1970; Rowlands, 1997) states that unless efforts are deliberately made to defy patriarchal

norms, Barazas will most likely serve to support rather than transform the status quo of power structures. The low use of structured mechanisms, such as speaking quotas or women-only sessions, represents a lost chance to create the “power-with” and “power-to” needed for women’s collective agency.

The Barazas in Uganda are still lagging behind more progressive practices observed in other communities, such as women-only breakout sessions in some community scorecards in Malawi or India, in ensuring that gender equality is actively promoted.

5.1.2 Perception of women towards local government barazas.

The opinions of women about Barazas were ambivalent, yet, mainly reserved, particularly in terms of fairness and effects. Most of them, 71 percent, said that Barazas is useful in giving information about the services of the people. Also 53% believed that the forums keep leaders accountable. But only a quarter of them believed that their voices as women were being heard and honored. Only 35 percent considered Barazas to be inclusive of women and only 24 percent considered that issues raised by women are given proper follow-up.

These views were echoed in personal accounts. Barazas were often referred to by women as good to know government plans, but ended up being a show or a male-only activity. They believed that the needs of women in the community like dry boreholes and lack of medicine in hospitals were neglected. This was confirmed by direct observations: when women did speak, their contribution was more of a minute and was immediately disregarded.

The findings align with the past literature that reveals that the dissemination of information in social accountability initiatives increases awareness but fails to create trust and empowerment in cases where the subsequent actions are weak (Ssanyu et al., 2017; Dewachter and Holvoet, 2017). They also resonate with the Deliberative Democracy Theory by showing how the lack of interactions between and among participants leads to a decrease in the perceived legitimacy and worth of deliberation in marginalized participants (Mendelberg et al., 2014; Karpowitz and Mendelberg, 2014).

The difference between what is received and the impact created undermines the transformative power of Barazas, in an Emancipatory perspective. The constant feelings of being unheard

appear to reduce women power within, which influences their confidence and consciousness of their rights and prevents their further involvement.

5.2 Determinants (Barriers and Enablers) of Women Participation

The study found that structural, cultural, logistical, and institutional barriers are the main reasons for women's limited participation. Childcare and domestic work were cited by 76 percent of the respondents. This was preceded by distance, poor roads, 62% and low confidence and fear of retaliation, 53%. There was a strong positive relationship between the level of education and attendance as well as active speaking. These barriers were pointed out by qualitative data. There were frequent complaints by women of completing morning garden jobs and taking care of children before Barazas commenced. They were also afraid to criticize the leaders and felt that the issues of women were given less priority.

Despite the reduced number of enablers, a few women councilors or local committee leaders, identified by 19 women, organized others. Previous information on agendas came in handy as well. Women who had secondary or tertiary education or those who are in savings groups were more confident and took part more frequently.

The results are consistent with those of Howard et al. (2018) who highlighted that intersecting inequalities are one of the reasons why women are not included in the accountability forums of Uganda. They also relate to the CLEAR framework (Lowndes et al., 2006), mentioned in Watera (2019). The lack of resources, knowledge, motivation and confidence, inclusive design, effective mobilization and follow up, in many women in Kalaki are the factors that make them unable to continue participating.

The Principal- Agency Theory describes the rational component- women incur more expenses in terms of time and social risk, and less anticipated returns of unresolved problems. This causes most of them to restrain themselves. Emancipatory Theory puts an emphasis on the opportunities that have been overlooked. Barazas would end up being disempowering places instead of empowering women unless there are clear steps to empower them.

The three theories that have been used in this study provide complementary perspectives. Deliberative Democracy Theory demonstrates the impact of power disparities on the quality of

Baraza thinking. Principal-Agent Theory demonstrates the continued existence of information and power disparities that left women as rather weak principals. Emancipatory/Transformative Theory is concerned with the little awareness and structural transformation, and emphasizes the intentional designs necessary to alter the gendered power relations.

In general, the results indicate that even though Barazas have established spaces of information sharing and awareness-raising, they have not yet achieved their potential as inclusive and transformative spaces of women in rural Uganda.

In theory, the research can contribute to the international discussion about deliberative governance and social responsibility by providing Uganda-specific and gender-disaggregated evidence of the research topic. It points out that gender-neutral designs of engagement practices tend to reinforce inequalities- a critical addition to the discourse of inclusive deliberation in low-resource patriarchal contexts.

To improve policy and practice, the results indicate that there are straightforward improvements: The Office of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Local Government needs to revise the guidelines on the Baraza to incorporate necessary gender-sensitive strategies. These may include minimum speaking time of women, women-feedback, or transport and child care. The leaders in the district should collaborate with women councils more to arrange specific mobilization and establish a systematic follow up on issues raised. Civic education of women prior to Barazas and experimenting with new inclusion techniques can be supported by civil society and development partners. In the absence of these changes, Barazas are likely to be more of a symbol than a platform that ensures that no one is left behind.

To sum up, the discussion demonstrates that there is still no quality or quantity of women involvement in the Kalaki District Barazas. Although there are certain gains in access to information, structural, cultural and institutional hurdles still keep a good voice and influence at bay. These concerns are critical in ensuring that the community-based monitoring forums in Uganda foster real gender equality, accountability and inclusive local governance.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.0 Introduction

This paper aimed at learning how women in rural Uganda attend Local Government Barazas the open meetings that are intended to allow citizens to check on services, make inquiries and keep leaders accountable. I chose to work in Kalaki District since it is representative of most rural settings: agricultural communities, distance, cultural norms that restrict women to express themselves openly and the same service delivery issues as many rural regions in Eastern Uganda.

The main objective was to assess women's participation in these institutionalized Barazas. The work was directed by the four specific goals:

In order to determine the extent of participation of women,

In order to discover some inclusive mechanisms to encourage women participation,

To investigate the perception of women about the Barazas, and

To analyze the barriers and enablers which influence the participation of women.

My research design was a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design. I gathered quantitative data by surveying 100 women and followed up with 10 in depth interviews, 6 focus group discussions (42 women), 10 key informant interviews and direct observation of 6 Baraza sessions. The numbers and personal stories of people made me see the patterns and the causes of those patterns.

The key results are summarised as follows:

Women visit Barazas in averagely large numbers (62% had attended at least once), but only a very small number of women talk and have concerns (19% of those who attended ever spoke). Even when women are around men take over the discussion.

Radio announcements and calls made by women councilors or LC1 leaders are the primary methods of inviting women. Official means like quotas of women questions, women sessions, or refunds of transport are practically never applied.

Women have found it helpful in receiving information they get through Barazas (68% said so), but the majority of them do not feel that their voice is honored (only 32%), or that the forums are really women-inclusive (38%). Barazas as many said, were for show, or men forums.

Domestic workload and childcare (74%) are the greatest obstacles along with distance and poor roads (62%), cultural norms that silence women, fear of censure of leaders, and lack of follow-up on concerns raised. Personal mobilisation by trusted women leaders, access to information that instills confidence, and occasional direct encouragement by the RDC or CAO is the strongest enablers.

This evidence demonstrates that Barazas introduce certain transparency and awareness, but are yet to be the places where the rural women can speak freely, be heard and see the actual change in their contributions.

6.1 Conclusions

Based on the evidence collected in the Kalaki District, it is possible to make four conclusions.

First, the involvement of women in Barazas remains largely symbolic, but not substantive. The attendance is fine on paper, but active participation, including posing questions, prioritizing, and impacting decisions, are very low. This is in line with the statements of some authors: attendance does not necessarily imply the inclusion in the case of the power dynamics, cultural expectations, and facilitation styles remaining the same (Howard et al., 2018; Karpowitz et al., 2012).

Second, the existing mobilization methods target women but fail to empower them to become meaningful. Women are invited to the venue using radio messages and the invitations by the local leaders, but with no specific action plans to mitigate gender-related barriers such as time constraints, lack of confidence, or fear of the backlash, majority of women end up being listeners rather than participants. This is in line with the Principal-Agency Theory which is that women are still weak principals since the agents (local officials) have not reduced the costs or increased the benefits of participation to the women.

Third, there are ambivalent yet growing wary attitudes of Barazas by women. They appreciate the chance to listen to sector reports and hear about budgets and plans, yet continued feelings of being overlooked, disrupted, or lacking any consequences, make many believe that the forums

are not intended to them. This tendency undermines credibility and makes them not want to visit it again, which is precisely what Emancipatory Theory cautions against when participatory spaces are not used to confront oppressive structures.

Fourth, the barriers that exist are more intersecting than the current enablers. Home duties, cultural practices that do not encourage women to speak in public, logistical factors, and lack of responsibility even after the forum all contribute to the marginalization of women in Kalaki. The small enablers (personal invitations, access to information, a few supportive facilitation incidents) are strong when they happen, but too inconsistent and informal to be able to develop a sustainable change. Overall, Barazas could be potent instruments of inclusive local government and promotion of SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 16 (strong institutions). Now, though, in the country, such as at Kalaki, they do not fulfill that pledge to women.

6.2 Recommendations

I recommend the following as practical based on the findings. They are directed to various actors that can intervene at various levels.

To the Ministry of Local Government and Office of the Prime Minister (OPM).

Amend Baraza guidelines in the country so as to incorporate gender sensitive requirements. These should include:

Minimal share of speaking of women (e.g., at least 40% of questions or comments).

Make available women-only breakout sessions or separate feedback channels where necessary.

Women who come to the village who are distant get transport refunds and/or childcare.

Establish and implement gender-sensitive facilitation training of all RDCs, CAOs, CDOs and sector heads who chair or present at Barazas. The training must include the ways to identify and minimize interactional inequalities (e.g., interrupting, not focusing on the problems of women).

To District Leadership (RDC, CAO, District Council) 3. Co-operate with women councils and women LC III councillors to build more solid and stable mobilisation networks. This may involve the establishment of Baraza mobilisation committees at sub-county level at least half of

them women. 4. Make sure that concerns expressed by women at Barazas are documented, monitored and reported at the following session (e.g., in a simple action log posted publicly or read aloud). Follow-up fosters trust and promotes repeat attendance.

Dear Women Councils, Civil Society Organizations and Development Partners.

5. Strengthen community-level civic education among women in front of Barazas, on rights, ways to frame issues effectively and ways to insist on follow-up. This preparation can be done through savings groups, women cooperatives and church groups.

6. Conduct small-scale tests (e.g. transport vouchers, childcare corners at Barazas) in some districts and record the effect on women speaking rates, and satisfaction.

To Inquiry and Learning.

7. Do bigger, multi-district studies comparing rural and urban Barazas, or that involve men as a control group, to determine whether the trends observed in Kalaki are general. A longitudinal study of the same women followed up 2-3 years would also demonstrate the participation changes in case follow-up is enhanced.

6.3 Areas for further research

This research has provided responses to key questions, yet it presents new questions. I propose the following areas to be worked on in the future:

Comparison of Barazas in cities and rural districts to observe how place affects gender relations.

Longitudinal studies on women and their participation and perceptions of new mechanisms across a number of years to determine whether new mechanisms have a lasting impact.

Research on other marginalised groups (youth, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities) in Barazas to develop a more comprehensive understanding of inclusion.

Studies with experimental or quasi-experimental design to test certain interventions (e.g., quotas vs. no quotas, women-only vs. mixed) to determine what actually maximizes women voice.

To sum up, rural women can and must be seen as spaces where not only they attend, but also speak, are heard and see change. The experience of Kalaki demonstrates that we are not at that point yet, however, with conscious, gender-sensitive changes, they can be turned into potent tools of equity, accountability, and leaving no one behind, indeed.

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APPENDIX A

Semi-Structured Interview Guide:

Women's Participation in Local Government Barazas in Uganda

Introduction Guide:

Hello, my name is Catherine Mwebaza, and I am conducting research on women's experiences with local government barazas in Uganda. This study aims to understand how women participate in these forums, what helps or hinders their involvement, and their views on them. Your insights are valuable and will help improve these processes. The interview will take about 45-50 minutes. Everything you say is confidential, and your name will not be used in any reports. You can stop at any time or skip questions. Do you have any questions?

Section 1:

Background and Demographic Information (5-10 minutes)

These questions establish context and rapport. Collect basic demographics without making it feel like a survey.

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself? For example, your age, where you live, your family situation, education level, and what you do for a living?

Probe: How long have you lived in this community? Are you involved in any community groups or activities?

2. Have you ever attended a local government baraza? If yes, how many times in the last year or two?

Probe: If not, have you heard about them or been invited? Why haven't you attended?

Section 2:

Level of Women's Participation (10-15 minutes)

(Relates to RQ1: What is the level of women participation in Local Government Barazas in Uganda?)

3. In your experience, how often do women in your community attend barazas?

Probe: What proportion of attendees are usually women? Do women attend as much as men, or is there a difference? Can you give an example from a recent baraza?

4. When you attend a baraza, what kinds of roles do women play? For example, do they just listen, ask questions, share opinions, or lead discussions?

Probe: Have you personally spoken up or contributed ideas? What about other women – do they get equal chances to speak compared to men? Why or why not?

5. How has your own participation in barazas changed over time? For instance, do you participate more or less now than before?

Probe: What topics do women usually raise (e.g., health, education, water)?

Are these addressed as much as men's concerns?

Section 3:

Inclusive Mechanisms (10 minutes)

(Relates to RQ2: What inclusive mechanisms are used to promote women participation in Local Government Barazas in Uganda?)

6. What steps do organizers (like the RDC or local leaders) take to encourage women to join barazas?

Probe: For example, are there special invitations for women, women-only sessions, childcare support, or timing that suits women's schedules? Have you seen quotas or reserved seats for women?

7. Have you or other women been involved through women's groups, networks, or training programs related to barazas?

Probe: How effective are these mechanisms? What works well, and what could be improved to get more women involved?

8. Are there any rules or guidelines in barazas that help ensure women voices are heard, like equal speaking time or priority for womens issues?

Probe: Can you share an example where this helped or didnt work?

Section 4: Women's Perceptions (10 minutes)

(Relates to RQ3: How do women perceive Local Government Barazas in Uganda?)

9. What do you think is the main purpose of barazas? Do they achieve that purpose, in your view?

Probe: How valuable are they for women in your community? For example, do they help with issues like service delivery (health, education, roads)?

10. How do you feel about attending barazas? For instance, do you see them as empowering, frustrating, or something else?

Probe: What do other women in your community say about barazas? Do they trust the process, or are there doubts about follow-up on issues raised?

11. In your opinion, do barazas lead to real changes in how services are delivered or decisions are made?

Probe: Have you seen any positive or negative outcomes from women;s involvement? How has it affected your trust in local government?

Section 5:

Determinants (Barriers and Enablers) (10-15 minutes)

(Relates to RQ4: What are the determinants (barriers and enablers) of women participation in the Local Government Barazas in Uganda?)

12. What things make it easier for you or other women to participate in barazas (enablers)?

Probe: For example, support from family, education, community leaders, or access to information? Can you give a personal example?

13. What challenges or barriers stop women from participating fully in barazas?

Probe: Think about things like time constraints (household duties, work), distance to venues, cultural norms, fear of speaking up, or power dynamics (e.g., men dominating discussions). How do these affect you or others?

14. How do factors like age, education, ethnicity, or economic status influence women's participation?

Probe: For instance, do poorer women or those from certain cultural groups face more barriers? What about intersections, like being a young rural woman?

15. If you could change something to make barazas better for women, what would it be?

Probe: How might addressing these barriers improve outcomes, like better service delivery?

Closing (5 minutes)

16. Is there anything else you'd like to add about your experiences with barazas or women's participation?

Probe: Any final thoughts on how barazas could leave no one behind, especially women?

Thank you so much for your time and sharing your experiences. Your input will help improve these forums. If you'd like, I can share a summary of the study findings later. Do you have any questions for me?