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LUSAKA

**School of Postgraduate Studies**

**Investigating the Experiences of Young Women's Participation in  
Politics in Informal Settlements: A Case of Mchini and Navutika  
Compounds, Chipata District, Zambia**

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE  
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OF THE MASTER'S IN POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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## Declaration

I, Sekela Zimba, declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own original research, conducted independently. This thesis has never been submitted to another university for a degree or diploma consideration. I accept complete responsibility for any mistakes or omissions in my thesis.

Signed:



Date: 7<sup>th</sup> January 2025

Supervisor's Signature:



Date: January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025

## **Dedication**

To my father, Goodson Zimba, my elder sister Temwani Zimba Mboyonga and my late mother, Alice Namfukwe Zimba for understanding the importance of education and allowing me to pursue my dreams.

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## **List of Acronyms**

<b>ACHPR</b>	African Charter on Human and People's Rights Against Women
<b>CDF</b>	Constituency Development Fund
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>GBV</b>	Gender Based Violence
<b>MP</b>	Member of Parliament
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>NYDC</b>	National Youth Development Council
<b>PF</b>	Patriotic Front
<b>PNUP</b>	Party of National Unity and Progress
<b>SADC</b>	Southern African Development Community
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UPND</b>	United Party for National Development
<b>USA</b>	United States of America
<b>WCoZ</b>	Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe
<b>YWCA</b>	Young Women's Christian Association
<b>YWILP</b>	Young Women in Leadership Project
<b>ZamStats</b>	Zambia Statistics Agency
<b>ZNWL</b>	Zambia National Women's Lobby

## **Abstract**

Despite growing international support for gender equality in political representation, young women in informal settlements continue to be underrepresented and encounter particular obstacles that prevent them from actively participating in politics. Against this background, this research was undertaken to investigate the experiences of young women's participation in politics in the informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika of Chipata district. This study used a qualitative approach, gathering information from focus groups and in-depth interviews with young women to investigate their viewpoints and lived experiences. Purposive sampling was employed to select young women who belonged to political parties and those who were active members of civil society organisations on their lived experiences in these informal settlements.

The results show how socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional factors interact in a complicated way to influence young women's political participation. Social norms and gender prejudices combine with structural issues like poverty, lack of access to education, and insufficient political mentoring to deter women from pursuing leadership positions. Nevertheless, the study also identifies examples of agency and resiliency in which young women overcome these limitations to make their political voices heard. The influence of role models in leadership, civil society organizations' lobbying, and community support networks are noteworthy motivators.

This research adds to the expanding conversation on inclusive governance, by providing localized insights into the lived realities of young women in informal settlements. It emphasizes the need for focused interventions to break down systemic barriers, empower young women, and create an environment that supports their political participation. The study highlights the need for policies and programs that address socioeconomic disparities, support gender-sensitive political frameworks, and support capacity-building initiatives for young women who want to be leaders.

**Keywords:** Young Women, Political Participation, Experiences

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0. Overview**

The chapter gives a background to the study and briefly discusses young women's roles in the fight for gender equality from a global perspective to the Zambian perspective. It also presents the problem statement and the research objectives, which are grouped into general and specific objectives. It further outlines the research questions, scope of the study, significance of the study, and organisation of the study.

#### **1.1. Background**

In recent times, the issue of young women's political participation has gained significant attention due to the recognition of gender equality and representation as essential components of democratic administration. Due to various obstacles, including cultural standards, institutional constraints within political institutions, and societal conventions, women have historically been underrepresented in the political realm. These obstacles are made more difficult for young women by age-related issues such as limited access to powerful networks, financial limitations, and a lack of political experience.

Many countries have adopted gender-sensitive policies due to emerging international frameworks such as the Beijing Platform for Action, United Nations Resolution 1325, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). However, the implementation of these policies varies widely. Even in nations where quotas or affirmative action policies exist to promote the representation of women in politics, young women are often still excluded from positions of political leadership. Research shows that even when women do attain political office, they often face gender-specific challenges, including discrimination, harassment, and a lack of acknowledgment for their achievements (Krook, 2020).

Young women have made significant contributions to gender equality through their participation in feminist movements that have pushed for social and legal reforms. For example, young women played a crucial role in advancing reproductive rights, fair pay,

and employment equality during the twentieth-century civil rights and women's liberation movements. Young women have been actively combating widespread gender-based assault and harassment more lately through movements like #MeToo and #TimesUp, bringing attention to concerns that had previously gone unnoticed (Gill and Orgad, 2018).

Young women have significantly influenced political landscapes by championing legislative reforms and gender quotas designed to enhance women's representation in government. For example, in the aftermath of the genocide, young women in Rwanda were crucial in advocating for the establishment of a gender quota system, resulting in one of the highest percentages of female lawmakers in the world (Powley, 2005). Similarly, young women in Latin American countries such as Brazil and Argentina have been instrumental in promoting legislative changes to combat gender-based violence and address disparities in political representation (Piscopo, 2015).

In Zambia, young women have played a crucial role in promoting gender parity through grassroots campaigns and within government institutions. Historically movements led by young women have been at the forefront of advocating for increased representation and legislative reforms. (Chira, et.al, 2019). For example, the advocacy efforts of women's groups, especially those spearheaded by young women, significantly influenced the enactment of the Gender Equity and Equality Act of 2015, which aimed to promote gender equality in leadership roles.

The involvement of young women has greatly facilitated engagement with political parties to demand greater inclusion and representation. Organizations such as the Zambia National Women's Lobby (ZNWL) and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) have been instrumental in helping young women build connections, participate in political discussions, and develop their leadership skills. These groups provide training and mentorship, empowering young women to challenge discriminatory practices and pursue leadership positions.

Zambia has made significant strides toward advancing gender equality over the years, particularly by encouraging greater participation of women in political life. However, young women, especially those from informal settlements, still face substantial barriers

to entry, despite the existence of national and international frameworks designed to enhance female political involvement. Some of the obstacles include deeply entrenched patriarchal norms, cultural expectations, economic disadvantages, and a lack of political mentorship or education. According to the World Bank reports (2020), a large percentage of Zambia's urban population resides in informal settlements marked by high poverty rates, limited educational opportunities, and minimal political influence for residents, particularly young women.

Young women's experiences in Zambia's informal settlements are a reflection of the convergence of multiple complicated elements, such as socioeconomic problems, restricted political platform access, and age and gender-based discrimination in society. These women are frequently shut out of formal political processes because of their limited financial resources, underrepresentation, and ingrained views that politics is the purview of men. In addition, young women in informal settlements frequently have limited opportunities to participate in politics or speak up for their rights because these communities frequently lack the institutional frameworks needed to encourage civic engagement.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

According to the Zambia Statistics Agency (ZamStats) 2022 Census of Population and Housing, Zambia's total population was 19,610,769, with women comprising 51% and men 49.3%. While women slightly represent the majority, this is not reflected in their political participation or in achieving equal representation in political roles (Nsana, 2017). Young women residing in informal settlements encounter specific challenges that hinder their engagement in political processes, even with initiatives in place to promote gender equality and political involvement. Additionally, there is a lack of studies focusing on the experiences of young women in politics, particularly in the Mchini and Navutika compounds of Chipata District, which limits our understanding of the factors influencing their participation.

In addition, Zambia's political environment, especially in informal settlements, is frequently marked by male domination, a lack of political mentorship, and cultural norms that deter young women from being involved. In Mchini and Navutika the

prevalence of political violence and the lack of forums for young women to express their concerns discourage their participation even more. Gaining an understanding of their experiences can help to draw attention to the difficulties and identify possible tactics and solutions that could improve their political engagement.

These informal settlements create a distinct socio-economic and cultural landscape where young women face overlapping barriers, including restricted access to education, economic resources, and entrenched gender norms. These obstacles significantly affect their ability to engage meaningfully in political activities. Thus, this research aims to investigate the lived experiences, challenges, and opportunities that young women encounter in these informal settlements. It seeks to identify the socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers that inhibit their political engagement.

### **1.3. Research Objectives**

#### **1.3.1. General Objective**

To investigate the experiences of young women's participation in politics in informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika in Chipata District, Zambia.

#### **1.3.2. Specific Objectives**

- i. To examine the factors driving young women's political participation in Chipata's informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika.
- ii. To assess the prevailing conditions for young women's political participation in Chipata's informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika.
- iii. To investigate the challenges and barriers encountered by young women in political participation in Chipata's informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika

### **1.4. Research Questions**

- i. What are the primary factors driving young women's participation in politics within Chipata's informal settlement?
- ii. What are the prevailing conditions for young women's political participation in Chipata's Mchini and Navutika informal settlements?

- iii. What are the primary challenges and barriers encountered by young women in political participation in Mchini and Navutika settlements?

### **1.5. Significance of the Study**

The examination of the experiences of young women engaged in politics in informal settlements with a particular emphasis on the Mchini and Navutika in Chipata District is important because it can fill in important gaps in academic research and policy-making. First of all, this study seeks to illuminate a population that political participation studies frequently ignore: the young, female, and urban poor. Through an analysis of the distinct obstacles, driving forces, and supportive elements encountered by young women residing in informal settlements, the research seeks to advance a more comprehensive comprehension of the impediments to inclusive political participation.

Furthermore, the results of this study are important for shaping evidence-based policy interventions meant to improve democratic governance and gender parity at the local level. Comprehending the experiences of young women residing in Mchini and Navutika compounds can aid in the creation of focused programs and activities that cater to their requirements and goals.

Moreover, the importance of this research goes beyond academic circles, impacting community-based and advocacy programs that support women's rights and political empowerment in informal settlements across the country. By emphasising the experiences of young women in Chipata District, the study adds to the larger conversation on gender equality, social justice, and democratization in Zambia and other places. The study is ultimately significant as it rests in its ability to spur constructive social change by elevating the perspectives and experiences of people who are frequently left out of political processes.

### **1.6. Scope of the Study**

This study was conducted within the Mchini and Navutika informal settlements of Chipata District, Zambia. These informal settlements served as the primary focus of the research to explore the experiences of young women's participation in politics within a specific geographic context. The study involved an application of a qualitative

research approach, employing semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation.

### 1.7. Definition of Key Terms and Concepts

- i. **Experiences:** Refer to individuals' lived realities, perceptions, and encounters within a particular context, which include a variety of subjective, social, and cultural aspects that influence their interactions, obstacles they face, and accomplishments they have about political engagement. It can also be defined as a direct observation of or participation in events as a basis of knowledge. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).
- ii. **Young Women:** Refers to those who identify as female and fall into the age range that is commonly associated with youth. This age range is usually described as those who are between the ages of 15 and 35. However, definitions can change depending on context and culture. The United Nations defines a youth as an individual between the ages of 15 and 24. (UN Programme on Youth). However, for this study, the ages to be considered will be between 18 and 35, as stipulated by the Zambian Constitution, in article 266, stipulates that a citizen who has attained the age of 18 is entitled to be registered as a voter and participate in voting.
- iii. **Political Participation:** Entails the engagement of individuals in various political activities, such as voting, campaigning, leadership positions, advocacy, and decision-making inside official and informal political systems, with the ultimate goal of influencing political results and policies. It is also defined also as; the various activities in which citizens engage in influencing government actions and decision-making extending beyond traditional electoral activities like voting. (Dalton, 2017)
- iv. **Informal Settlements:** Refers to residential neighbourhoods, usually inhabited by socially and economically disadvantaged communities, characterized by substandard housing, restricted access to essential amenities like water and sanitation, and frequently lack official infrastructure or legal recognition. They arise from the failure of conventional markets to provide low-income residents with suitable and reasonable housing. (Satterthwaite, 2009).

## **1.8. Organisation of the Study**

The rest of the study is organized as follows: Chapter Two reviews existing literature on young women's participation in politics, and Chapter Three explains the research methodology. Chapter Four presents and interprets the findings from Mchini and Navutika informal settlements, while Chapter Five analyzes the results. Finally, Chapter Six synthesizes key findings, and offers recommendations for enhancing young women's participation and directions for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1. Introduction

This chapter includes related literature that has been generated and is closely related to the current study. The literature overview will be from the global, regional and national perspectives respectively.

#### 2.2. Overview

Engagement in politics ensures that citizens have a voice in decision-making processes, a fundamental aspect of democracy. Despite the advancements made toward gender equality, young women continue to be significantly underrepresented in political roles. Their participation is shaped by particular experiences that reflect both emerging opportunities and barriers that are institutional and cultural in nature.

The term "political participation" encompasses the various ways individuals engage in political processes and influence social decision-making. It is a crucial element of democracy and includes a wide array of actions that empower people to impact decisions regarding political leaders and the policies they implement. Moreover, it is defined as the diverse activities in which citizens partake to influence government actions and decision-making, extending beyond traditional electoral activities such as voting (Dalton, 2017).

#### 2.3. Forms of Political Participation

**Conventional participation** includes participating in policy discussions, running for office, campaigning, and voting. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) argue that traditional political engagement, especially voting, continues to be the most prevalent and important form of political participation. Voting is viewed as the most direct way citizens can influence political outcomes, particularly in democratic societies (Putnam, 2000). Among the more traditional forms of involvement include campaigning, which includes canvassing, donating to political candidates, and going to rallies.

**Unconventional participation** refers to actions that happen outside of recognized political channels, such as strikes, online activism, boycotts, sit-ins, civil disobedience, protests, and petitions. Barnes and Kaase (1979) suggest that unconventional political participation has gained importance recently, especially among marginalized groups who may find formal channels inaccessible or unresponsive. Non-traditional forms of political participation, such as social movements, boycotts, and civil disobedience, are thought to be effective at influencing legislation and attracting public attention.

## **2.4. Global Perspective on Young Women's Participation in Politics**

This examines young women's experiences participating in politics in some regions of Asia, Brazil, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA), drawing on several studies that examine the difficulties and advancements faced by each region.

### **2.4.1. Asia**

Because of the many political systems, cultural traditions, and social conventions in Asia, young women's political participation differs greatly. Young women are becoming more involved in political action in nations like the Philippines and India, especially about problems like democratic governance, gender-based violence, and education (Ghosh, 2019). Young women in South Korea played a significant role in the demonstrations that resulted in President Park Geun-Hye's impeachment, demonstrating their increasing political agency (Chung and Lee, 2018). On 16th August 2024, Paetongtarn Shinawatra was elected as Prime Minister of Thailand making her the second Female Prime Minister in Thai history.

However, strong patriarchal limitations frequently face Asian young women. Traditional gender roles are still prevalent in many nations, which restricts women's access to political participation (Roy, 2019). Furthermore, Tadros (2014) notes that financial constraints, sexual harassment, and political violence are major barriers that keep young women from fully engaging in politics.

### **2.4.2. Brazil**

Modern feminist movements and traditional gender norms both play a significant role in shaping young women's political participation in Brazil. There is a growing trend of community organizing and grassroots activism among Brazilian women, particularly among the younger demographic (Maciel and Nogueira, 2019). Concerns regarding gender violence, inequality, and economic hardships largely fuel this movement.

Young women in Brazil frequently take the lead in social movements and rallies, advocating for advancements in social justice, government accountability, and the protection of women's rights. However, women remain considerably underrepresented in elected positions, and the political system remains largely patriarchal (Miguel and Biroli, 2014). Additionally, many young women come from low-income backgrounds, facing economic barriers that limit their access to resources and political platforms (Baquero, 2017).

### **2.4.3. The United Kingdom**

The United Kingdom has witnessed progressive growth in the political engagement of young women, primarily due to the impact of feminist movements and the growing representation of women in politics. Social justice, climate change, and gender equality are major concerns for young women in the UK and these interests motivate them to get involved in politics (Fox, 2019). Social media have greatly aided young women, as sites like X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram have developed into forums for political activism and dialogue (Bennett, 2020).

The proportion of women serving in the House of Commons has steadily increased in the UK. Following the General Elections of 2024, the proportion and total number of female members of parliament reached an all-time high. In comparison to 220 (31%) in 2019, there are now 263 (40%) female MPs out of 650 MPs. (House of the Commons Library, 2024). Political parties, particularly the Labour Party, have contributed to this advancement by implementing all-women shortlists to choose parliamentary candidates in specific constituencies. Furthermore, the UK has produced three female Prime Ministers, Margaret Thatcher from 1979 to 1990, who was in leadership for 10 years and is considered one of the most significant female

figures in British political history. Theresa May was the second female Prime Minister from 2016 to 2019 and Liz Truss became the third female Prime Minister in 2022, however, she resigned after only 50 days in leadership.

Regardless of these advancements, young women in the UK still encounter several obstacles to political participation. Studies point to the persistent issues of gendered discrimination, harassment, and the low number of women in positions of political leadership (Campbell and Childs, 2018). Some young women are discouraged from fully participating in political processes due to institutional impediments and the notion that politics is a field dominated by men (Krook and Norris, 2020).

#### **2.4.4. The United States of America**

Young women in the United States have played a crucial role in various political movements, particularly during the Women's March and the Black Lives Matter movement, as well as in the presidential elections of 2016, 2020, and currently 2024. Research suggests that progressive candidates and initiatives that prioritize racial justice, gender equality, and reproductive rights resonate most strongly with young women (Fraser et al., 2021).

Despite their active engagement, young women in the U.S. face numerous challenges. The political landscape remains predominantly male-dominated, and women of colour encounter additional hurdles due to the intersecting impacts of gender and race (Junn, 2017). As the Democratic Party's presidential candidate for 2024, Kamala Harris, a woman of colour, garnered significant attention; however, she also faced considerable criticism regarding her appearance and personal life. Indeed, like in many countries in the world, female candidates often experience negative portrayals that highlight traits viewed as weaknesses in women but strengths in men. For instance, while women may be labelled as "bossy," men are typically described as "authoritative." Furthermore, incidents of gender-based violence and online harassment have discouraged some young women from actively participating in the political sphere (Bardall, 2020).

In both the UK and the U.S., young women are increasingly engaging in formal political processes, such as voting and running for office, despite the ongoing presence of systemic sexism and online harassment. In contrast, young women in Brazil and several Asian countries are more frequently involved in grassroots movements and protests, often driven by pressing social and economic issues. Across the globe, gender, ethnicity, and class create multifaceted barriers that hinder young women's political participation.

## **2.5. Sub-Saharan Perspective on Young Women's Participation in Politics**

In pre-colonial African societies, women held important political roles as chiefs, advisors, and rainmakers. However, colonialism introduced male-dominated government structures that ignored women's contributions. The imposition of new religions, education, and economic practices further entrenched patriarchy and isolated women from political and socio-economic participation, a legacy that persists today (Mboyonga,2022). This section explores the political participation of young women in the sub-Saharan region, focusing specifically on East Africa (Kenya), West Africa (Nigeria), and Southern Africa (South Africa and Zimbabwe). It utilizes data from various studies that highlight both the challenges and opportunities for engagement.

### **2.5.1. Kenya**

In Kenya, sociological and institutional issues have made it difficult for young women to participate in politics. Patriarchal norms dominate Kenyan politics, and women especially young women face societal expectations that restrict their participation in the political sphere. Despite the 2010 Kenyan Constitution's promotion of gender equality and the requirement that women participate in political processes, prejudice against young women persists in both political parties and election procedures. (Nzomo 2014). However, young women are allegedly becoming more involved in civil society groups and grassroots movements. (Cheeseman and Lynch, 2018). These platforms give young women the chance to speak up on behalf of causes like health, gender equality, and education, which adds to the political conversation even when it takes place outside of official political organisations.

There are many obstacles for young women in Kenya's political landscape, including electoral violence, harassment, and a lack of resources. (Omolo, 2018). The lack of implementation of the two-thirds gender rule which states that no more than two-thirds of any elected body shall be of one gender, has further restricted the representation of Women. A vicious circle of exclusion results in young women being passed over for leadership roles in parties and having their political opinions devalued.

### **2.5.2. Nigeria**

Nigeria offers a particularly difficult environment for the political engagement of young women. Nigeria, the most populous nation in Africa, is home to a dynamic political scene, but it is also marked by pervasive sexism and socioeconomic disparities that prevent women from participating in politics. Social conventions and religious convictions significantly restrict the political aspirations of young women, who are notably underrepresented in Nigerian politics. (Ademiluyi and Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2021)

Although the Nigerian Constitution guarantees gender equality in political participation, men control most political processes. Women in Nigeria confront various difficulties, such as limited financial resources, political violence, and cultural prejudices that minimize their influence in politics (Aina, 2012). Young women are particularly frequently written off as being too inexperienced to hold elected office.

The "Not Too Young to Run" movement, which aims to lower the age barriers for running for office, has been one of the efforts to increase women's participation in politics in recent years. (Krook and Nugent). However, Abdul (2020) points out that although this movement has created a platform for youth involvement in politics, young women still face obstacles like limited access to resources and gendered stereotypes. Despite these obstacles, young women are actively involved in advocacy and grassroots movements, pushing for better representation and gender-sensitive policies, often through non-governmental organisations and informal networks.

### **2.5.3. South Africa**

Since apartheid ended, women's political engagement in South Africa, particularly that of young women, has advanced significantly. Under the South African Constitution,

men and women are guaranteed equal rights to participate in politics. Gender quotas and affirmative action have significantly expanded the participation of women in political processes (Friedman, 2012). With over 44.7% of the National Assembly being female, South Africa has one of the highest percentages of female representation in Parliament among all African countries.

Mudau and Obadire (2017) point out several obstacles that young women, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, must overcome to participate in politics. The legacy of racial injustice, gender-based violence, and socioeconomic position exacerbates the challenges young women confront in actively engaging in political processes. While accepting of women's participation, South African political parties frequently exclude young women in leadership positions because they believe they lack the necessary experience or are unable to assume important political duties (Krook and O'Brien, 2012). Youth-led movements like #FeesMustFall have made it possible for young women to participate in politics outside of established frameworks. (Dlakavu, 2020). Though their efforts are still not fully acknowledged, this non-traditional form of political participation has given young women a platform to confront racial and patriarchal injustices.

#### **2.5.4. Zimbabwe**

The socio-political environment of Zimbabwe greatly influences the political engagement of young women. According to Makamure (2016), women, especially young women, are notably underrepresented in local and national political bodies. An authoritarian political system combined with patriarchal standards makes it difficult for young women to advance in politics. Merely 12.9% of the candidates in the 2018 parliamentary elections were female, and significantly fewer were young women.

Zimbabwe's political parties have come under fire for not providing venues for young women to participate. Cultural expectations and frequent exclusion from decision-making processes deter young women from running for political office. (Mushonga, 2015). Young women are further discouraged from seeking political office because of the absence of role models, socioeconomic hardships, and political violence

Young women have benefited greatly from the resources and training offered by organisations such as the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ), which has helped them negotiate the male-dominated political arena. Nevertheless, given the dangers of political violence and intimidation within political organisations, young women frequently decide to participate in political engagement outside of established frameworks. (Makumbe, 2009).

Based on the literature review, we can conclude that various institutional, cultural, and societal issues continue to impact young women's political participation in Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. Although these countries have legal frameworks that promote gender parity in political engagement, young women still face significant challenges, such as entrenched patriarchal attitudes, a lack of resources, political violence, and exclusion from decision-making processes. Despite these obstacles, young women are finding innovative ways to engage in politics, including activism, grassroots movements, and participation in civil society organizations. Their experiences highlight the need for more inclusive political institutions that provide young women with the necessary support and resources to fully participate in political processes.

## **2.6. The Zambian Perspective on Young Women's Participation in Politics**

This examines young women's experiences in participating in politics in Zambia, drawing on several studies that examine the difficulties faced and advancements made in Zambia.

Since gaining independence in 1964, women in Zambia have been actively engaged in political activities, although their presence in official political spheres has remained limited. This has led to their portrayal as silenced and invisible figures in the political history of the country (Mboyonga, 2022). Despite the notable achievement of having a female vice president following the 2016 Presidential elections, Zambia continues to experience low levels of female political participation. For example, only 18% of parliamentary seats were held by women in the 2016 elections (Fawcett, 2019). The 2021 general elections further highlighted the underrepresentation of women in politics, with only one female candidate among the 16 vying for the presidency,

comprising 16% of the contenders. Additionally, female candidates accounted for just 21% for parliamentary seats, 13% for the mayor and council chairperson positions, and 9% for councillors (Gender Links, 2021). The current parliament reflects a stark gender representation gap, with male members constituting 84.4% and female representatives making up only 15.6% of the total.

In addition to their formal political participation, young women have been actively involved in civic movements, non-governmental organisations, and community-based projects that promote political change. Youth activism and political consciousness have been greatly enhanced by civil society organisations (CSOs). According to Mutukwa (2020), these organisations have given young women a forum to advocate for causes including women's rights, health, education, and reforms to the government.

Furthermore, the Zambian political discourse has greatly benefited from the leadership of young women in grassroots groups that support rights to reproductive health and gender-based violence (GBV) prevention. Young women can now use social media to mobilize support and air their political beliefs thanks to the advent of digital activism. Mwanakatwe (2019) asserts that even in the absence of official leadership roles, internet platforms have enabled young women to sign petitions, take part in political debates, and support political reforms.

Another way for young women to get involved in politics is through youth forums and councils. These councils are frequently venues where young people including women can have an impact on local politics and policy choices. Under its mandate to encourage youth engagement, Zambia's National Youth Development Council (NYDC) has implemented programs that provide political education and leadership development to young women. These platforms give young women the chance to interact with decision-makers and share their opinions on social justice, governance, and the advancement of the country.

Mwanza (2022) contends that although youth councils have the potential to be inclusive, young women's perspectives are frequently ignored and that male dominance is common. To address this, programs like the Young Women in

Leadership Project (YWILP) have been developed with the express purpose of empowering young women to participate in politics by providing them with political networking opportunities, leadership training, and mentoring.

### **2.6.1. Legal Framework Supporting Young Women's Participation in Politics**

Zambia is guided by legal frameworks both at the local and international levels aimed at promoting gender equality and supporting young women's participation in politics. This literature review is informed by such legal framework that seeks to support young women's political participation in Zambia. We draw on international Conventions, constitutional provisions and legislation.

#### **i. Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1979.**

CEDAW is an important international convention that addresses discrimination against women in all its forms. It was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979. Zambia agreed to prohibit gender-based discrimination and guarantee women's equal participation in politics when it joined CEDAW in 1985 (Article 7). Despite not having a specific focus on young women, CEDAW's broad mandate encourages women's full and equal participation in political processes, including that of young women.

#### **ii. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) 1986.**

Zambia has ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which upholds the rights of women under the Maputo Protocol, an agreement to further advance the African Charter on the Protection of Women's Rights in Africa. Women must participate in decision-making processes, including those involving politics, according to Article 9 of the Maputo Protocol. The adoption of affirmative action measures by member states to attain gender parity is encouraged by this regional legal framework, which is essential in encouraging the involvement of young women in politics.

#### **iii. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development 2008.**

The 2008 SADC Protocol on Gender and Development sets standards for gender equality among the countries of Southern Africa. Ensuring that 50% of women are in positions of political and decision-making authority by 2030 is one of its main goals. Zambia has integrated these objectives into its domestic gender policy to foster a more welcoming political atmosphere for women, particularly young women.

#### **iv. The Constitution of Zambia (Amendment) Act No. 2 of 2016**

The 2016 Zambian Constitutional Amendment Act recognises gender equality and provides for the protection of women's rights as a fundamental principle.

- Article 45 (1) stipulates that the election of President, Member of Parliament or Councillor shall be founded on "gender equity in the National Assembly or Councils." This lays the groundwork for encouraging women to take part in political decision-making.
- Article 259(1) requires that, when appointing public officers, a person responsible for making the appointment should ensure that at least 50% of the appointees are women.  
This provision promotes gender equality in public service.
- Article 47 guarantees the right to run for office and vote in elections, regardless of gender, thus promoting an inclusive political environment.

#### **v. Electoral Process Act, 2016**

Women's participation is increased by the Electoral Process Act of 2016, which forbids violence, intimidation, and discrimination against them during electoral processes and establishes rules for free and fair elections. The Act also contains provisions that ensure women and other marginalized groups' safety during elections and campaigns, therefore facilitating their participation. Although it is not targeted at young women in particular, it encourages inclusivity by stressing the importance of political parties implementing policies that support gender diversity and equal access to political rights. Enforcement is still a worry, as political violence and harassment directed towards women continue to discourage young women from running for office.

## **vi. The Gender Equity and Equality Act of 2015**

The goal of the Gender Equity and Equality Act of 2015 is to domesticate international commitments regarding gender equality. It calls for the implementation of policies that will support women's participation in politics and their ability to assume leadership roles. Institutions are mandated under this statute to address gender inequality and give women equal opportunities in all fields, including politics.

### **2.6.2. Challenges to Young Women's Participation in Politics**

In Zambia, several obstacles prevent young women from actively participating in politics. The cultural, social, and socioeconomic barriers that historically excluded women from the political process are at the core of these difficulties. This study of the literature looks at the main challenges that young women in Zambia's political environment confront.

#### **i. Cultural and Patriarchal Norms**

Like in many other African civilizations, patriarchal ideals that assign particular duties to men and women considerably influence cultural standards in Zambia. Kabemba (2019) and Mboyonga (2022) argue that women are generally relegated to supporting roles in Zambian culture, favouring men in leadership roles. Due to the widespread belief that men should handle public leadership; young women are prevented from entering the political sphere by traditional expectations that they should concentrate on caring for their homes. Furthermore, resistance to women in leadership is a manifestation of patriarchal beliefs; Young women who aspire to political positions frequently encounter sexism, belittling, and dismissal (Kamau, 2018).

#### **ii. Political Violence and Intimidation**

In Zambia, political violence is a recurring problem that disproportionately affects women and deters them from participating. Much research, such as one conducted in 2019 by Resnick and Casale, shows that young women are more susceptible to psychological and physical abuse during political campaigns and elections. A major obstacle is the risk of violence and intimidation, particularly for young women who might not have the networks or financial means to defend themselves. A large portion

of this violence takes place in political organisations, which are frequently places where men predominate and where involvement by women is not actively encouraged (Sakueka, 2021).

### **iii. Economic Disempowerment**

In Zambia, young women encounter major economic obstacles that restrict their political participation. Many young women cannot afford the resources needed for political campaigns, including money for media, outreach, and transportation (Mkandawire, 2020). Lack of access to professional and educational opportunities that would provide young women with the networks and confidence they need to participate in politics is another consequence of economic disempowerment. According to a study by Mbewe (2017), women from low-income families have additional difficulties since they are more likely to rely on male family members or political figures, which limits their ability to express themselves in political settings.

### **iv. Limited Access to Political Networks**

The absence of access to established political networks is another key hurdle. Gaining access to established political parties and movements which are primarily run by men is frequently necessary for involvement in politics. According to Mumba and Chilufya (2020), a lot of young women struggle to work their way through political systems that demand assistance and endorsements from insiders in the field who might not put women's emancipation first. In the absence of these networks, young women may encounter difficulties in obtaining nominations for political office or rising to positions of influence within parties.

### **v. Legal and Institutional Barriers**

Despite Zambia's Constitution's provision of equal political rights for men and women, women's political involvement has not been completely facilitated by institutional and legal frameworks. Gender quotas and other appropriate methods to guarantee women's representation are not provided under the Electoral Process Act, claims Mwanawasa (2018). Young women are further discouraged from participating in

politics by the low representation of women in the National Assembly and Municipal Councils, which is the consequence of the absence of gender-specific election reforms.

#### **vi. Limited Political Education and Capacity Building**

Building the abilities and knowledge required for successful political engagement depends heavily on political education and training. However, research by Zulu (2021) shows that these chances are frequently inaccessible to young women in Zambia. Young women are largely ignored by political parties and civil society initiatives that try to increase women's engagement in politics by concentrating on older women. Because of this, young women are frequently unprepared when they enter politics and lack the organizational and strategic abilities necessary to compete with their male counterparts.

#### **vii. Gender Stereotyping and Media Representation**

The media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of political leaders. Research by Mulenga (2019) shows that young women in Zambian politics are often portrayed negatively or completely overlooked. This negative representation reinforces the stereotype that women are unsuitable for leadership positions. As a result, the belief that men dominate politics discourages young women from pursuing careers in this field. Additionally, gender stereotypes are perpetuated in Zambian secondary school textbooks, whereby female historical figures are often silenced and rendered invisible compared to their male counterparts (Mboyonga, 2022). This phenomenon reflects the prevailing patriarchal dominance in education.

#### **viii. Sexual Harassment and Exploitation**

In Zambian politics, sexual harassment is still a major problem that puts young women in danger. According to a report from the Political Participation Network of Southern Africa (2022), young women who are pursuing political positions or endorsements often encounter sexual advances and harassment. This problem is so prevalent that

it not only restricts their involvement but also deters other young women from pursuing leadership roles for fear of being taken advantage of.

## **2.7. Gaps in Literature**

Despite the several researches which have been undertaken concerning young women's participation in politics some gaps have been identified.

### **i. Focus on Informal Settlements**

Most of the literature on young women's political engagement frequently overlooks the particular political dynamics seen in informal settlements in favour of formal political organisations or urban environments. Comprehensive research is lacking on how informal political structures, governance, and socioeconomic circumstances in informal settlements affect young women's engagement.

### **ii. Intersectionality and Socioeconomic Status**

The economic and social realities of informal settlements such as poverty, unemployment, and restricted access to resources are rarely explored in conjunction with political participation, even though some research acknowledges gender-based barriers to political participation. Few studies also examine how intersecting factors such as age, economic status, education, and geographic location (informal settlements) combine to create unique challenges for young women.

### **iii. Barriers to Political Networks**

While obstacles like political violence and gender stereotypes are widely known, little is known about how young women in informal settlements manage to get access to mentorship, support systems, and political networks. Determining the obstacles that young women encounter in pursuing political careers requires an understanding of the ways in which these networks operate in informal settlements.

### **iv. Digital Divide and Political Mobilization**

While the literature recognises the contribution of digital activism to increased youth involvement, it does not adequately address the ways in which the digital gap impacts

young women living in informal settlements. Owing to the restricted availability of technology in these regions, it is important to investigate how digital instruments either facilitate or hinder the political engagement and mobilisation of young women.

**v. Role of Traditional Power Structures**

Local, traditional power structures are common in informal settlements and can have an impact on political participation. The influence of these structures on young women's political engagement as impediments or as platforms for leadership within their communities is not adequately explored in the literature.

**vi. Political Violence and Security in Informal Settlements**

Political violence has been identified in the literature as a hindrance to women's political participation; however, little research has been done on how this violence particularly impacts young women living in informal settlements, where there may be a lack of law enforcement and more competitive politics.

**vii. Cultural Norms Specific to Informal Settlements**

Studies that have already been done frequently generalize patriarchal and cultural barriers without taking into account how these norms are reinforced or changed in the context of informal settlements. There is a dearth of research on the specific cultural norms or neighbourhood dynamics that influence young women's engagement in politics in these settings.

**viii. Capacity Building and Education**

Little consideration is given to whether political education and capacity-building initiatives are reaching young women living in informal settlements; instead, research on these topics frequently concentrates on national or urban contexts. Research is required to determine the extent to which these initiatives empower young women in economically and politically marginalized communities.

This research seeks to close the gaps highlighted by offering a more contextualized knowledge of the opportunities, challenges, and dynamics that young women in

informal settlements encounter while attempting to participate in politics. It aims to educate educators, activists, and policymakers on the unique difficulties in these contexts, with the ultimate goal of encouraging inclusive political engagement for young women from marginalized areas.

## **2.8. Theoretical Framework**

Through the theoretical framework, one can gain a conceptual understanding of the intricate dynamics influencing the experiences of young women's participation in politics in informal settlements. The proposed research draws from two pivotal theories, the feminist theory and the intersectionality theory.

### **2.8.1. The Feminist Theory**

Feminist theory offers insights and recommendations on how the social and environmental factors that cause or worsen the issues faced by women can be transformed (Jackson and Jones, 1998). It underscores the importance of examining the power dynamics and social structures that perpetuate gender inequality. By emphasizing gender as a primary lens for analysing power relations, disparities, and societal frameworks, feminist theory is particularly useful in understanding the unique challenges and opportunities that young women encounter.

The theory explores how patriarchal structures, societal expectations, and gender roles impact political participation, illuminating why young women may be underrepresented in political spheres or face specific obstacles in their efforts to engage in politics. Furthermore, feminist theory highlights the value of agency, resistance, and voice by focusing on lived experiences. These concepts are essential for comprehending how young women navigate political environments often marked by social marginalization, poverty, and resource scarcity.

In contemporary feminist discourse, particularly in Africa, writers like Nigerian author and public intellectual Chimamanda Adichie provide a vital perspective. In her acclaimed work "We Should All Be Feminists" (2014), Adichie challenges gender norms and power imbalances that restrict women's opportunities in the home, workplace, and society, including politics. She stresses that cultural norm should not

suppress women's aspirations or limit their participation in public life. Her 2017 book, "Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions," offers practical advice on empowering girls to resist societal pressures to conform to traditional gender roles. Her writings consider the complexities of African women's lives, including economic, racial, and class realities, and emphasize the importance of addressing these interconnected challenges in discussions about women's empowerment.

In her 2006 novel "Half of a Yellow Sun," Adichie also features strong female characters who challenge societal expectations. She illustrates that even during crises, women have played an active role in shaping their societies through the lenses of history and conflict. Adichie's feminist philosophy is both literary and political; she often discusses how societies are weakened when women are excluded from decision-making processes. For instance, she has consistently advocated for increased representation of women in governance and policy-making through her speeches and writings. Her assertion that "culture does not make people; people make culture" directly challenges the notion that social norms are immutable, suggesting that young women can and should reshape political contexts to be more inclusive.

In Zambia, where gender norms often marginalize women in political power, Adichie's works advocate for both individual and structural transformation. Her writings inspire young women to envision themselves as political leaders and decision-makers, as well as engaged voters and advocates. Adichie's call for a broad-based feminism that recognizes both institutional and individual obstacles provide a framework for examining the experiences of young Zambian women in political participation.

However, one criticism of the feminist theory feminist theory is that women's experiences risk being essentialized, portraying young women as a monolithic group without taking into consideration the diversity of their identities, experiences, and backgrounds. Informal settlements are frequently multi-layered environments where gender intersects with racial and ethnic background, class, and education. If the research does not take an intersectional approach, which takes into account how various types of discrimination overlap and influence political involvement, then relying only on feminist theory may oversimplify this complexity.

Regardless of the critiques the theory offers an analytical framework for examining young women's involvement in politics in unofficial communities such as Mchini and Navutika informal settlements. Feminist perspectives provide insightful analysis of the obstacles young women encounter in their pursuit of political empowerment and engagement in marginalized urban contexts by examining power dynamics, identifying intersecting oppressions, emphasizing agency, and promoting transformative politics.

### **2.8.2. Intersectionality Theory**

The intersectionality theory examines how a person's experiences and opportunities within society are shaped by the linked and mutually constitutive aspects of gender, age, socioeconomic status and identity. Henskivsky (2014) argues, that intersectionality promotes an understanding of human beings as shaped by the interaction of different social locations such as gender, geography, religion, and disability/ability interactions occurring in systems and structures of power through which forms of privilege and oppression are shaped. The principle of intersectionality aids in acknowledging the distinct obstacles that young women residing in informal settlements encounter, which are associated with their gender and financial standing. These women may have restricted access to political, economic, and educational networks, which when combined with cultural norms around gender roles, further limits their ability to participate in politics.

Intersectionality provides a sophisticated framework for analysing how these various facets of identity interact and influence the political experiences of young women living in informal settlements. For example, because of her gender, age, social background, and exclusion from her community, a young woman from an informal settlement may have particular political difficulties. These intersecting forms of oppression frequently shape not only their political engagement but also the obstacles they face, such as restricted access to political forums, networks, and resources.

Critics argue that the theory emphasizes numerous dimensions of identity which may be difficult to square with the requirement for specific findings that can result in successful interventions while studying young women in informal settlements. Moreover, individual agency which is essential in comprehending how young women

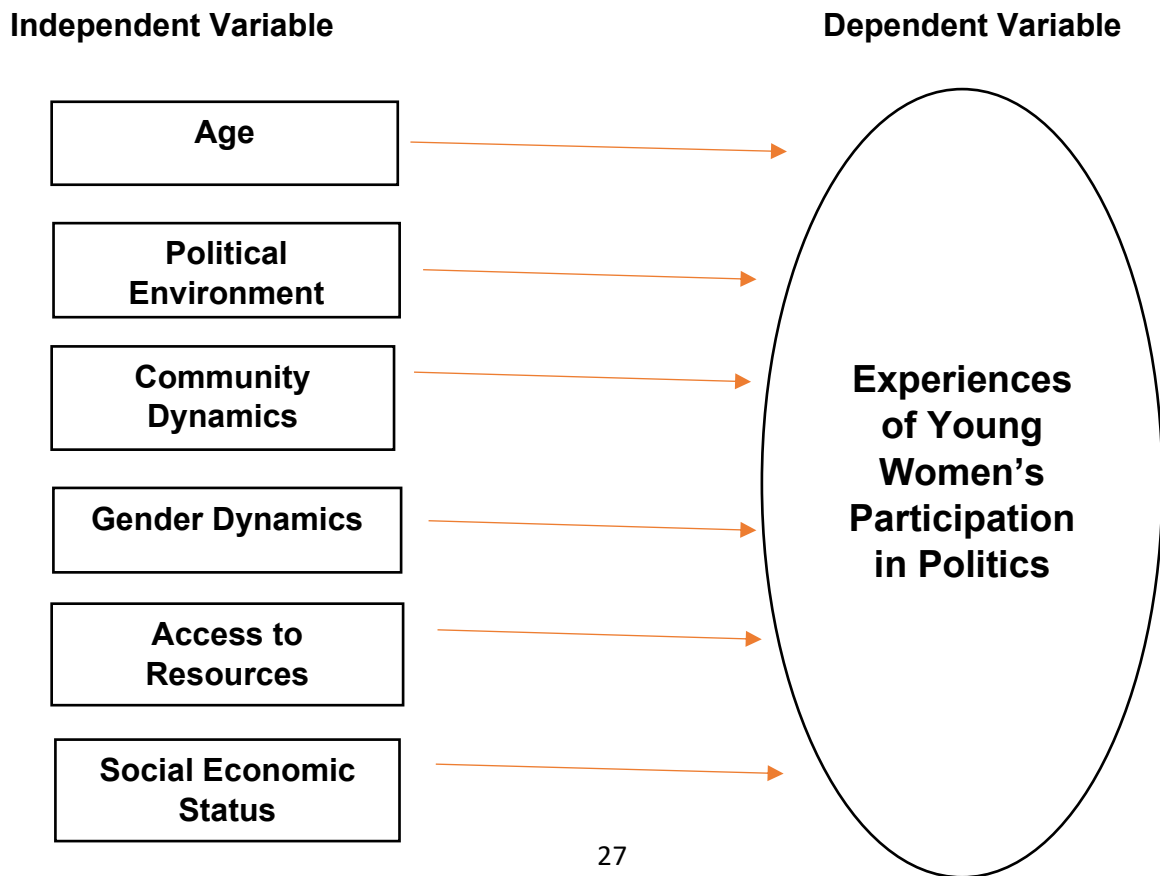
manage to overcome challenges and participate in politics despite the limitations imposed by their intersecting identities, may be minimized by intersectionality's emphasis on structural issues.

Both theories offer valuable insights into the political participation experiences of young women in the informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika in the Chipata district. However, feminist theory provides a stronger framework for this research because it effectively addresses gender dynamics and examines how socioeconomic status and ethnicity influence political participation.

The study integrates various theoretical frameworks to examine the complex dynamics of young women's political engagement in informal settlements. It aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of their struggles, opportunities for empowerment, and experiences, particularly within Mchini and Navutika compounds in Chipata District.

### 2.8.3. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1



*Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework for the study*

**Dependent Variables: *Experiences of young women in politics***

This represents the primary focus of the research - the experiences, challenges, motivations, and opportunities faced by young women in participating in political activities within the informal settlements.

**Independent Variables**

**i. Age**

The different age groups in informal settlements and their experiences differ according to their age. It represents the various ways in which age influences political experiences and participation among women in informal settlements.

**ii. Political environment**

The broader political context, including governance structures, policies, and political culture, may influence the space available for young women's participation in politics.

**iii. Community dynamics**

The social, cultural, and economic dynamics within the informal settlements, including community structures, norms, and values, may influence young women's participation in politics.

**iv. Access to resources**

This encompasses factors such as access to education, information, networks, financial resources, and other opportunities that may facilitate or hinder young women's engagement in political activities.

**v. Gender Dynamics**

Societal norms, stereotypes, and power structures related to gender roles and expectations may impact young women's agency and ability to participate in politics.

#### **vi. Social economic factor**

The economic conditions and resources available within the informal settlements may shape the opportunities and constraints young women face in political participation.

### **2.9. Chapter Summary**

This chapter offers a thorough analysis of the body of research on the experiences of young women involved in politics, with an emphasis on those who reside in informal settlements. The review starts by looking at regional and global patterns in women's political participation. It emphasizes the increasing acknowledgement of the role that women play in political arenas and highlights the particular difficulties that young women face, especially in developing nations like Zambia. Although women's political participation has increased significantly, the literature recognizes that young women from underprivileged communities including those living in informal settlements remain underrepresented and have unique obstacles that prevent them from actively participating in politics.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the methodological framework used to investigate the experiences of young women's participation in politics in the informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika in the Chipata district. It explains the research approach, the research design, the study population, sample size, data collection and analysis, ethical considerations, and finally, the study's limitations.

#### **3.2. Research Approach**

The research focussed on the qualitative research approach. This approach was helpful as it enables researchers to capture the nuances, context, and complexities of social phenomena, providing insights into the underlying motivations, beliefs, and cultural influences. As Denzin and Lincoln (2018) argue, qualitative inquiry is a powerful tool for uncovering the complexities of human behaviour and social structures, enabling researchers to generate theories and develop deeper understandings of the social world.

Qualitative research is ideal for studying topics where little is known or understood. This method was essential in the case of young women living in informal settlements because it made it possible to examine individual narratives, cultural settings, and the particular obstacles or facilitators of political participation. Therefore, it aligned well with the study of young women's political participation in informal settlements, a marginalized and often overlooked population.

#### **3.3. Research Design**

- **Phenomenological Research Design**

Phenomenological design plays a crucial role in understanding the nuances of human experiences and perceptions, which significantly informs the design process. This approach is centred around three core principles: empathy, authenticity, and a focus on human-centeredness. By prioritizing these elements, phenomenological design seeks to close the gap between user expectations and the actual outcomes of the

design. As noted by Merleau-Ponty (2012), this method allows for a richer understanding of how people interact with their environments and the designs created for them.

Numerous factors hinder political participation, particularly in marginalized communities. Institutional structures, such as bureaucratic barriers and lack of access to information, along with prevailing cultural norms and individual motivations, can create significant obstacles. To address these issues, phenomenology encourages participants to reflect on their personal experiences and articulate them in their own words. This process allows researchers to document the complexities of these experiences, leading to the formulation of detailed and meaningful narratives that highlight the intricacies of participation.

The phenomenological research approach proved ideal for this study, which investigates the political engagement of young women in informal settlements. By emphasizing these women's subjective experiences, this method reveals the unique meanings they assign to their political activities. It sheds light on the ways they navigate their socio-political environments and the challenges they face.

Furthermore, the phenomenological approach facilitated a deeper understanding of the fundamental aspects of participation, which are often overlooked by more conventional research methods. Focusing on lived experiences enabled grasping of the specific socio-political difficulties these women encounter and how these challenges impact their engagement in political processes. Ultimately, this detailed exploration paved the way for more effective strategies that can empower young women and enhance their political participation in their communities.

- **Qualitative Approaches**

Qualitative approaches were significant in this study as they helped in exploring the complexities of social phenomena using methods including observations, interviews, and document analysis. They strive for richness and depth in their conclusions rather than generalizability. Qualitative research is well-suited for exploring complex and context-specific phenomena, as it allows for in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences, beliefs, and perspectives. (Creswell and Poth, 2017). This research

design was particularly suitable for exploring the experiences of young women's participation in politics in informal settlements as it enabled the recording of detailed, contextualised data, adjusted to changing conditions and investigated the complexities of politics.

### **3.4. Study Population**

The study focused on young women between the ages of 18-35 residing in Mchini and Navutika informal settlements, key community figures that may include community leaders and religious leaders. Representatives from civil society organizations (CSOs) working within Chipata District, local government representatives as well as other stakeholders were also included. The research obtained comprehensive insights into the experiences, obstacles, and opportunities faced by young women in their political participation within the context of informal settlements in Chipata District by interacting with a wide range of stakeholders within the Mchini and Navutika compounds.

### **3.5. Sample Size**

The sample size for this study was based on the principle of saturation. Saturation is reached when data collection no longer yields new information or themes, indicating that the sample size is sufficient to address the research objectives. (Saunders, 2018). This approach was well-suited for qualitative research, ensuring that the data collected was comprehensive and the study adequately explored the experiences and perceptions of the target group. The study focussed on 20 participants, with 16 participants being those who are actively involved in politics, 8 from each settlement who belong to political parties, United Party for National Development (UPND), Patriotic Front (PF), and the Party of National Unity and Progress (PNUP). The remaining 4 catered to the participants from civil society organisations (CSOs) that advocate equality and women's empowerment in the informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika.

#### ***Table. 1. Targeted Sample***

<b>Respondent Category</b>	<b>Mchini Settlement</b>	<b>Navutika Settlement</b>	<b>Total Participants</b>
<b>UPND members</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>PF members</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>PNUP members</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>CSO Representatives</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>

### **3.6. Sampling Techniques**

The sampling technique for this study was purposeful sampling. It enables the intentional selection of participants who possess specific characteristics or experiences that are directly relevant to the research objectives. (Etikan et al, 2016). Researchers can increase the usefulness and relevancy of the data without having to survey a wider, less targeted population by focusing on those who match the predetermined criteria. The sampling technique targeted 20 young women from Mchini and Navutika compounds.

#### **3.6.1. Limitations of Sampling**

Due to practical constraints, the original objective of interviewing a targeted sample of 20 respondents was not accomplished. Rather, interviews with only 14 responders were completed. This deficiency resulted in part from the fact that members of several of the political parties that were targeted did not fit the precise requirements specified for the study. As a result, the sample's desired variety and representation could not be achieved.

### **3.7. Data Collection**

Primary data was collected through interviews with young women who are members of political parties and CSOs. Secondary data was collected through document analysis and a review of the literature. Interviews were chosen as the major data collection method for the study as they allowed for one-on-one interaction and allowed participants to comfortably communicate their own experiences and opinions. Through the interviews, the researcher managed to explore such issues as the case and dilemma about the experience of young women in political participation. The interviews also provided an opportunity to converse directly with the participants and explore their experiences.

### **3.8. Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was utilised in the study. It involved methodically classifying and coding data to find recurrent themes or patterns that shed light on the underlying ideas and phenomena. Conducting a thematic analysis involves multiple steps, such as becoming acquainted with the data, creating preliminary codes, looking for themes, evaluating themes, defining and labelling themes, and creating the final report. (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This adaptable strategy was crucial for delving into intricate phenomena, capturing a range of viewpoints, and producing detailed data descriptions.

### **3.9. Ethical Clearance**

Ethical considerations informed this study and consent was sought from all those participating in this study. The participants fully understood the objectives and purpose of the study, together with any potential risks and benefits. Participation was free will, and before the commencement of the experiment, subjects were fully informed about the details of the study, its purposes, procedures, risks involved, and potential benefits. Additionally, the participants were guaranteed that there would be no consequences if they were demotivated or refused to continue with the study at any time. When participants grew evasive and seemed unwilling to participate in the study, this principle was maintained.

Anonymity and confidentiality were essential components in guaranteeing moral research practices. Privacy protection: Several safeguards were put in place to ensure the participants' identities were kept private and anonymous. To avoid unwanted access, all information gathered for this study including interview transcripts and other documents have been coded and securely kept. To maintain anonymity, identifiable information was either eliminated or anonymized. Furthermore, throughout the data-gathering procedure, participants' well-being was given top priority to contextual and human dignity drives.

### **3.10. Limitations**

This study was limited by its sample size, as the target of 20 responses was not achieved; only 14 responses were collected successfully. Additionally, no statistical methods were employed that would allow for the generalization of the findings. As a result, the findings are not applicable to other informal settlements beyond Mchini and Navutika.

Locating and connecting with young women in these informal settlements proved challenging, as many do not hold official political positions. Furthermore, some women were hesitant to participate in the study due to concerns about being identified with specific political parties

### **3.11. Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided a comprehensive overview of the methodology employed to examine the experiences of young women participating in politics within the informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika in Chipata. It outlined the research design, data collection techniques, and analytical approaches used to gather and interpret the information. Through qualitative interviews, the research aimed to capture the nuanced perspectives of these women and contribute valuable insights to the discourse on gender and political engagement in informal communities, which are presented in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

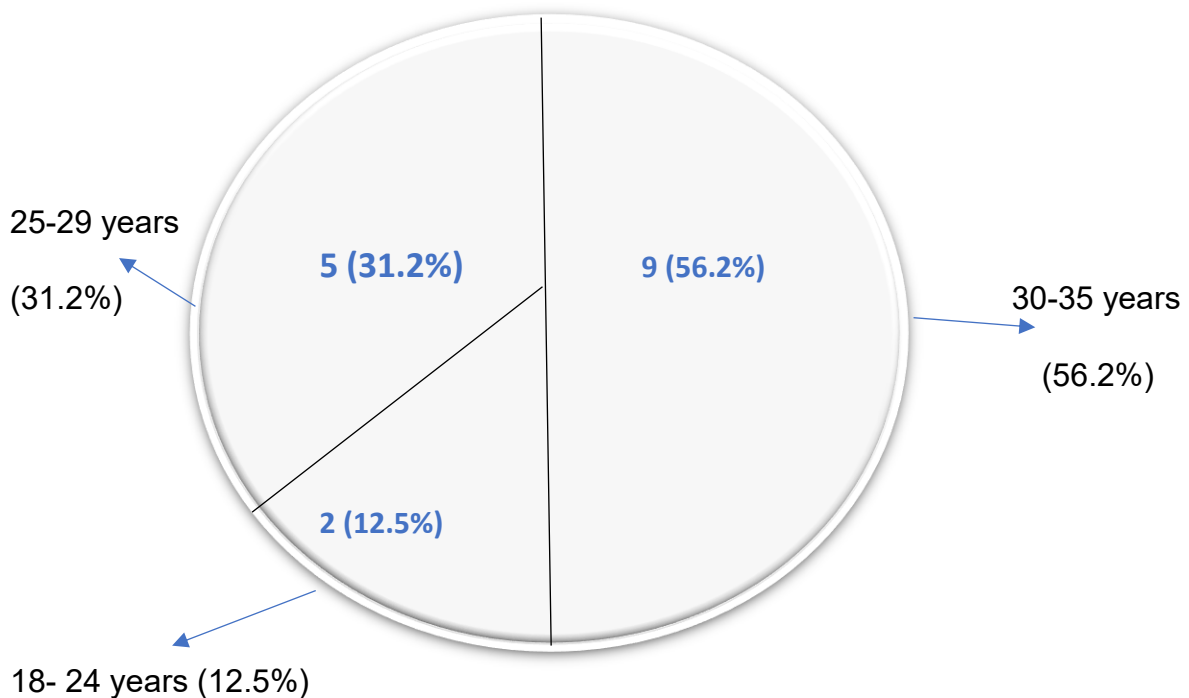
#### 4.1. Introduction

The chapter presents the research findings collected from the two selected informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika in Chipata district of Eastern province. The findings are presented according to the three research questions.

#### 4.1.2. Age

The targeted age for respondents was between the age of 18-35. Only two respondents represented the age group between the age of 18 to 24 years, five represented the age group between 25 to 29 years and nine respondents represented the age group between 30 to 35 years as shown below.

**Figure: 2**



## **4.2. Factors driving Young Women’s Political Participation in Chipata’s informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika.**

The first objective was to determine the factors driving young women’s political participation in Chipata’s informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika.

### **4.2.1. Responses from Young Women on factors that drive their Political Participation**

The responses from the young women on factors that drive their political participation indicate a complex interaction of influences and motivations. Several young women emphasised how eager they were to bring about social change especially issues about healthcare, education, and gender equality.

One participant a PF member from Mchini informal settlements, stated that:

*The voices of women are ignored in the community and this motivated me to participate in politics as a way to find a solution to the issues that we face such as poverty, lack of proper health care and so on.*

Another young politician a UPND member from Navutika noted that: *“due to her and her peers’ experiences with early marriage, she entered politics to support policies that promote girls’ education to keep other girls from experiencing the same fate.”*

Many young women are motivated to engage in politics because they view it as a way to attain financial security. Members of ruling political parties have quicker access to resources such as Constituency Development Funds (CDF) and food assistance. Additionally, peer influence has played a significant role in encouraging young women in Mchini and Navutika to participate in politics. This was echoed by UPND participant from Navutika stated that:

*Friends have been very important since they have inspired me to participate in neighbourhood meetings, join discussions, and even launch grassroots movements. They have made it clearer to me that even tiny contributions are important and*

*that group efforts can have an impact. The eagerness and dedication of some of my friends who are also politically active have motivated me to venture beyond my comfort zone and become more involved.*

A summary of responses from young women who are members of political parties is provided in the table below.

**Table. 2. Distribution of responses from young women who are members of political parties**

Informal Settlement	Responses
Mchini	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The need for social change</li> <li>- Lack of women’s representation in leadership positions</li> <li>- To make connections with powerful people who can lead to interesting career progression and employment prospects</li> <li>- To avoid past experiences of harassment by cadres</li> </ul>
Navutika	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A path to economic stability</li> <li>- Presence of Civil Society organisations that provide resources and mentorship programs</li> <li>- To elevate their status and attain respect among their peer and the community</li> <li>- Peer influence</li> </ul>

#### **4.2.2. Responses from young women who are members of civil society organisations**

Young women who are members of civil society organisations identified several factors that drive them into political participation, and their responses were similar to those of young women who are members of political parties. The identified factors included the desire to break stereotypes, high numbers of gender-based violence (GBV), and to inspire other young women.

Some young women identified several important factors that have contributed to their increased political participation, such as unemployment, which has become a major concern, leading young women to advocate for policies that address economic stability and job creation; inadequate healthcare systems, which have been emphasized as a pressing issue, which have motivated political participation to secure better access to high-quality medical services; and the lack of adequate educational opportunities, which has been cited as a catalyst for political involvement to improve the accessibility and equity of educational resources.

The following quote from a member of CSO A offers additional insight into the findings

*As a child, I was deeply aware of the different social problems that affected our society, with a focus on the difficulties that young women faced. As a result of these encounters, I gained a deep awareness of the necessity of systemic change. I realized that one effective way to remedy these injustices could be through active political participation. I hoped that by getting involved in politics, I might make a significant contribution to the development of solutions that would promote better opportunity and equity for underrepresented groups.*

A respondent from CSO B stated the following:

*I was greatly impacted and inspired to act after seeing the injustices occurring in my town. The ongoing lack of essential services brought to light structural injustices that many people in my community had to deal with daily. These encounters gave me a renewed sense of obligation to promote change. I was driven to take part in initiatives that would support fair access to necessary resources and services. These observations and my desire to address these urgent*

A summary of responses from young women who are members of civil society organizations (CSOs) is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Distribution of responses from young women who are members of CSOs**

<b>CSO</b>	<b>Responses</b>
CSO A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To solve challenges faced by the community</li> <li>- Provide a voice for the voiceless</li> <li>- Motivated by having been a member of the debate club</li> <li>- Lack of quality education</li> <li>- High unemployment levels</li> </ul>
CSO B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Defy the gender stereotype</li> <li>- To inspire other young women and girls</li> <li>- High cases of GBV</li> <li>- To provide training on advocacy</li> <li>- The desire to break barriers</li> <li>- Lack of health care</li> </ul>

#### **4.3. Findings on the prevailing conditions for young women’s political participation in Chipata’s informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika.**

The second research objective was to assess the prevailing conditions for young women’s political participation in Chipata’s informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika.

##### **4.3.1. Responses from young women on the prevailing conditions for political participation in the informal settlements**

Young women gave in-depth explanations of the current circumstances influencing their political engagement. They brought attention to the difficulties in a male-dominated setting where their opinions are frequently disregarded. They also underlined how little social and institutional support is available to women who want to hold leadership positions. Notwithstanding these obstacles, they recognised the work

done by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide leadership development courses, which are an essential tool for enabling young women in political arenas.

Given the male-dominated environment, one participant a UNPD member from the Navutika informal settlement stated:

*In our community, older men dominate most political activity. Because of this, we feel marginalised from meaningful participation. Their intimidating dominance prevents us from speaking up or participating fully in political debates. This makes it difficult for us to take on leadership roles or attend political events.*

Similarly, a participant from Mchini informal settlement a PF member noted that

*We are rarely mentored by senior party members and because of this lack of direction, we feel alone and uncertain about how to handle the political system. It appears our participation is mainly to fulfil gender representation needs or quotas which makes it difficult to progress within the party structure and acquire leadership abilities.*

The young women acknowledged the efforts of civil society organizations in encouraging active political participation among young women. For instance, a PF participant from Mchini remarked that:

*Several CSOs have established forums that enable us to express our thoughts and grow as leaders. However, political parties don't give priority to our political participation. Therefore, we often feel a stronger bond with CSOs than with the political parties we belong to.*

In recognizing the positive impact of civil society organizations on mentoring female politicians, a UPND participant from Navutika noted that

*Some CSOs provide leadership training and programs; however, they are rather small and do not provide the knowledge and expertise needed to challenge the patriarchy in political parties. Many of the programs*

*concentrate on developing leaders generally instead of examining the particular difficulties that young women face in informal settlements.*

*Several CSOs have established forums that enable us to express our thoughts and grow and as leaders. However political parties don't give priority to our political participation, therefore, we often feel a stronger bond with CSOs than the political parties we belong to.*

A summary of responses from young women who are members of political parties is presented in the table below

**Table.4. Distribution of responses from young women who are members of political parties**

Informal Settlement	Responses
Mchini	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Male dominated environment</li> <li>- Limited access to political platforms</li> <li>- There are safety concerns especially if meetings are held later in the evenings</li> <li>- There are online resources and political forums but access is determined by the availability of data bundles</li> <li>- There are leadership workshops and training sessions organised by CSOs</li> </ul>
Navutika	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limited support systems</li> <li>- Information about political meetings is not widely spread to young women seeking leadership positions</li> <li>- The youth sections of political parties often favour young men</li> <li>- CSOs engage in leadership training but don't prepare for active roles within political parties</li> </ul>

#### **4.3.2. Responses from young women who are members of CSOs on the prevailing conditions for political participation in informal settlements**

The young women who are members of CSOs described the prevailing conditions in informal settlements. They emphasised a slow but encouraging trend toward more acceptance of young women in politics. They also underlined the existence of unofficial networks that offer young women crucial assistance. Nevertheless, they noted issues such as insufficient institutional support and scarce resources, which prevent them from reaching their full potential and engaging fully.

Concerning the slow acceptance of young women's participation in politics, a participant from CSO B noted:

*Yes, there is a gradual but visible change in favour of young women in politics being more accepted, due to the success of certain young women who are active in politics. However, resistance still exists and is frequently caused by institutional biases, cultural norms, or structural obstacles.*

The political environment in these informal settlements was described by some as somewhat favourable in terms of policy.

For instance, a participant from CSO A, noted that:

*Several, policy measures demonstrate some support for gender equality; however, the everyday, practical assistance that young women need to flourish in the political environment is frequently lacking. This disparity is the reason behind the difference between the policy's intended and actual impacts.*

A summary of responses from young women who are members of CSOs is presented in Table 5.

**Table 5. Distribution of responses from young women who are members of CSOs**

CSO	Responses
CSO A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is a slow shift towards greater acceptance</li> <li>- The environment is supportive in theory</li> <li>- Limited support and resources</li> </ul>
CSO B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some parts of communities are neutral or indifferent</li> <li>- Presence of informal networks that young women</li> <li>- Support from individual connections</li> <li>- Challenging environment due to traditional gender roles</li> </ul>

#### **4.4. To investigate the challenges and barriers encountered by young women in political participation in Chipata’s informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika.**

The third objective of this research was to investigate the challenges and barriers encountered by young women in political participation in Chipata’s informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika.

##### **4.4.1. Responses from young women on the challenges and barriers encountered in informal settlements**

The young women highlighted several challenges and barriers to political participation. These include a lack of financial resources, formal education, traditional norms, and stigma against female leaders.

Significant financial obstacles prevent many young women in Mchini and Navutika from actively participating in political activities such as campaigning, and leading to disparities in political representation.

For example, a PF participant from Navutika noted that:

*My ability to participate properly has been hindered by financial limitations. I can't run effective campaigns, print necessary materials, or go to important meetings that could further my cause if I don't have enough money which makes it challenging to build influence and achieve significant change.*

Regarding the financial challenges, another female politician shared that

*There are expenses involved in engaging in even the most basic activities, such as transportation costs which can mount up quickly when attending political events. This leads to putting important facets of life, like housing, food or medical bills above participating in political activities.*

Cultural expectations play a significant role in shaping the responsibilities of young women in informal settlements. These societal norms often place the care of the family as their foremost priority. As a result, many young women experience considerable pressure to focus on managing their homes and families. For example, a respondent from Navutika observed that:

*Severe discrimination often occurs when individuals seek leadership positions. There is a pervasive belief that men are naturally more capable, particularly in roles involving leadership or decision-making. As a result, women frequently struggle to receive equal consideration, leading many to feel ignored or underappreciated.*

A summary of responses from young women who are members of political parties is presented in the table below

**Table.6. Distribution of responses from young women who are members of political parties**

Informal Settlements	Responses
Mchini	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of financial resources</li> <li>- Traditional norms</li> <li>- Limited access to networks</li> <li>- Low self-confidence to challenge the gender stereotype</li> <li>- Employment constraints</li> </ul>
Navutika	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of formal education</li> <li>- Stigma against female leaders</li> <li>- Safety concerns</li> <li>- Fear of public scrutiny and criticism</li> <li>- Patriarchal leadership structures</li> </ul>

**4.4.2. Responses from young women who are members of CSOs on the challenges and barriers encountered in informal settlements**

The young women who are members of CSOs gave an insight into some of the challenges and barriers that young women face in political participation. These included a lack of support from family and community members, harassment and disrespect, limited resources and funding and a lack of formal education.

Lack of support from family and community is one of the largest obstacles women encounter when trying to enter politics as many family and community members believe that politics is not a field that is appropriate for women.

A participant from CSO B noted that:

*Sometimes, our families discourage us from getting involved in politics because they think it is a waste of time or that it won't result in any meaningful change. And without the support of those closest to us, it can be difficult to stay motivated to engage in political work, undermining our confidence and making us doubt our ability to make a difference.*

Regarding stigma, all the respondents acknowledged that there is a substantial stigma that young women in politics frequently experience which diminishes their visibility and impact. In highlighting this a participant from CSO A stated:

*Many people believe young women participate in politics merely to promote their personal goals rather than to make a significant difference. This unjust impression undervalues their enthusiasm and commitment to public service and it fosters an atmosphere in which their intentions are always questioned, irrespective of their accomplishments.*

Similarly, a participant from CSO B noted that:

*Young women have been subjected to offensive remarks and actions from male co-workers who have publicly stated that young women entering politics is undesirable or unsuitable and they should limit themselves to 'feminine roles', and this ignores their goals and diminishes their potential.*

A summary of responses from young women who are members of CSOs is presented in Table 7.

**Table 7. Distribution of responses from young women who are members of CSOs.**

CSO	Responses
CSO A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Financial constraints</li> <li>- Stigma</li> <li>- Safety concerns</li> <li>- Lack of access to educational resources</li> <li>- Limited opportunities and representation</li> </ul>
CSO B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of support from family and community members</li> <li>- Traditional norms and values</li> <li>- Prejudice against young women as they are believed to be too young</li> <li>- Harassment and discrimination</li> <li>- Lack of youth-focused policies</li> </ul>

#### 4.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a comprehensive overview of the research findings gathered from two informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika, located in the Chipata district of Eastern Province. The analysis was structured around the three primary research objectives, allowing for a clear understanding of how each objective is addressed through the collected data. These findings are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Discussion of Findings**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter provides an analysis of the findings set out in Chapter Four in line with the research objectives outlined in Chapter One. The results are discussed under the headings derived from the main research questions. These are:

1. The primary factors driving young women's participation in politics.
2. The prevailing conditions for young women's political participation.
3. The primary challenges and barriers encountered by young women in political participation.

#### **5.2. The primary factors driving young women's participation in politics.**

This section explores the primary factors that drive young women's political participation in the Mchini and Navutika informal settlements. Based on the responses detailed in Chapter Four, these factors are categorized into three main themes: personal motives and experiences, socioeconomic and structural influences, and advocacy and capacity-building initiatives.

##### **Personal Motives and Experiences**

###### **a) Motivated by having been a Member of the Debate Club**

For some young women, having been members of the debate club during their school days was a life-changing experience essential to their personal and professional growth. Members of these clubs have the opportunity to refine their public speaking skills, boost their confidence, and deepen their understanding of social and political issues within a supportive environment. Through engaging in debates, young women learn to articulate their views effectively and critically examine complex topics. One participant noted that she can now advocate for meaningful change, due to the skills she has acquired through these experiences. Moreover, research also emphasises the long-term effects of youth-oriented extracurricular activities, such as debate clubs and how they help develop civic engagement and leadership skills (Banaji and

Buckingham, 2013). In addition to being equipped to handle public debate, these forums encourage young women to actively participate in influencing their surroundings

### **b) Avoidance of Harassment by Cadres**

Several respondents stated that their encounters with harassment by political cadres had a significant impact on their political participation. These interactions had a profound effect, inspiring people to actively participate in politics as a means of protesting against such occurrences. A respondent acknowledged that she decided to join a political party to avoid harassment encountered during the previous years and to help ensure that other young women do not encounter the same fate. Many saw participation as a conscious approach to confronting and reversing their prior experiences, rather than merely being involved. They stated that they wanted to help create political situations that were safer and more welcoming. This is consistent with theories of political participation that hold that activism to change the mechanisms that sustain these problems is frequently sparked by personal adversity (Dalton, 2017). People may become completely disengaged from politics as a result of such experiences, or they may decide to dedicate themselves to promoting change and reform in political arenas.

### **c) Breaking Barriers and Defying Stereotypes**

A strong desire to dismiss gender stereotypes was another driving force behind young women's political engagement. These young women aimed to challenge the prevalent belief that politics is a field that is inevitably controlled by men by actively participating in political arenas. These misconceptions frequently restrict women's participation in leadership and decision-making and assign them to lower roles. Many respondents conveyed a strong desire to dismantle obstacles and reinterpret cultural norms regarding women's roles and skills. In both Mchini and Navutika, young women aim to overthrow the long-standing patriarchal systems that frequently keep them out of decision-making. This is consistent with frameworks for gender equality that seek to address systematic injustices by promoting greater inclusion of women in governance (UN Women, 2020).

#### **d) Career Progression and Employment Prospects**

Another driving factor was the chance to network with powerful people and gain access to career growth opportunities. For many young women, getting involved in politics was a calculated way to create useful networks and access career prospects. The desire for long-term professional advancement and financial stability were intimately related to these goals. This drive is consistent with larger patterns in which political involvement is used as a springboard for leadership positions and economic mobility (Goetz and Hassim, 2003). Young women sought to take advantage of these chances to create a more secure and bright future by getting involved in politics.

#### **e) A Path to Economic Stability**

Being involved in politics was frequently seen as a means of attaining financial stability. Many young women see political positions as a way to obtain financial advantages, such as allowances and stipends, which could enhance their financial security. Participating in politics also provided access to beneficial networking possibilities, allowing participants to build relationships with powerful people and institutions. Access to resources that may be used to improve one's financial situation is frequently made possible through these networks. Additionally, political participation provides the opportunity to obtain leadership roles, which enhances opportunities for socio-economic progress in addition to conferring status. According to research conducted in similar contexts by Ndlovu and Mutale (2021) political engagement and economic empowerment are closely related, and both are important avenues for upward mobility.

### **Socio-economic and Structural factors**

#### **a) Lack of Quality Education**

Young women in Mchini and Navutika are motivated by the lack of access to high-quality education. This problem is commonly cited as a significant obstacle to their capacity to advance in their socioeconomic standing and achieve upward mobility. Young women in these communities encounter a variety of structural barriers to schooling. Lack of resources, such as textbooks and classroom materials further

impair children's learning experiences, and overcrowded schools make it impossible for teachers to give each student the attention they need. Many young women in Mchini and Navutika are driven to advocate for change despite these obstacles. They strive to establish a future where girls have equal access to school and actively support improved policies to overcome gender gaps in education. They hope to create a more equal society by empowering themselves and upcoming generations of young women through their activities. This is consistent with other research, including Banda (2019), which highlights education as a crucial factor in determining women's political engagement.

### **b) Lack of Healthcare Services**

Healthcare access is still a major problem in Mchini and Navutika. The lack of accessible and reasonably priced health care has been cited as a major worry among young women. This problem is especially noticeable when it comes to maternal health and reproductive rights, as insufficient resources and services pose major obstacles to receiving the right care. Many women feel vulnerable and underserved due to a lack of resources and support, which motivates them to take action. Young women's involvement in politics is growing as a result of the urgent need for change. By highlighting the pressing need for equity in the delivery of health services, they hope to promote better healthcare infrastructure and policies that cater to their unique medical demands. This result resonates with previous research by Labonte et al. (2021), which emphasizes the connection between low-quality public services and greater civic participation among underserved groups.

### **c) High Cases of Gender-Based Violence**

In both Mchini and Navutika, gender-based violence (GBV) was acknowledged as a pervasive and extremely concerning problem. The prevalence of the issue is demonstrated by the large number of young women in these communities who reported having either experienced or witnessed various forms of abuse. A respondent underlined that GBV seriously impairs young women their access to socioeconomic possibilities in addition to violating their fundamental rights. Their resolve to actively participate in politics has been reinforced by these terrible realities. Through their

involvement, they hope to support the creation of community-based support programs that offer resources and support to survivors as well as the adoption of stronger legislation to combat GBV. Political engagement is perceived as a tool to challenge patriarchal structures that perpetuate violence against women, echoing findings by Jewkes et al. (2019), which suggest that political activism can be an avenue for addressing systemic gender inequalities.

#### **d) Lack of Women's Representation in Leadership Positions**

Young women in the settlements are actively seeking political positions as a result of the dearth of prominent female leaders in local governing systems. For instance, a respondent expressed that of the eleven (11) ward councillors in Chipata district, none are females. The young women underlined the need to close this disparity by gender conventions that have traditionally kept women out of positions of leadership. They see this as a chance to dismantle obstacles and pave the road for increased gender parity in areas where decisions are made. The finding aligns with Dahlerup's (2018) research, which emphasizes the significance of representation: the presence of marginalized groups in leadership roles not only validates their potential but also promotes wider engagement in political processes. The data demonstrates how the lack of female leaders creates a clear gap that young women feel compelled to fill.

### **Advocacy and Capacity Building Factors**

#### **a) Providing a Voice for the Voiceless**

Young women in these informal settlements stated that they got involved in politics because they wanted to support their communities and deal with structural problems including unemployment, poverty, and restricted access to social services. Young women felt empowered to speak for underrepresented groups and raise the issues of their families and peers, who frequently lack a voice, by being involved in political processes. Among young women who had personally witnessed the effects of neglect and exclusion from decision-making processes, this sense of agency was especially noticeable. Research has indicated that a personal desire to confront injustices and contribute significantly to the advancement of society frequently catalyses political

engagement (Ballington and Karam, 2005). This is consistent with respondents' statements that they use their political participation as a means of promoting social justice and necessities in their local communities.

#### **b) Presence of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) Providing Resources and Mentorship Programs**

The research highlighted the contribution of civil society organizations to the political engagement of young women. The CSOs that work in Mchini and Navutika are essential because they provide resources, mentorship, and training to provide young women with the know-how and abilities needed for political participation. To overcome obstacles like prejudice and underrepresentation, respondents said that mentorship programs gave them more self-assurance and a better understanding of the political system. This observation is in line with the findings of Chingaipe and Chinsinga (2019), who pointed out that CSOs in Zambia are crucial in encouraging women to participate in politics, particularly in underrepresented communities. These initiatives tackle systemic issues while establishing a support system, which is essential for maintaining political participation. Practical obstacles to involvement, like lack of access to communication platforms and transit expenses, are also lessened by CSOs' financial and logistical assistance.

### **5.3. The Prevailing Conditions for Young Women's Political Participation**

This section analyses the second objective, which is to assess the prevailing conditions for young women's political participation in Chipata's informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika. Data collected for the second research objective identified several important factors influencing young women's political engagement. These findings are organised and discussed under key themes.

#### **A. A Slow Shift Towards Greater Acceptance**

Although young women's political participation is still low, there are indications that attitudes within the communities are gradually changing. For decades women have been disadvantaged by traditional gender standards, therefore, shutting them out of

political arenas and positions of decision-making. However, these long-standing obstacles are starting to be challenged, especially by younger generations and those living in more urbanised areas and have spread to informal settlements. This shift is largely fostered by increased exposure to gender equality campaigns and educational opportunities. Furthermore, the prominence and impact of female role models in civic and political leadership are motivating others to question long-standing preconceptions. Progress is nevertheless slow despite these encouraging advancements. The opposition from older and more traditional members of society highlights the enduring cultural obstacles that prevent women's involvement in politics from being widely accepted. The path to complete inclusion and equality is still a work in progress, despite the encouraging change. Similar research conducted in sub-Saharan Africa has shown that improvements in gender views frequently follow larger socioeconomic transformations and advocacy initiatives (Tripp et al., 2014).

### **B. A Supportive Environment in Theory**

According to the respondents, in their official declarations and paperwork, formal political entities like political parties and local councils frequently highlight the involvement of young women as proof of their dedication to promoting diversity, policies and charters that support gender equality are commonly cited. There are still a lot of holes in the actual implementation of these policies, even with these official commitments. In reality, there aren't many real chances for young women to participate actively in political processes. Political parties might, for instance, set quotas to boost the representation of women, but they are usually disregarded or compromised in favour of upholding long-standing patriarchal hierarchies and power structures. Similar disparities between Zambian policy and reality were noted by Chipeta (2017), who pointed out that official announcements frequently do not result in significant change for underprivileged groups.

### **C. Male-Dominated Environment**

Due to the male-dominated character of political venues, young women in Mchini and Navutika encounter several obstacles. In political parties and community leadership

organisations, men usually hold powerful positions, making it difficult for young women to advance to leadership positions. This disparity strengthens the notion that leadership is primarily a male domain and fosters an atmosphere that sustains gender inequity. Young women's voices are restricted and they are deterred from actively engaging in political processes by their lack of representation and possibilities. Studies, like the one conducted by Banda et al. (2020), demonstrate how Zambian politics deeply embedded patriarchal structures perpetuate negative perceptions by frequently depicting women as less capable leaders. This environment makes it hard for young women to question these norms and make their presence known in decision-making settings. These structural hurdles perpetuate a cycle of exclusion.

#### **D. Neutral or Indifferent Community Attitudes**

In certain communities in Mchini and Navutika, attitudes toward young women's political participation are generally neutral or indifferent. This lack of strong sentiment is often the result of a lack of awareness about the significance of gender inclusion in politics, as well as a general apathy that does not translate into active opposition to young women's involvement but rather creates a difficult environment. In the absence of explicit encouragement or support, young women may find it difficult to participate meaningfully in political processes, which holds the potential to impede the advancement of greater gender equity in politics. Lack of awareness of the wider advantages of inclusion in governance is frequently associated with neutrality on gender-related problems (Nkombo, 2020).

#### **E. Presence of Informal Networks**

Informal networks are a vital source of support for young women who want to get involved in politics. Organizations such as women's savings associations or community clubs are much more than just social networks; they are vital hubs for empowerment, offering a safe forum for young women to talk about their experiences, debate political issues, and devise strategies for participation, as well as mentorship opportunities that allow women to learn from more experienced individuals and the moral support that these communities provide to help them gain the confidence they need to navigate the often difficult political terrain. Informal networks have been

identified as key enablers of political engagement among marginalized groups, particularly in resource-constrained environments (Cornwall, 2008).

## **F. Support from Individual Connections**

For young women attempting to establish themselves in politics, personal connections with politically engaged people such as civic activists and municipal leaders have become more crucial than ever. These relationships can be excellent mentorship resources, providing direction and support as women negotiate the challenges of political participation. They also give people access to crucial data, tools, and networks that might lead to worthwhile opportunities like participating in political campaigns or events. Nevertheless, this assistance is frequently erratic and heavily reliant on the availability and readiness of powerful allies. The irregularity of this support emphasises the necessity of more organized and inclusive channels for young women to join and succeed in politics. One influential element in women's leadership development has been identified as individual mentoring (O'Brien, 2015).

### **5.4. To investigate the challenges and barriers encountered by young women in political participation**

This section analyses the third objective, which is to investigate the challenges and barriers encountered by young women in political participation in Chipata's informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika. The responses have been grouped into three themes: social, economic and structural challenges and barriers.

#### **Social Challenges and Barriers**

##### **a) Traditional Norms**

Traditional norms heavily influence the roles and expectations of young women in these communities. These deeply embedded practices often dictate that women should prioritise domestic duties, leaving little opportunity for them to pursue opportunities outside the home. Patriarchal societal structures further reinforce these limitations by defining women's roles in ways that exclude them from political

engagement and leadership roles, discouraging them from stepping outside traditional boundaries and pursuing goals outside the home.

The cultural ideas that uphold these limitations have been criticised by young women in these communities. The social presumption that political engagement is essentially masculine confines many, thus excluding them from political arenas. Similar studies have shown that conventional conventions frequently limit women's public participation, especially in male-dominated areas like politics (Mwiinga, 2020). A cycle of exclusion and disempowerment is created by these cultural views, which also suppress women's ambitions and undercut their potential contributions.

### **b) Stigma Against Female Leaders**

The results revealed a reoccurring issue of stigma associated with women in leadership roles. Many young women related experiences of confronting discriminatory remarks and enduring uncertainty about their skills to lead effectively. Such remarks frequently erode their self-esteem and call into doubt their authority as leaders. For women hoping to pursue careers in politics or leadership, this widespread stereotype creates an unwelcoming and frequently hostile environment. As a result, the obstacles put in place deter not only these women but also those who would think about becoming like them. The wider implication is a cycle that keeps women underrepresented in leadership roles, which further solidifies gender stereotypes and impedes the advancement of gender equity. This is in line with research by Banda (2019), which shows that social stigma reduces women's political participation and erodes their self-esteem.

### **c) Low Self Confidence to challenge Gender Stereotypes**

Particularly for young women, the widespread gender stereotypes in Mchini and Navutika have serious repercussions. These misconceptions significantly hinder women by reinforcing the idea that political participation and leadership are largely male spheres. Consequently, poor self-confidence is a problem for many young women in these areas. They usually question their capacity to question the deeply embedded expectations and conventions that are placed on them. They are less

inclined to assume leadership positions or actively engage in political discourse as a result of this self-doubt, which feeds the cycle of underrepresentation. Young women in Mchini and Navutika have a lot of unrealized potential if they are not supported or encouraged to challenge these preconceptions. The necessity for empowerment programs specifically designed for young women is highlighted by the well-established link between gender stereotypes and self-confidence (Chisanga, 2021).

#### **d) Harassment and Discrimination**

For young women who want to get involved in politics, harassment and prejudice remain significant barriers. Many respondents said they had experienced gender-based violence and sexual harassment. During political campaigns, when tensions and public scrutiny are at their highest, these experiences are especially common. Such occurrences not only injure people physically and emotionally but also foster a climate of insecurity and fear. As a result, safety worries frequently deter young women from entering the political sphere, thus sustaining the gender gap in political engagement. Research such as that conducted by Kalaba (2018) shows that violence and harassment against women in politics are widespread problems, especially in informal settlements.

### **Economic Challenges and Barriers**

#### **a) Lack of Financial Resources**

There are significant challenges for young women in Mchini and Navutika to mobilize the financial resources needed for meaningful political participation. For many, the costs of running campaigns, attending political meetings, and maintaining a visible presence in political spaces are prohibitive, making it difficult for them to enter political leadership. One of the most common obstacles mentioned by respondents was the lack of adequate income and savings. Without adequate financial support, these young women find it difficult to compete with more financially stable candidates, further marginalizing their voices in political decision-making processes. This financial gap not only restricts their ability to participate actively but also feeds a cycle of underrepresentation in leadership roles. These findings correspond with earlier

studies that identified financial independence as a major enabler for political participation (Domingo et al., 2015).

### **b) Limited Access to Networks**

This data highlights a troubling pattern: women's exclusion from existing male-dominated networks creates a cycle of marginalisation. Without intentional efforts to dismantle these barriers, the systemic underrepresentation of women in political spaces is likely to continue. Political success often depends on access to influential networks and strategic alliances, which play a crucial role in mentorship, sponsorship, and overall support. However, in regions like Mchini and Navutika, many young women face significant barriers in accessing these crucial connections, excluding them from opportunities that could lead to their political development and leadership development. This result is consistent with the findings of Tripp et al. (2008), who emphasize the value of political networks in promoting women's representation and capacity building.

### **c) Limited Opportunities and Representation**

The lack of opportunities for young women in political spaces is a recurrent theme in the data. Participants frequently emphasized the underrepresentation of women in political structures, which they saw as both a symptom and a cause of systemic exclusion, contributing to a cycle in which women are denied meaningful participation in decision-making processes. Many young women expressed their dissatisfaction with tokenistic attempts to include them in politics, pointing out that these initiatives frequently reduced women to symbolic roles, depriving them of real authority and influence, which not only limits the potential contributions of women but also maintains the status quo, making the struggle for equitable representation even worse. These results support the research by Tamale (2020), who highlights how patriarchal norms and institutional obstacles prevent women from fully participating in decision-making processes in many African nations.

## **Structural Challenges and Barriers**

### **a) Employment Constraints**

Young women's political engagement is severely hampered by unemployment, especially in informal settlements where socioeconomic difficulties are more severe. Formal education, steady work, and resources that enable people to participate in civic activities are frequently unavailable in these settlements. The problem is made worse for young women by cultural norms and gendered expectations that place a higher value on household responsibilities than civic participation. Young women in informal settlements are disproportionately excluded from both the political and economic spheres, even though economic empowerment is a crucial facilitator of political involvement, according to research published by the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2020). Furthermore, unemployment feeds cycles of marginalisation because young women are less likely to have access to networks or leadership development opportunities that can advance their political careers. Because their needs and viewpoints are still not adequately reflected in decision-making processes, this exclusion maintains structural injustices.

### **b) Lack of Formal Education**

Political participation was found to be significantly influenced by educational attainment. The study made clear that when it comes to participating in political processes, young women with lower educational attainment frequently encounter major obstacles. Many expressed a lack of confidence and a poor comprehension of political institutions, which deterred them from actively participating. For example, several participants stated that their inability to convey their thoughts and beliefs clearly resulted from their lack of knowledge. This difficulty was especially noticeable when conversing with male colleagues in leadership roles, which furthered their exclusion from political arenas. The results highlight the importance of improving educational possibilities to empower young women and encourage their active involvement in politics. Women are less likely to comprehend electoral procedures or their rights as candidates or voters in informal settlements, where educational attainment is frequently poor, according to a study by UNESCO, (2020).

### **c) Patriarchal Leadership Structure**

In both Mchini and Navutika, patriarchy is still a major barrier that is ingrained in cultural norms and beliefs. Women have limited opportunities to participate in decision-making roles in these communities due to the preponderance of men in leadership positions. This gender disparity is a reflection of long-standing social conventions that value male leadership and authority over women's opinions and contributions. As their opinions and ideas are routinely disregarded, many young women have voiced their dissatisfaction and regret at being left out of these procedures. In addition to restricting women's possibilities, the continued existence of these norms impedes the larger growth of inclusive and egalitarian governance in these communities. According to previous studies, women are marginalized and deterred from pursuing leadership positions by ingrained patriarchal structures (Connell, 1995). In addition, respondents pointed out that older male leaders frequently minimize or reject their contributions, which further distances them from political arenas.

#### **d) Safety Concerns**

Participants pointed up that safety concerns were a major deterrent to political engagement. Numerous people mentioned instances of intimidation and harassment during political events, which makes the atmosphere unfriendly for participation. These difficulties are exacerbated by the threat of violence, particularly during election seasons. Particularly for young women, the widespread feeling of insecurity discourages them from engaging in political activities. In addition to discouraging active participation, this atmosphere of dread maintains gender inequality in political leadership and representation. These results are consistent with research showing that harassment and violence in public places disproportionately harm women living in informal settlements (ActionAid, 2018). Young women's exclusion from politics is made worse by the absence of safe places for them to gather and organise.

#### **e) Lack of Youth-Focused Policies**

One major structural obstacle was the absence of youth-focused policies and initiatives. Participants pointed out that meaningful interaction with younger generations is hampered by this divide. They underlined that the unique needs and goals of young women are mainly ignored by local political platforms. In addition to alienating people,

this disregard erodes their faith in politics as a practical means of enacting structural or social change. As a result, many young women are disenchanted with politics and are deterred from taking part in initiatives to influence their communities. Their voices going unheard and their potential contributions going unacknowledged is a vicious cycle which is further maintained by this lack of inclusivity. This resonates with the previous research showing that youth-focused policies can make young people, especially women much more politically engaged (United Nations Development Programme, 2016).

### **5.5. Chapter Summary**

The chapter discussed the research findings according to the three research questions that sort to investigate the factors driving young women's political participation, the prevailing conditions and the challenges and barriers that young women face in political participation in informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

#### **6.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations on the key findings of the research, investigating the experiences of young women's participation in politics in the informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika in Chipata district. Further, it provides recommendations for encouraging young women's participation in politics, as well as areas for further research based on the findings.

#### **6.2. Conclusion**

##### **6.2.1. To examine the factors driving young women's political participation**

The first objective was to examine the factors driving young women's political participation in Chipata's informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika. The results show that a variety of factors influence young women's political engagement in informal settlements. These elements are firmly anchored in their desires for individual and group growth, as well as the socioeconomic and cultural obstacles they encounter. A fundamental motive that arises from realising the widespread lack of women's voices in decision-making processes is the desire for social change and representation in leadership roles. Many young women believe that being involved in politics is a method to solve structural problems including high unemployment, poor educational standards, restricted access to healthcare, and the pervasiveness of gender-based violence. Additional motivators include the desire to inspire others and give voice to underrepresented communities, as well as personal experiences like overcoming harassment and challenging gender stereotypes. These research findings underscore the interplay between structural impediments, individual agency, and community support in determining young women's political engagement. Addressing these elements holistically can assist in establishing an enabling atmosphere for their persistent and impactful participation in political processes.

### **6.2.2. To assess the prevailing conditions for young women's political participation**

The second objective was to assess the prevailing conditions for young women's political participation in Chipata's informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika. The results show that young women's political participation in informal settlements is intricate and multidimensional. The atmosphere is still largely male-dominated, with deeply ingrained traditional gender norms posing serious obstacles, despite a gradual shift towards greater acceptance and theoretical support for inclusiveness. Young women's participation is further hampered by limited access to political platforms, safety concerns (especially about evening gatherings), and insufficient information sharing about political activities. However, some societies have areas of neutrality and increasing acceptance, indicating the possibility of future advancement. Supportive people and informal networks provide important, notwithstanding insufficient channels of encouragement. However, institutional obstacles must be removed for significant change to take place, and focused initiatives are required to give young women more access to platforms, resources, and chances to fully engage in political life.

### **6.2.3. To investigate the challenges and barriers encountered by young women in political participation**

The third objective was to investigate the challenges and barriers encountered by young women in political participation in Chipata's informal settlements of Mchini and Navutika. The study's conclusions point to a complex web of obstacles and difficulties that prevent young women from engaging in politics in informal settlements. These issues originate from institutional, social, and economic elements that foster a culture of marginalisation and exclusion. While traditional norms, patriarchal leadership structures, and community prejudices perpetuate gender stereotypes and discourage young women from pursuing leadership roles, financial restrictions and a lack of formal education severely limit their access to opportunities. Furthermore, a cycle of exclusion is maintained by the absence of youth-focused policies and representational opportunities, since young women are frequently written off as being too inexperienced or unable to participate in political debate.

### 6.3. Recommendations

- **Encourage Civic Education:** Through education initiatives, young women in Mchini and Navutika should know the value of political engagement and its possible influence on local governance.
- **Increase Youth Engagement:** Encourage youth forums and discussions to get young women talking about politics and their role in government.
- **Strengthen Economic Support:** To help young women overcome financial obstacles to, participation offer them logistical and financial support in the form of campaign funding, transportation subsidies, and networking opportunities.
- **Foster an Inclusive Political Environment:** Encourage the adoption of quotas or other affirmative action measures by political parties in order to increase the representation of young women in their organizational structures and decision-making procedures.
- **Provide Safe Spaces:** Set up community centres or other places where young women can congregate, talk about, and plan political concerns without worrying about harassment or retaliation.
- **Encourage Legal Awareness:** Make sure young women are aware of their legal rights and opportunities by educating them about their civic and political rights.
- **Increase Policy Advocacy:** Push for national and district-level policy changes to remove structural obstacles like limiting party practices or biased election procedures.
- **Mentorship Programs:** Set up mentorship programs where experienced female politicians help inexperienced women navigate the political system.

### 6.4. Future Research Directions

The research had limitations in both scope and timeframe, which hindered the ability to address all the issues related to the problem being investigated. As a result, it is challenging to generalize the findings from the two informal settlements to the rest of the country. Therefore, a larger sample should be used to encompass all informal

settlements in the Eastern Province for more accurate generalization. Future research can also be undertaken in the following areas:

- I. Examine how traditional customs, societal expectations, and cultural beliefs affect young women's political engagement.
- II. Evaluate the success of political awareness campaigns and civic education initiatives aimed at young women living in informal settlements.
- III. Examine how young women in informal settlements' access to social media and mobile technologies affects their political activism and advocacy.
- IV. Examine how CSOs, NGOs, and other community-based organizations may help young women pursue their political goals.
- V. Examine the ways in which age, socioeconomic class, ethnicity, and disability interact to influence young women's political experiences in Chipata's informal settlements.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A- Interview Questions

#### **a: Semi-structured interview schedule for young women who are members of political parties**

1. What motivated you to participate in politics in your community?
2. Are there any personal experiences or specific events that inspired your political involvement?
3. In what ways does the community support or encourage young women's political participation here?
4. How would you describe the political environment in Mchini and Navutika for young women?
5. What resources or support systems are available for young women interested in political participation?
6. Do you feel that young women have equal opportunities to participate in politics as men in these settlements? Why or why not?
7. What challenges do young women in Mchini and Navutika face when trying to participate in politics?
8. Can you highlight any barriers related to education, employment, or social norms that hinder young women's political involvement?
9. How does the local political culture or structure affect the participation of young women in political activities?

#### **b: Semi-structured interview schedule for young women who are members of Civil Society Organisations.**

1. Can you share specific experiences or people who influenced your decision to participate in politics?

2. How has being part of a CSO impacted your interest or participation in politics?
3. What issues within your community inspire you to get involved in political activities?
4. How would you describe the general environment for young women's political participation in your community?
5. What resources or support systems are available to young women who wish to engage in politics here?
6. Do local leaders or political figures encourage young women's political participation? If yes, how?
7. In your experience, how does the community view young women's involvement in political activities?
8. What social or cultural norms within Mchini and Navutika make it challenging for young women to engage in politics?
9. Are there specific challenges tied to resources, like funding or training, that have limited your participation?
10. Have you experienced any discrimination or prejudice in your political journey due to your gender or age?

## Appendix B- Plagiarism Report



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15.10%

## Report #24458689

Investigating the Experiences of Young Women's Participation in Politics in Informal Settlements: A Case of Mchini and Navutika Compounds, Chipata District, Zambia A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF LUSAKA, IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE AWARD OF THE MASTER'S IN POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS Name: SEKELA ZIMBA Student number: MPIR23119669

Appendix C- Ethical Clearance Form



**SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES**

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UNILUS-RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Ref no:FWA000332280510/24

Date: 25<sup>th</sup> October 2024

**STUDENT NAME:** Sekela Zimba

**Investigating the Experiences of Young Women's Participation in Politics in Informal Settlements: A Case of Mchini and Navutika Compounds, Chipata District, Zambia.**

The above research was submitted to the research ethics committee for review. The study has no major ethical problems and is approved subject to the following:

1. The study cannot be changed without express permission of the UNILUS research ethics committee.
2. Approval from the necessary authority should be sought.

**The committee wishes you success in your work.**



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**Professor Kasonde Bowa**

MSc(Glasgow),M.Med(UNZA),FRCS(Glasgow),FACS,FCS,DPH(LSTMH),MPH(UCL)

Chairman- UNILUS REC

Professor of Urology and Consultant Urologist

Deputy Vice-Chancellor – Research and Innovation

Executive Dean - School of Medicine and Health Sciences