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**Female Leadership and Social-Economic Development in County Governments  
in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands of Kenya**

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**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** *The main aim of this study was to determine the effect of female leadership on the socio-economic development of county governments in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL) in Kenya, following the introduction of new governance systems per the 2010 constitution. The study hypothesizes that promoting and supporting women's leadership in government could have positive outcomes for communities and society as a whole, given the context of counties facing economic and social challenges.*

**Material/Methods:** *The study employed a mixed research design based on positivism research philosophy. The target population was 230 (201 public service board members and 29 county secretaries) in ASAL counties. Data was collected using questionnaires, both open and closed questions, which were administered by the researcher through a drop and pick technique. A Census survey was used in the study.*

**Findings:** *The findings revealed a significant effect of female leadership on the socio-economic development of county government. The data, analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, indicate that women's leadership roles positively impact community and societal outcomes, thus emphasizing the importance of diversity and inclusion in government.*

**Conclusion:** *The study concludes that there is indeed a beneficial effect of female leadership on the socio-economic development of county governments. This implies that measures to support and promote women's leadership in all sectors of society, particularly in government, could yield advantageous results for communities and the society at large.*

**Value:** *This study offers valuable implications for policy, theory, and potential future practice. It highlights the importance of improving the performance of women in top leadership positions in county governments, suggesting this could significantly enhance their socio-economic impact. The study adds to the body of knowledge on gender and leadership, particularly within the context of Kenya's ASAL counties.*

**Keywords:** *Leadership Position, Women, Social-Economic Development*

**Paper Type:** *Research Article*

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## **1. Introduction**

In recent time, women are increasingly taking up positions of leadership in a variety of industries, in public as well as private companies. This rise in visibility is a result of the realization that women can lead just as effectively as males do (Barkhuizen et al., 2022). As they have a long history of tackling the issues raised by social dynamics and changes in the environment, women are especially well-suited to advocating a sustainability-focused strategy. Women have special abilities at managing natural resources, according to study (Nightingale, 2011). Compared to men, women are more engaged to sustainability issues due to a variety of inherent characteristics (Fernández et al., 2021). According to Agarwal et al. (2020), women are capable of bringing about lasting change due to their original and creative viewpoints, leadership abilities, social awareness, and aptitude to see opportunities. A higher proportion of female directors on the board of directors can improve the adoption of Sustainable Development Goals practices and external assurance of sustainability reporting, claim Cicchiello et al. (2021). According to a study by Galletta et al. (2022) in the banking sector, having more female directors improves financial and environmental performance since they are more aware of social implications and stakeholder expectations. But not all women have an equal impact on how environmentally responsible a company is. Female directors with advanced degrees and a history of social engagement are favorably associated with performance that is long-lasting (Issa et al., 2021).

Women may not be paid equally for their work as males, but this does not mean that they are less capable in terms of tasks, performance, decisions, resilience, and effectiveness (Alzougool et al., 2015). As opposed to the short-term and shareholder objectives that are frequently found in male leaders, women leaders are frequently more focused on long-term and stakeholder interests (Glass et al., 2016). For instance, women are better able to strike a compromise between the performance-based interests of shareholders and the interests of diverse stakeholders, such as communities, employees, suppliers, and customers (Brammer et al., 2007; Harrison and Coombs, 2012). The fact that women are still underrepresented in leadership roles, however, highlights a serious issue that requires attention. According to Alzougool et al. (2015), societal norms and cultural beliefs that restrict women's access to leadership positions are mostly to blame for this underrepresentation.

Women continue to be underrepresented in management and leadership roles. Due to this exclusion, male and female workers with equivalent experience and training face a sizable compensation disparity. Women in Kenya face numerous obstacles that include sociocultural, economic, and historical ones that hinder them from holding management and leadership positions. Although it is widely acknowledged that women play a crucial role in Kenya's economy, they are still underrepresented in devolution. The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) 2019 study indicates that there are not many women working for pay. Less than 30.0% of women hold appointed posts in county administrations (KNBS, 2020).

## **2. Literature Review**

The participation of women leaders is extremely beneficial to the promotion of a sustainability-focused strategy. Women have continuously proven their worth and prowess in overcoming obstacles caused by shifting social dynamics and the environment over time. Due to innate qualities that make their commitment to sustainability stronger than that of men, women hold a unique role as stewards of natural resources (Nightingale, 2011; Fernández et al., 2021). According to Agarwal et al. (2020), women have critical traits that are essential for enacting lasting change, such as a creative and inventive viewpoint, leadership abilities, social awareness, and the capacity to see opportunities. According to Cicchiello et al.'s research from 2021, there are benefits to having more women on the board of directors, including increased adoption of SDG practices and external assurance of sustainability reporting. Additionally, the banking industry study by Galletta et al. (2022) shows that having more female directors enhances financial and environmental performance because they are more aware of the societal implications and expectations of stakeholders than men in the same position.

Greater female representation is correlated with less discriminating laws. According to recent studies, the number of women in parliaments or executive positions correlates with less discriminatory tax policies, more maternity leave initiatives, and less discriminatory labor market regulations (Betz, Fortunato, and O'Brien, 2021). According to a sizable body of research connecting women's leadership to better outcomes for women in the workplace, smaller gender wage gaps, promotions of female employees, and lower job loss rates after economic shocks (Biasi & Sarsons, 2022; Maida & Weber, 2022), women's leadership is also connected to a decrease in labor market discrimination. Women in leadership positions can contribute to addressing societal anxieties and biases around gender stereotypes (Bertrand et al., 2019). Additionally, women's leadership has been linked to less promotion hurdles, which has led to smaller gender wage discrepancies and a higher percentage of women in jobs that are austerity-proof (Arvate, Galilea, and Todescat, 2018; Biasi & Sarsons, 2022).

In a study by Melesse (2021), it was determined what elements affected how well women leaders performed and how cooperatives were governed in Dire Dawa City Administration. 239 female committee members and leaders were chosen for the study using the census method and an explanatory research design. There were 233 completed questionnaires in total, and a total of 233 were examined using descriptive statistics like mean and standard deviation as well as analytical statistics by utilizing a multiple linear regression model. The study's conclusions showed that women are capable of successful leadership and cooperative governance.

Using cross-country and panel regressions, Xu (2015) investigated the connection between gender disparities in political engagement and economic growth across 30 Asian nations between 1991 and 2013. With a specific focus on the Asian panel, the study attempted to update and clarify earlier research findings on the relationship between female political engagement and economic progress. The findings demonstrated that rising female political participation has aided in Asia's economic expansion in recent years.

### **3. Material and methods**

The research adopted a positivism research philosophy and explanatory research design to explain causal relationships between variables and enhances theory development from the findings (Albassam, 2014). The target population of this study will be 230 (201 public service board members and 29 county secretaries) from 29 ASAL counties (County Director of Human Resource Management 2020). The research employed the census technique. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), the census sampling approach can be used when the total population is less than one hundred respondents. The census sampling approach was used in this study to sample 230 respondents. Data was collected mainly through questionnaires. The questionnaire was structured with a Likert scale to quantify the responses. To ensure reliability and validity of the research instruments, a pilot study was carried out in the Nairobi County government using 5 public service board members and 1 county secretary in Nairobi County. This regression model was used to test the relationship between women leadership and social-economic development of county governments as a linear function of the independent variables.

### **4. Findings and Discussion**

#### *4.1. Descriptive Statistics*

Findings from Table 1 showed that to some extent county government in County Governments in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands of Kenya had adhered to two-third gender in appointment off female leaders in the county. Respondents agreed that Female leaders in the county talk about future trends that will influence growth of the county, spend time and energy making certain that people they work with adhere to the principles and standards they have to agree on, speak with genuine conviction about the higher meaning and purpose of their work, ensure that people grow in their jobs by learning new skills and developing themselves, give the members of the team lots of appreciation and support for their contributions, treat others with dignity and respect and make sure that people are creatively rewarded for their contributions to the success of their projects. However, respondents were in a disagreement that Female leaders actively listen to diverse points of view, follow through on the promises and commitments that they make, search outside the formal boundaries of their county for innovative ways to improve what they do, paint the “big picture” of what they aspire to accomplish and make certain that they set achievable goals, make concrete plans, and establish measurable milestones for the projects and programs they work on. In general, female leadership was above average in county government.

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics for Female leadership**

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev</b>	<b>Skewness</b>	<b>Kurtosis</b>
The county always ensures the two-third gender rule is adhered to	3.293	1.092	-0.179	-0.079
Female leaders in the county talk about future trends that will influence growth of the county	4.182	1.103	-1.675	2.312
Female leaders in our county spend time and energy making certain that people they work with adhere to the principles and standards they have to agree on	4.333	0.878	-1.478	2.287
Female leaders in our actively listen to diverse points of view	3.207	0.903	-1.509	2.587
Female leaders in our county follow through on the promises and commitments that they make	3.244	0.862	-0.421	-0.539
Female leaders in the county search outside the formal boundaries of their county for innovative ways to improve what they do.	2.697	1.166	-0.340	-0.947
Female leaders in the county treat others with dignity and respect	4.030	1.032	-0.705	-0.504
Female leaders in the county make sure that people are creatively rewarded for their contributions to the success of their projects	3.869	0.920	-1.239	1.916
Female leaders in the county support the decisions that people make on their own.	3.712	1.299	-0.643	-0.759
Female leaders paint the “big picture” of what they aspire to accomplish	2.737	1.123	0.207	-0.786
Female leaders make certain that they set achievable goals, make concrete plans, and establish measurable milestones for the projects and programs they work on.	2.717	1.251	0.141	-1.105
Female leaders speak with genuine conviction about the higher meaning and purpose of their work.	4.182	1.103	-1.675	2.312
Female leaders ensure that people grow in their jobs by learning new skills and developing themselves.	4.333	0.878	-1.478	2.287
Female leaders give the members of the team lots of appreciation and support for their contributions.	4.207	0.903	-1.509	2.587
<b>Female leadership</b>	<b>3.919</b>	<b>0.624</b>	<b>-2.089</b>	<b>4.358</b>

Findings from Table 2, reveals economically, that the county government under the study had created job opportunities for locals, improved farming income, increased demand for local products through networking, lobbying, partnership and marketing, created new business investment opportunities and created and ensured good environment for local business. However, the county government has not enhanced access to avoidable transportation, networked and lobbied for jobs from foreign countries and increased agriculture production through provisions of farming inputs.

Socially, findings revealed the county government ensures there is easy access to a public facility (such as hospitals, government offices), has provided amenities

necessary for doing business (such as sewage, access to water, etc) and encouraged establishment of different corporate activities, e.g., supermarket, banks. In addition, respondents were neutral on the county government support preservation of local culture, supports residents in their advocacy for their neighborhood, Increase community capacity building and provision enough security against crimes. However, the county government has not adequately provided easy access to work, social infrastructure (such as electricity, roads, etc), and public facilities, e.g., Schools, health care services, and sports facilities.

**Table 2: Social-economic development**

	Mean	Std. Dev	Skewness	Kurtosis
The county government has created job opportunities for locals	2.571	1.338	0.091	-1.389
The county have networked and lobbied for jobs from foreign countries	2.200	1.431	0.404	-1.268
The county has increased agriculture production through provisions of farming inputs	2.276	1.364	0.391	-1.097
The county government has improved farming income	2.894	1.284	0.011	-1.231
The county government has enhanced access to avoidable transportation	2.217	1.325	0.758	-0.711
The county government has increased demand for local products through networking, lobbying, partnership and marketing	2.830	0.950	0.480	-0.470
The county government has created new business investment opportunities	3.010	0.820	-0.180	1.490
The county government has created and ensured good environment for local business	3.150	0.850	0.550	0.550
<b>Economic development</b>	2.719	1.170	0.313	-0.516
The county government adequately provide of social infrastructure (such as electricity, roads, etc)	3.280	1.310	0.030	-1.370
The county government ensures there is easy Access to a public facility (such as hospitals, government offices)	3.810	1.080	-0.450	-0.370
The county government has provided easy access to work	2.640	0.970	0.280	-0.070
The county government has provided amenities necessary for doing business (such as sewage, access to water, etc)	3.730	0.890	-0.550	-0.260
The county government adequately provide of public facilities, e.g., Schools, health care services, and sports facilities	2.260	1.030	0.590	-0.350
The county government support preservation of local culture	2.890	1.210	-0.200	-0.990
The county government has provided enough security against crimes	3.090	1.000	0.300	-0.690
The county government has encouraged establishment of different corporate activities, e.g., supermarket, banks	3.840	1.360	-0.740	-0.930
The county government Supports residents in their advocacy for their neighborhood	3.150	0.950	0.200	-0.610

The county government Increase community capacity building	3.050	0.610	-0.160	-0.170
<b>Social Factors</b>	3.064	1.041	-0.070	-0.581

#### 4.2. Correlation Analysis

Table 3 illustrates the correlation results. From the findings in table 3, the relationship between economic development and female leadership was found to be positive and significant ( $\rho = 0.29$ ,  $p$ -value  $< 0.01$ ). Furthermore, the relationship between female leadership and social development was found to be positive and significant ( $\rho = 0.643$ ,  $p$ -value  $< 0.05$ ).

**Table 3: Correlation Analysis**

		Economic development	Social development	Female leadership
Economic development	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	1		
Social development	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.593** 0.000	1	
Female leadership	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.129* 0.045	.643** 0.000	1

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Source:** (Survey Data, 2023)

#### 4.3. Regression Results

A linear regression analysis was done to determine the direct impact of female leadership on social-economic development in order to attain objectives. In order to evaluate the model, fit and ascertain the study models' predictive capability, regression analyses were carried out. Field (2009) pointed out that there are various approaches to regression analysis, such as forced entry. In order to evaluate the direct effects of predictor factors on the predicted variable (economic- social development), the Enter (forced entry) approach was used in this study.

##### *Effect of Female Leadership on Economic Development*

The results on how female leadership affects the economic development of ASAL counties are shown below. According to Table 4 findings, female leadership had a significant impact ( $R^2 = .268$ ), accounting for up to 26.8% of the fluctuations in the dependent variable, or economic development of ASAL counties. The model's fitness was supported by the ANOVA analysis, which also showed that female leadership had a statistically significant impact on economic development of ASAL counties ( $F = 75.514$ ,  $p = .000$ ). As a result, it was determined that the model was capable of accurately forecasting economic development of ASAL counties using female leadership. The

regression coefficients in Table 4 established the mean change in economic development of ASAL counties for one unit of change in the female leadership.

**Table 4:** Regression results for Effect of Female leadership on economic development

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	2.028	0.236		8.594	0.000
Female leadership	0.502	0.058	0.518	8.690	0.000
<b>Model Summary</b>					
R	0.518				
R Square	0.268				
Adjusted R Square	0.265				
Std. Error of the Estimate	0.628				
<b>ANOVA</b>					
F	75.514				
Sig.	0.000				

a Dependent Variable: economic development of ASAL counties

The computed show that female leadership had a significant impact, with  $\beta = 0.518$  (p-value = 0.000, which is less than = 0.05), thus, female leadership significantly affect economic development of ASAL counties. Based on the results mentioned above the following model was generated

$$Y = 1.543 + 0.793X_2 + \varepsilon$$

This suggested that there was up to 0.518 unit increase in female leadership for each unit increase in economic development of ASAL counties. This infers that female leadership enhances the economic growth of county governments. Women bring different experiences and perspectives to leadership positions, which can lead to more innovative solutions and better decision-making. This can help to drive economic growth by promoting policies and initiatives that are more inclusive and equitable. Studies have shown that countries with higher levels of female political participation tend to have lower levels of corruption and better governance overall. This can create a more favorable business environment and attract investment. When women are in leadership positions, they may be more likely to promote policies that support female workforce participation. This can lead to a larger and more productive workforce, which can boost economic growth



*Effect of Female Leadership on Economic Development*

The sections below present the results for effects of female leadership on economic development of ASAL counties at KNH. Results in Table 5 showed that female leadership predicts 48.9 percent variations in economic development of ASAL counties at KNH ( $R^2 = .489$ ). The ANOVA model showed model fitness for effect of female leadership on economic development of ASAL counties was statistically significant ( $F = 253.563, p=.000$ ). Thus, the model was fit to predict economic development of ASAL counties using female leadership.

**Table 5:** *Linear Regression for Effect of Female leadership on social development of ASAL counties*

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	1.609	0.141		11.444	0.000
Female leadership	0.681	0.043	0.699	15.924	0.000
<b>Summary Statistics</b>					
R	0.699				
R Square	0.489				
Adjusted R Square	0.487				
ANOVA (F stat)	253.563				
ANOVA (F prob)	0.000				

b Dependent Variable: Social development of ASAL counties

Findings showed that female leadership had coefficients of estimate which was significant basing on  $\beta_1 = 0.699$  ( $p\text{-value} = 0.000$  which is less than  $\alpha = 0.05$ ). It was concluded that female leadership had a significant effect on economic development of ASAL counties at KNH. This suggested that there was up to 0.699 unit increase in female leadership for each unit increase in social development of ASAL counties. The effect of female leadership was more than 15 times the effect attributed to the error; this was indicated by the t-test value = 15.924. The findings agree with Biasi and Sarsons (2022) and Maida & Weber (2022) female leaders may be more likely to prioritize social issues such as education, healthcare, and social welfare. These areas are important for promoting human development, which can have a positive impact on overall social well-being. When women hold leadership positions, they can serve as role models for other women and girls and promote gender equality. This can help to reduce gender-based discrimination and violence and promote greater social inclusion. Female leaders can help to increase the participation and representation of women in political and social spheres. This can help to ensure that the perspectives and needs of women and girls are taken into account in policymaking, which can lead to more inclusive and equitable outcomes. Female leaders may be more likely to engage with and involve their communities in decision-making processes. This can help to build trust and promote greater community ownership of social development initiatives.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The evidence suggests that female leadership can have a positive impact on the economic development of a country or government. This is due to several factors, including the diversity of perspectives, improved governance, increased workforce participation, and focus on social issues that female leaders may bring to their roles.

To maximize the potential benefits of female leadership for economic development, it is important to prioritize policies that support gender equality and promote female representation in leadership positions. This can include initiatives to increase access to education and training for women, as well as efforts to reduce gender bias and discrimination in hiring and promotion.

In addition, it is important to create a supportive environment for female leaders, including mentorship and networking opportunities, as well as policies to support work-life balance and family-friendly workplaces. By creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for female leaders, we can help to ensure that their talents and perspectives are fully utilized, and that we can reap the benefits of their contributions to economic development.

Based on the research that suggests that female leadership can positively impact the social development of a country or government, it can be concluded that increasing the representation of women in leadership positions can be beneficial for society as a whole. This is because female leaders may bring a different perspective to decision-making and policy implementation, which may result in more inclusive and equitable outcomes. Additionally, female leaders may serve as role models for young girls and women, inspiring them to pursue leadership positions and achieve their full potential.

Therefore, it is recommended that steps be taken to increase the representation of women in leadership positions. This could include implementing policies to ensure equal access to education and professional opportunities for women, promoting mentorship and networking opportunities for women, and encouraging political parties and other organizations to actively recruit and support female candidates. By doing so, we can work towards a more inclusive and equitable society, benefiting all members of the community.

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