

An Analysis of the Use of Communication to Promote Participation of Women Working in the Security Sector in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Effective integration of women's voices and gender-sensitive communication frameworks in security institutions is critical in ensuring meaningful engagement of women working within this sector. Moderan (2024) advocates for protected dialogue spaces, gender-inclusive language protocols, and equitable access to institutional resources and information channels to ensure women's meaningful participation in the evolving security landscape. Despite progressive policy frameworks, women serving in security forces continue to encounter substantial obstacles in their professional roles. Research by Ombati (2018) revealed female military personnel in Somalia operations experienced persistent gender discrimination and harassment, undermining their operational effectiveness. This research explores the communication mechanisms and strategies employed by the security sector in their efforts to enhance female employees participation and integration in their overall communication structure and hierarchy. The study has used the Participatory Communication, Securitization and Gender theories. The study adopted a descriptive survey design, which is appropriate for gathering data on the current practices, opinions, and trends related to communication and women's participation working in the Kenya security sector. The objectives of the study was to find out the current state of communication structures, media channels, messaging strategies, and feedback mechanisms used to promote women's participation in the Kenya security sector. The study found that existing communication structures within the Kenya security sector are generally perceived negatively as they are not friendly in promoting women's participation. The chain of command, formal policies, informal networks, and gender representatives were all rated unfavourably by a majority of respondents. The average mean score of 2.24 (on a 5-point scale) indicates that current communication structures are not effectively supporting women's integration and advancement in the sector. This study recommends that the security sector including Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) and National Police Service (NPS) leadership conduct a comprehensive review of existing communication structures to ensure they actively promote gender inclusivity at all levels. Another recommendation is the development of a multi-channel communication strategy that effectively combines traditional and digital media to reach women across all demographics and geographic locations.

Key words: Communication Structures, Media and Communication Channels, Women Participation, Security Sector, Feedback Communication Channels

BACKGROUND

Globally, the landscape of female involvement in security forces shows concerning disparities despite recent initiatives to have more of them join the sector. According to UN Women (2020), women represent merely 4.2% of military personnel and 10.8% of police officers worldwide, while United Nations Peacekeeping (2021) reports that women make up only 4.8% of military personnel in peacekeeping operations. While various international organizations have pushed for greater gender equality through measures like UN Resolution 1325 (United Nations, 2000), the numbers remain disappointingly low across most nations. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (2021) underscores this challenge, revealing that only 22.1% of the gender gap in political empowerment has been closed globally.

In Africa, regional differences paint a complex picture of women's integration into security forces, with some nations emerging as progressive leaders while others lag significantly behind. The African Gender Index

(2019) indicates that women constitute only 20% of military and police forces across the continent. However, countries like South Africa have achieved notable progress, with women comprising 29% of military and 34% of police forces (South African Police Service, 2020; Department of Defence, 2020), while Rwanda reports 30% military and 40% police force representation (Rwanda National Police, 2020; Ministry of Defence, 2020). Nevertheless, as Shikomba (2018) and Mushonga (2018) document, deeply rooted cultural barriers, institutional resistance, and workplace challenges continue to impede women's full participation and advancement in security roles throughout much of the continent.

In Kenya, significant strides have been achieved in transforming the gender composition of security institutions through strategic policy implementation. Women's presence in the Kenya Defence Forces expanded from 7.6% to 11.3% between 2013 and 2019, while female representation in the National Police Service grew from 10% to 14% during this period (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). This evolution stems from deliberate governmental initiatives, including the comprehensive National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (Ministry of Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs, 2016), coupled with the pioneering Kenya Defence Forces Gender Policy (2017), which collectively aim to integrate gender considerations across all military operations and processes.

The Kenya Defence Forces' transformative approach to gender equality manifests through its comprehensive Gender Policy (2017), which represents a paradigm shift in military institutional culture. This groundbreaking framework confronts historical gender disparities by establishing concrete mechanisms for increasing female participation across all military domains, from initial recruitment through career advancement. Beyond numerical targets, the policy prioritizes creating an environment free from discrimination and harassment, while particularly highlighting women's valuable contributions to peacekeeping missions and advocating for their enhanced role in military leadership and decision-making processes at every level.

Despite progressive policy frameworks, women serving in Kenya's security forces continue to encounter substantial obstacles in their professional roles. Research by Ombati (2018) revealed female military personnel in Somalia operations experienced persistent gender discrimination and harassment, undermining their operational effectiveness. Additional studies highlight concerning patterns, with Badurdeen (2020) documenting the exploitation of women recruited into extremist organizations, while Aroussi (2021) and Bouka, Berry & Kamuru (2019) demonstrate how increased female representation hasn't necessarily translated into meaningful decision-making authority or the incorporation of women's distinct security perspectives into operational strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Women in the security sector face a myriad of challenges that undermine their effective participation and advancement. Gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, and limited opportunities for career progression are among the most pressing issues (Shikomba, 2018; Mushonga, 2018). Effective integration of women's voices in security institutions depends heavily on transformative communication strategies and institutional reforms. While research by Krause, Krause & Bränfors (2018) demonstrates that female participation strengthens peace agreement durability, Myrntinen (2019) emphasizes the necessity of gender-sensitive communication frameworks to achieve these outcomes. Contemporary security sector reforms must address these communication barriers, with Moderan (2024) advocating for protected dialogue spaces, gender-inclusive language protocols, and equitable access to institutional resources and information channels to ensure women's meaningful participation in Kenya's evolving security landscape.

Promoting gender equality and women's involvement in the security sector is made possible by the 2010 Kenyan Constitution and a number of government policies, including the government Gender and Equality Commission Act (2011) and the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (2016). However, there are still issues with political will, resource limitations, and cultural views, and the application of these regulations is still unequal (Aroussi, 2021; Bouka et al., 2019; Muraya, 2022).

The security sector in Kenya and by extension Africa has made great progress in creating channels of communication that support women's involvement and gender equality.

A study by Ombati (2018) revealed that female combatants in the Kenya Defence Forces' operation in Somalia encountered gender-based discrimination and harassment, which negatively impacted their ability to perform their duties effectively. Similarly, Badurdeen (2020) highlighted the challenges faced by women who volunteered to join Al-Shabaab in Kenya, including gender-based violence and limited opportunities for advancement within the organization. Moreover, deeply entrenched gender stereotypes and biases continue to undermine women's leadership potential and their ability to contribute effectively to the security sector (Madsen & Andrade, 2018). The integration of women into the security sector has not always translated into their meaningful participation in decision-making processes or the incorporation of their unique perspectives and experiences (Jayasundara-Smits, 2021; Oreta, 2023).

Statement of the Problem

The persistent gender disparity in security forces continues to challenge progress toward equality at global, regional, and national levels, particularly in Kenya's context. Current data paints a stark picture: United Nations Women (2020) reports women constitute merely 4.2% of military personnel and 10.8% of police officers worldwide, while UN Peacekeeping operations (2021) show similarly low figures of 4.8% and 10.9% respectively. The African continent demonstrates marginally better statistics, with the African Gender Index (2019) indicating 20% female representation across military and police forces. While Kenya has shown some improvement, with Kenya Defence Forces' female participation rising from 7.6% to 11.3% and National Police Service representation increasing from 10% to 14% between 2013 and 2019 (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019), these advances still fall considerably short of the 30% minimum threshold established by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (United Nations, 2000), highlighting the substantial work still needed to achieve gender parity in security institutions.

Effective communication is crucial in addressing these challenges and promoting inclusivity and gender equality in the security sector. However, the current communication strategies and practices within the security sector often fail to adequately address the unique needs, perspectives, and experiences of women (Myrntinen, 2019). The lack of inclusive communication can perpetuate gender stereotypes, reinforce discriminatory practices, and hinder women's meaningful participation in decision-making processes (Carey, 2019). Furthermore, the absence of safe spaces for women to share their views, the use of gender-insensitive language and messaging, and unequal access to information and resources can further marginalize women within the security sector (Moderan, 2024). Therefore, this study sought to analyse how the Kenya security sector uses communication to promote women participation.

Objectives of the Study

Specific Objectives

1. To identify and examine the existing communication and media structures used while communicating with women working within the Kenya security sector.
2. To analyse the specific messages targeting women within the Kenya security sector.
3. To examine the effectiveness of the feedback communication channels available for women working in the Kenya security sector.

Research Questions

1. What are the existing communication and media structures used while communicating with women working within the Kenya security sector?
2. What are the specific messages used by the Kenya security sector to target women's participation?
3. What are the feedback communication channels available for women working in the Kenya security sector and how effective are they?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Security Sector Communication

The development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is also intimately related to the idea of communication in the security sector. To interact with internal and external stakeholders, encourage accountability and openness, and educate the public, the security sector has been using a variety of media and communication channels more and more. The security sector has adopted digital channels such as websites, social media, and mobile apps in addition to more conventional media like print, radio, and television (Efobi et al., 2018; Odhiambo & Celestine, 2020; Shah et al., 2021). The security forces in Kenya, for instance, are active on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, where they often share information on their training, operations, and community outreach initiatives. The National Police Service (NPS) in Kenya also uses social media to disseminate information about its reform initiatives, safety advice, and crime warnings. Furthermore, official websites have been set up by the national security organs to provide details on their missions, organizational structures, and policies in addition to channels for public complaints and input (Odhiambo & Celestine, 2020).

Security institutions must create focused strategies that cater to the unique needs and interests of women and guarantee that women are meaningfully involved in the creation and distribution of content if they are to fully utilize media and communication channels in advancing gender equality (Karambu, 2020; Okoli & Nwankwo, 2021). Efobi, Tanankem, and Asongu (2018) investigate the connection between sub-Saharan Africa's female economic involvement and ICT development, emphasizing how technology may help women participate and be empowered in a variety of fields, including security.

In their exploration of the idea of "African Women's Digital Flight," Shah, Maina, and Kipkoech (2021) highlight how digital technology might support women's agency and involvement in security and peace-building initiatives. Badurdeen (2020), emphasizes the need of gender-sensitive communication techniques to combat violent extremist narratives. The unintended repercussions of combining countering violent extremism (CVE) with the UN's Women, Peace, and Security agenda in Kenya are examined by Aroussi (2021), who highlights the significance of good communication in preventing CVE initiatives from undermining women's rights and involvement. In his case study of Kenya's reaction to terrorism, Kamau (2021) makes the point that thwarting the danger of violent extremism requires efficient coordination and communication among security forces. A key component of governance and reform is communication in the security sector, which includes the methods, procedures, and platforms used by security organizations to interact with both internal and external stakeholders (Myrntinen, 2019). In addition to fostering a more responsive and inclusive security apparatus that meets the requirements of all people, regardless of gender, effective communication within the security sector is crucial for establishing confidence, transparency, and accountability (Jayasundara-Smits, 2021). In order to make sure that communication tactics are in line with the values and expectations of the future generation of African security sector workers, Aning and Siegle (2019) stress the need of evaluating their attitudes and views.

In her case study on gender and SSR in Zimbabwe, Mushonga (2018) highlights the importance of communication in reducing gender-based violence in the security sector and encouraging women's engagement. In a similar vein, Oreta (2023) investigates the growth of opportunities for women in the Philippine security industry, emphasizing the need of efficient communication techniques in promoting inclusion and gender equality.

Different security communication scholars have emphasized the importance of enforcing gender sensitivity standards in the context of peacekeeping missions, arguing that successful communication is crucial to putting policy pledges into action. Thomson (2019) observes the need of a feminist institutionalist approach to the agenda for women, peace, and security, which includes an emphasis on changing the ways that security institutions communicate. A thorough analysis of the connections between gender, SSR, and security sector governance is given by Myrntinen (2019), who also emphasizes the significance of gender-sensitive communication tactics in fostering inclusive and adaptable security institutions.

The women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda is strongly related to the idea of security sector communication. In their analysis of the creation and propagation of the WPS policy environment, Kirby and Shepherd (2021) emphasizes how communication shapes gender and security-related norms and behaviors. In their critical mapping of the WPS agenda, Basu, Kirby, and Shepherd (2020) highlight the need of transformative communication tactics that oppose patriarchal power structures and encourage women's active involvement in peace and security processes. Henry (2021) makes the case that critical racial feminism is essential to furthering the WPS agenda, stressing the need of intersectional communication techniques that tackle the many and overlapping types of prejudice that women encounter in settings impacted by war. Forms of media and communication channels utilized by the security sector

Forms of media and communication channels utilized by the security sector

To interact with internal and external stakeholders, share information, and encourage accountability and transparency, the security industry makes use of a wide variety of media and communication platforms (Shah et al., 2021). These channels include digital platforms like websites, social media, and mobile apps in addition to more conventional media like print, radio, and television (Efobi et al., 2018; Odhiambo & Celestine, 2020). Given that the COVID-19 pandemic has sped up the use of distant communication technologies, the usage of digital media has grown in significance (Oreta, 2023). However, a number of variables, including the content's accessibility, relevance, and gender sensitivity, affect how well these channels support gender equality and women's engagement (Badurdeen, 2020; Okoli & Nwankwo, 2021). Security institutions must create focused strategies that cater to the unique needs and interests of women and guarantee that women are meaningfully involved in the creation and distribution of content if they are to fully utilise media and communication channels in advancing gender equality (Karambu, 2020; Okoli & Nwankwo, 2021).

To interact with internal and external stakeholders, encourage accountability and openness, and educate the public, Kenya's security sector has been using a variety of media and communication channels more and more. In order to disseminate news, updates, and press releases, the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) and the National Police Service (NPS) have adopted digital channels such websites, social media, and mobile apps (Shah et al., 2021). The KDF, for instance, is active on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, where it often shares information on its training, operations, and community outreach initiatives. Additionally, the NPS uses social media to disseminate information about its reform initiatives, safety advice, and crime warnings. Furthermore, official websites have been set up by the KDF and NPS to provide details on their missions, organisational structures, and policies in addition to channels for public complaints and input (Odhiambo & Celestine, 2020).

In order to interact with stakeholders and advance openness, the security sector in South Africa has also adopted a variety of media and communication outlets. Public relations, media interaction, and social media presence are all managed by the South African Police Service's (SAPS) specialised media and communication section (South African Police Service, 2020). To provide information about its activities, crime prevention programs, and community policing initiatives, the SAPS uses print, radio, and television media. Additionally, it keeps up an active presence on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, posting news updates, safety advice, and details about its offerings. Public relations, media liaison, and internet presence are all managed by the Department of Defense's newly formed media and communication department (Department of Defence, South Africa, 2020). The department disseminates information about its operations, defence policies, and community engagement initiatives using a variety of media, including print, radio, television, and internet platforms.

Effective use of media and communication channels to interact with stakeholders and advance transparency has proven difficult for Nigeria's security sector. In the context of its operations against Boko Haram and other insurgent groups, the Nigerian military has come under fire for its lack of accountability and transparency (Eniola, 2020). Nonetheless, the military has worked to enhance its public relations and communication tactics in recent years. This includes boosting its interactions with the media and civil society and creating a special department for media and communication (Okoli & Nwankwo, 2021). It has also been difficult for the Nigerian Police Force to interact with the public and advance transparency via the use of media and

communication channels. To disseminate information about its services, activities, and reform initiatives, it has just introduced a new website and social media accounts (Nigerian Police Force, 2021).

To interact with stakeholders and educate the public, Uganda's security sector has made use of a variety of media and communication platforms. A media and communication department has been formed by the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) to oversee its internet presence, media interaction, and public relations (Ministry of Defence and Veteran Affairs, Uganda, 2020). The UPDF disseminates information about its operations, training sessions, and community involvement initiatives via print, radio, and television media. Additionally, it keeps up an active presence on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, where it posts news updates and details about its operations. Additionally, a media and communication department has been formed by the Uganda Police Force to oversee its internet presence, media interaction, and public relations (Uganda Police Force, 2020). The police department disseminates information about its activities, crime prevention programs, and community policing initiatives using a variety of media, including print, radio, television, and internet platforms.

The Concept of Communication to Promote Women Participation

Promoting women's involvement in a variety of fields, including security, requires effective communication. According to Kosek and Buzzanell (2018), the idea of communication to support women's involvement is the deliberate use of narratives, messages, and discourse to support and encourage women's active participation, representation, and inclusion in leadership roles and decision-making processes. The consequences of unconscious gender prejudice on women's leadership development are emphasized by Madsen and Andrade (2018), who also stress the need of communication tactics that dispel stereotypes and advance gender equality.

With an emphasis on the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP), Oreta's (2023) research investigated the involvement and integration of women in the Philippine security sector. The study showed that women made up 17.9% of the PNP and 16.6% of the AFP, demonstrating advancements in gender inclusion. Important turning points were highlighted in the report, including the creation of Women's Desks at every police station and the AFP's 1993 admittance of women into the Philippine Military Academy. In order to increase the number of opportunities for women in the security industry, the research suggests a number of actions and offers institutional frameworks for gender mainstreaming. These include establishing more "safe spaces" for resolving complaints, helping women rise into leadership positions, including gender-related contributions into incentive schemes, and implementing assessment metrics and procedures that are sensitive to gender.

In the context of peace talks and peace-building initiatives, the value of communication in encouraging women's involvement is especially clear. In their analysis of the connection between women's involvement in peace talks and the sustainability of peace, Krause, Krause, and Bränfors (2018) contend that good communication techniques are crucial to guaranteeing that women's needs are met and their opinions are heard. In her investigation of women's experiences with peace-building in Kenyan communities devastated by violence, Mueller-Hirth (2019) emphasizes the value of communication in promoting inclusive and participatory procedures.

Communication tactics that encourage women's involvement are essential in the security industry to combat violence and prejudice based on gender. With an emphasis on the situation of female soldiers in the Kenya Defence Forces' campaign in Somalia, Ombati (2018) investigates the idea of feminine masculinity in the military. The research emphasizes how crucial communication is to subverting gender stereotypes and advancing women's autonomy and empowerment in the military. In their investigation of women's political engagement in Kenya's devolved political system, Bouka, Berry, and Kamuru (2019) highlight the importance of communication in fostering women's participation and leadership at the local level.

Promoting women's involvement in combating violent extremism (CVE) initiatives also requires effective communication techniques. In her study of the reasons and experiences of Kenyan women who volunteer to join Al-Shabaab, Badurdeen (2020) emphasizes the need of gender-sensitive communication tactics that tackle the underlying causes of radicalization and advance women's empowerment. In Kenya, Aroussi (2021)

examines the unforeseen ramifications of incorporating CVE with the UN's Women, Peace, and Security agenda, stressing the significance of clear communication in preventing CVE initiatives from undermining women's rights and involvement.

The idea of using communication to encourage women's involvement is directly related to the larger goals of women's empowerment and gender equality. In their 2019 study, Flabbi, Macis, Moro, and Schivardi explore how female leadership affects gender disparities and company performance, emphasizing the value of communication tactics that support women's career progression. In their meta-analysis of the business case for women leaders, Hoobler, Masterson, Nkomo, and Michel (2018) highlight the need of communication tactics that dispel gender stereotypes and advance women's leadership potential.

Good communication techniques are also essential for encouraging women to take up leadership roles in global health. The "two-thirds gender rule" and gender quotas in Kenyan health leadership are examined by Muraya (2022), who emphasizes the importance of communication in advancing women's representation and involvement in decision-making. In their exploration of the idea of feminist commitments towards a horizontal Women, Peace, and Security critical learning community, Luttrell-Rowland, Prandini Assis, and Segalo (2023) stress the value of communication in promoting inclusive and participatory approaches to gender and security.

The existing communication structures within the security sector

The institutional culture, attitudes, and practices pertaining to gender equality and women's involvement are significantly shaped by the communication structures in the security sector (Aning & Siegle, 2019; Myrntinen, 2019). In addition to informal networks and connections, these structures also contain official channels like the chain of command, policies, and procedures (Oreta, 2023; Shikomba, 2018). A number of variables, including leadership commitment, resource allocation, and the inclusion of women's voices in decision-making processes, affect how well these communication systems advance gender equality (Hendricks, 2017; Jayasundara-Smits, 2021; Kezie-Nwoha, 2020). However, women are marginalised in the security industry as a result of current communication systems that often reinforce gender prejudices and inequalities (Madsen & Andrade, 2018; Mushonga, 2018). Security institutions have responded to these issues by establishing a number of mechanisms, including gender mainstreaming committees, women's associations, and gender focal points, to encourage women's participation and facilitate the integration of gender perspectives (Haastrup, 2019; Hendricks, 2017; Sigsworth & Kumalo, 2016).

To promote information sharing, decision-making, and stakeholder involvement, Kenya's security sector—which is mostly made up of the National Police Service (NPS) and the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF)—has set up a number of communication channels. The institutional culture, attitudes, and practices around gender equality and women's involvement are greatly influenced by these structures (Aning & Siegle, 2019; Ministry of Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs, Kenya, 2016). Promoting gender equality and women's involvement in the security sector is made possible by the 2010 Kenyan Constitution and a number of government policies, including the government Gender and Equality Commission Act (2011) and the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (2016). However, there are still issues with political will, resource limitations, and cultural views, and the application of these regulations is still unequal (Aroussi, 2021; Bouka et al., 2019; Muraya, 2022).

The security industry in South Africa has made great progress in creating channels of communication that support women's involvement and gender equality. In order to promote discussion and advocacy on gender problems, the South African Police Service (SAPS) established Women's Networks and Men for Change forums as part of its Gender Mainstreaming Strategy (South African Police Service, 2020). To encourage gender equality and women's empowerment in the military, the Department of Defence has also set up a Women's Forum and a Gender Mainstreaming Council (Department of Defence, South Africa, 2020). In addition to encouraging women's leadership and decision-making in the security industry, these institutions have been essential in increasing public awareness of gender-based violence and discrimination.

As part of Rwanda's larger commitment to gender mainstreaming, the security sector has made the creation of communication channels that support women's engagement and gender equality a top priority (Ministry of Defence, Rwanda, 2020). To address incidences of gender-based violence and encourage women's

involvement in law enforcement, the Rwanda National Police set up a Gender Desk (Rwanda National Police, 2020). In order to help integrate gender views into military operations and decision-making processes, the Rwanda Defence Force has also established Gender Focal Points as part of its Gender Mainstreaming Policy (Ministry of Defence, Rwanda, 2020). In addition to enhancing the institutional response to gender-based violence and discrimination, these institutions have been credited for boosting the representation and leadership of women in the security sector.

Establishing efficient communication channels that support gender equality and women's engagement has proven to be very difficult for Nigeria's security industry. Gender-responsive policies and practices are still not widely used in the security sector, even after a National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security was adopted in 2017 (Okoli & Nwankwo, 2021). The frequency of sexual exploitation and abuse by security personnel, as well as the Nigerian military's lack of gender awareness, have drawn criticism (Eniola, 2020). To address these issues and encourage women's involvement and leadership, there have been attempts to set up gender desks and focal areas within the security industry (Okoli & Nwankwo, 2021).

Although there are still issues with cultural attitudes and resource limitations, the security sector in Uganda has made significant strides in creating communication channels that support gender equality and women's involvement (Kayonga, 2021). To help include female views into military operations and decision-making, the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) created female Focal Points (Ministry of Defence and Veteran Affairs, Uganda, 2020). In order to address incidences of gender-based violence and encourage women's involvement in law enforcement, the Uganda Police Force has also put in place a gender policy and set up a gender desk (Uganda Police Force, 2020). However, a lack of political will, insufficient funding, and enduring sexism and gender stereotypes in the security sector have all hindered these organisations' efficacy (Kayonga, 2021).

The specific messages used by the security sector to target women's participation.

Attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours pertaining to gender equality are significantly shaped by the messaging that the security sector uses to encourage women's involvement (Karambu, 2020; Okoli & Nwankwo, 2021). These messages often stress the value of women's distinct contributions to national security, emphasizing their abilities in community involvement, peacekeeping, and conflict resolution (Eniola, 2020; Ministry of Defence, Kenya, 2021). Additionally, security organisations emphasize that women have the right to serve their country and progress in their professions in the military and law enforcement by promoting themes of equality and nondiscrimination (Department of Defence, South Africa, 2020; National Police Service, Kenya, 2020). However, a number of variables, including the messaging's reach, trustworthiness, and consistency, affect how well these messages encourage women's engagement (Kayonga, 2021; Rwanda National Police, 2021). Security institutions must create evidence-based, gender-sensitive, and culturally appropriate communication strategies that address the unique opportunities and challenges faced by women in the security sector if they hope to optimize the impact of messaging on women's participation (Madsen & Andrade, 2018; Mushonga, 2018).

The security industry in Kenya has used a variety of messaging to encourage gender equality and women's involvement. The value of women's distinct contributions to national security has been underlined by the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF), which highlights their abilities in community involvement, peacekeeping, and conflict resolution (Karambu, 2020). Additionally, the KDF has advocated for nondiscrimination and equal opportunity, emphasising that women have the right to serve their nation and develop their military careers (Ministry of Defence, Kenya, 2021). In a similar vein, the National Police Service (NPS) has used messaging that highlights the value of women in law enforcement and challenges conventional gender stereotypes. Women's contributions to community policing, conflict prevention, and gender-based violence response have also been emphasised by the NPS (National Police Service, Kenya, 2020).

The feedback communication channels available for women working in the security sector

For women in the security industry to express their worries, share their experiences, and participate in decision-making, feedback communication channels are crucial (Karambu, 2020; Oreta, 2023). In addition to

informal networks and connections, these channels include institutional systems including women's organisations, gender desks, and complaints procedures (Ministry of Defence, Kenya, 2021; South African Police Service, 2020). A number of variables, including the timeliness, confidentiality, and accessibility of the feedback systems, affect how well these channels support gender equality and women's engagement (Eniola, 2020; Rwanda National Police, 2021). However, issues including a lack of political will, insufficient funding, and enduring discrimination and gender stereotypes in the security sector often hinder the effectiveness of current feedback systems (Kayonga, 2021; Nigerian Police Force, 2021). Establishing and enhancing victim-centered, gender-sensitive, and accountability-based feedback communication channels that are responsive to women's needs and rights must be a top priority for security institutions in order to overcome these obstacles (Haastrup, 2019; Hendricks, 2017; Sigsworth & Kumalo, 2016). This calls for the creation of explicit rules and procedures, the distribution of sufficient funds, and the active participation of women in the planning, execution, and assessment of feedback systems (Kezie-Nwoha, 2020; Okoli & Nwankwo, 2021).

To help women express their concerns, share their experiences, and participate in decision-making, the security sector in Kenya has set up a number of feedback communication channels. In order to address concerns of discrimination, harassment, and abuse, the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) has put in place a Gender and Equality Policy that requires the creation of a Gender Desk and a Complaints Mechanism (Ministry of Defence, Kenya, 2017). In order to provide women a forum to exchange stories, support one another, and fight for their rights and interests, the KDF has also set up Women's Associations and Networks (Karambu, 2020). To combat gender-based violence and discrimination, the National Police Service (NPS) has also set up a Complaints Mechanism and a Gender and Equality Division (National Police Service, Kenya, 2020). In order to encourage and advocate for women in law enforcement, the NPS has also created Women's Police Associations and enacted a Sexual Harassment Policy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study used Participatory Communication, Securitization and Gender Theories. The Participatory Communication Theory, developed by Jan Servaes in 1999, emphasizes the importance of involving all stakeholders in the communication process, particularly those who are often marginalized or excluded, such as women (Servaes, 1999). This theory posits that effective communication is not a one-way process of information dissemination, but rather a dialogic and empowering process that enables individuals and communities to articulate their needs, share their knowledge, and participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives (Servaes & Malikhao, 2005). In the context of the security sector, the Participatory Communication Theory suggests that women's meaningful participation in communication processes is essential for promoting gender equality, addressing their specific security needs, and enhancing the overall effectiveness and legitimacy of security institutions (Servaes, 2008).

One of the key strengths of the Participatory Communication Theory is its emphasis on the empowerment and agency of marginalized groups, such as women, in the communication process (Servaes, 2008). By recognizing the inherent knowledge, skills, and capacities of women, this theory challenges the top-down, expert-driven approaches to communication that often perpetuate gender inequalities and exclusion (Servaes & Malikhao, 2005). The Participatory Communication Theory also highlights the importance of cultural sensitivity and local context in shaping communication processes, which is particularly relevant in the diverse and complex security landscapes of Kenya (Servaes, 1999). Moreover, this theory provides a normative framework for evaluating the effectiveness and ethics of communication practices, based on principles of inclusivity, dialogue, and empowerment (Servaes, 2008).

Despite its strengths, the Participatory Communication Theory has also faced some criticisms and challenges. One criticism is that the theory's emphasis on participation and empowerment may overlook the structural and systemic barriers that limit women's access to communication resources and decision-making processes in the security sector (Chitty, 2005). Some scholars have argued that the theory's focus on local context and cultural sensitivity may also risk relativizing or essentializing gender norms and inequalities (Wilkins, 2000). Moreover, the practical implementation of participatory communication approaches in the hierarchical and male-dominated security sector may face resistance from entrenched interests and require significant institutional reforms and capacity-building efforts (Jallov, 2012).

The Participatory Communication Theory remains relevant and applicable to the study of how the security sector uses communication to promote women's participation. By providing a theoretical framework that centers the voices, experiences, and agency of women, this theory guides the analysis of existing communication structures, media channels, messaging strategies, and feedback mechanisms in the security sector. The Participatory Communication Theory also inform the development of recommendations for more inclusive, dialogic, and empowering communication practices that enhance women's meaningful participation in the security sector.

Securitization Theory

The Securitization Theory was developed by Ole Wæver and Barry Buzan, along with other scholars from the Copenhagen School of security studies, in the 1990s (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998). This theory posits that security is not an objective condition but a socially constructed phenomenon. It argues that issues become security concerns through a process of "securitization," which involves speech acts and communication processes. According to this theory, actors can transform any public issue into a matter of security by presenting it as an existential threat. The success of securitization depends not only on the speech act itself but also on the acceptance of this framing by the relevant audience (Wæver, 1995).

The major strengths of Securitization Theory is its ability to explain how non-traditional issues, such as gender equality, can become security concerns through discursive practices (Balzacq, 2005). This aspect is particularly relevant to understanding how women's participation in the security sector can be framed as a security issue. The theory also provides a framework for analyzing the power dynamics involved in security discourse, which is crucial for examining gender relations in the security sector (McDonald, 2008). However, the theory has been criticized for its narrow focus on elite discourse, potentially overlooking the role of broader societal narratives and everyday practices in shaping security perceptions (Bigo, 2002). Additionally, some scholars argue that the theory's emphasis on speech acts may underestimate the importance of non-verbal forms of communication and material practices in securitization processes (Balzacq, 2011).

The Securitization Theory is relevant to this study on how the security sector uses communication to promote women's participation. It provides a framework for analyzing how the security sector communicates about women's participation, potentially framing it as a security issue rather than just a matter of gender equality. This perspective can help in understanding how communication strategies are used to elevate the importance of women's participation in the eyes of both internal and external stakeholders. The theory's emphasis on audience acceptance is particularly useful for examining how different communication channels and messages are employed to gain support for increased women's participation. Furthermore, the theory's consideration of context and power dynamics can inform the analysis of how existing gender norms and power structures within the security sector influence communication strategies and their effectiveness in promoting women's participation.

Gender Theory

Gender Theory, developed through the work of Butler (1990) and Scott (1998) provides a critical framework for understanding how gender roles, relations, and identities are socially constructed and maintained through various institutional practices, including communication (Butler, 1990; Scott, 1986). This theoretical perspective argues that gender is not merely a biological fact but a complex social construct that shapes organizational structures, power relations, and individual experiences. In the context of the security sector, Gender Theory helps explain how communication practices can either reinforce or challenge traditional gender norms and barriers to women's participation (Harding, 2004).

The theory's emphasis on intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), is particularly relevant to understanding how various social categories such as gender, rank, ethnicity, and class intersect to shape women's experiences in the security sector. This intersectional perspective highlights how communication strategies must address multiple, overlapping forms of discrimination and barriers to promote meaningful women's participation. Gender Theory also emphasizes the role of language and discourse in constructing and

maintaining gender hierarchies, making it especially pertinent to analyzing how security sector communication practices can either perpetuate or transform gender relations (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Within the security sector, Gender Theory provides a framework for examining how institutional communication practices reflect and reproduce gendered power relations, while also identifying opportunities for transformative change. The theory suggests that effective promotion of women's participation requires not just surface-level changes in communication practices, but deeper transformations in institutional cultures and power structures that have historically privileged masculine perspectives and experiences (Acker, 1990). This theoretical lens helps explain why some communication strategies may fail to promote women's participation if they do not address underlying gender biases and power dynamics within security institutions.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework illustrates the key communication structures and strategies aimed at enhancing women's participation in organizational settings. It identifies four main components: existing communication structures, forms of media and communication channels, specific messages used, and feedback communication channels.

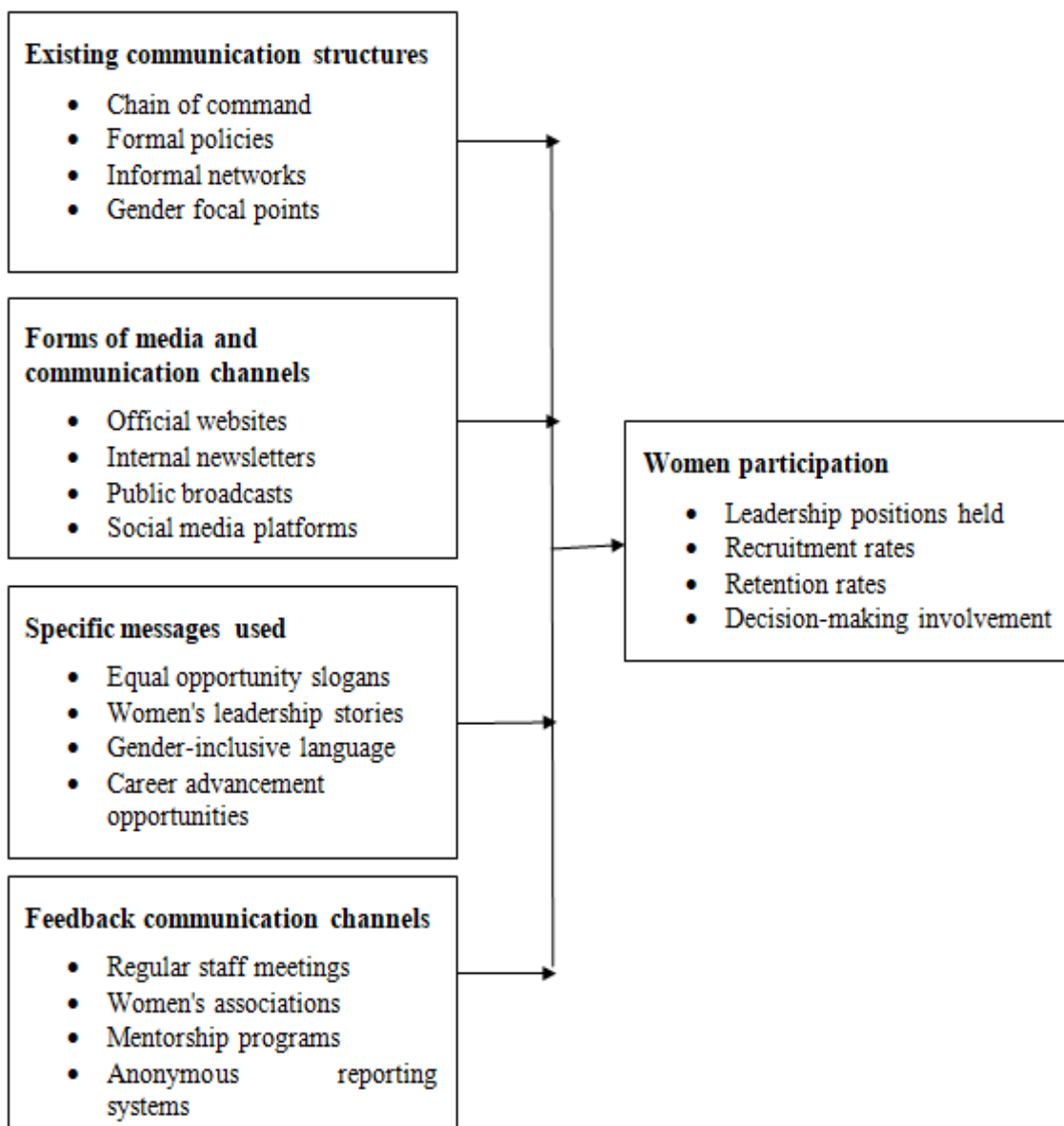


Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework

Existing communication structures include the chain of command, formal policies, informal networks, and gender focal points, establishing the basis for inclusive communication practices. Various platforms such as

official websites, internal newsletters, public broadcasts, and social media are utilized to disseminate information. Messages promoting gender equality and women's participation, such as equal opportunity slogans, women's leadership stories, gender-inclusive language, and career advancement opportunities, are strategically communicated. Feedback mechanisms, including regular staff meetings, women's associations, mentorship programs, and anonymous reporting systems, ensure continuous dialogue and improvement.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey design, which is appropriate for gathering data on the current practices, opinions, and trends related to communication and women's participation in the Kenya security sector. The descriptive survey design allows for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data from a representative sample of the target population, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. This design is suitable for the study as it facilitated the description and analysis of the communication strategies, channels, messages, and feedback mechanisms used by the security sector to promote women's participation. This approach allows for a comprehensive examination of communication strategies and women's participation across diverse operational contexts, providing insights relevant to the entire security sector. However, descriptive survey design has its weaknesses in that it may not capture organizational culture, unspoken norms, or institutional barriers affecting women's participation. It doesn't also identify cause-and-effect relationships implying that in this study, it would not be conclusive to say that good communication plan would enhance women participation.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The summary highlights the current state of communication structures, media channels, messaging strategies, and feedback mechanisms used to promote women's participation in the Kenya security sector. It also reflects on the overall perception of women's participation within these organizations.

The study found that existing communication structures within the Kenya security sector are generally perceived negatively in terms of promoting women's participation. The chain of command, formal policies, informal networks, and gender representatives were all rated unfavourably by a majority of respondents. The average mean score of 2.24 (on a 5-point scale) indicates that current communication structures are not effectively supporting women's integration and advancement in the sector.

Regarding forms of media and communication channels, the findings reveal a mixed but generally negative perception. While digital platforms like social media and official websites showed slightly more positive ratings, traditional channels such as internal newsletters and public broadcasts were viewed less favorably. The overall mean score of 2.76 suggests that the security sector's media and communication channels are not adequately reaching or engaging women, particularly in rural areas.

The study revealed that specific messages used to target women's participation are not perceived as effective. Respondents indicated that equal opportunity slogans, women's leadership stories, and gender-inclusive language are not prominently or consistently used. Career advancement opportunities for women were not seen as clearly communicated, and messages were not perceived as effectively challenging gender stereotypes. The average mean score of 2.50 indicates a need for significant improvement in messaging strategies.

Feedback communication channels available for women were also perceived negatively. Respondents indicated that multiple channels for voicing opinions, regular staff meetings addressing women's concerns, and women's associations were not effectively utilized. Mentorship programs and anonymous reporting systems were also viewed unfavorably. The overall mean score of 2.49 suggests that current feedback mechanisms are inadequate for addressing women's needs and concerns in the security sector.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

The study concluded that the existing communication structures within the Kenya security sector are inadequate for effectively promoting women's participation. Despite recent efforts to establish gender-focused

roles and policies, the overall perception remains negative. This suggests a significant gap between policy implementation and practical outcomes, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive and integrated approach to gender-inclusive communication within organizational hierarchies and networks.

The forms of media and communication channels utilized by the security sector show a gradual shift towards digital platforms, but their effectiveness in promoting women's participation remains limited. While there is an increasing use of social media and official websites, these channels have not yet been optimized to reach and engage women, particularly those in rural areas. This indicates a need for a more strategic and targeted approach to media utilization that considers diverse demographic and geographic factors.

The specific messages used to target women's participation are not resonating effectively with the intended audience. The lack of visible and impactful messaging around equal opportunities, women's leadership, and career advancement suggests that current communication strategies are not successfully challenging gender stereotypes or promoting women's roles within the security sector. This points to a critical need for more authentic, consistent, and empowering messaging that aligns with the realities and aspirations of women in the sector.

Feedback communication channels available for women in the security sector are perceived as insufficient and ineffective. The negative perception of mentorship programs, staff meetings, and anonymous reporting systems indicates a lack of trust and engagement with these mechanisms. This suggests that current feedback channels are not providing women with adequate opportunities to voice their concerns, share experiences, or contribute to decision-making processes. The study concludes that there is a pressing need to redesign and strengthen these feedback mechanisms to ensure they are accessible, responsive, and influential in shaping organizational policies and practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study recommends that the security sector including Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) and National Police Service (NPS) leadership conduct a comprehensive review of existing communication structures to ensure they actively promote gender inclusivity at all levels. Regular gender sensitivity training should be implemented for all personnel, with a particular focus on those in leadership roles, to enhance understanding and support for women's participation. Clear, measurable targets for women's representation in key decision-making positions should be established, with progress communicated transparently.

For the Communications Departments of both KDF and NPS, it is recommended to develop a multi-channel communication strategy that effectively combines traditional and digital media to reach women across all demographics and geographic locations. There is a need to create and disseminate compelling content that showcases women's achievements and leadership in the security sector, challenging existing stereotypes. Regular surveys and focus groups should be implemented to assess the effectiveness of communication channels and messaging, using these insights to continually refine strategies.

Human Resources Departments should redesign recruitment and promotion materials to use gender-inclusive language and imagery that appeals to women candidates. It is crucial to establish and promote formal mentorship programs that pair junior women with senior leaders (both male and female) to support career development. Clear career progression pathways for women in various roles within the security sector should be developed and effectively communicated.

For Gender Affairs Units, it is recommended to strengthen existing feedback mechanisms by ensuring anonymity, responsiveness, and regular follow-up on issues raised. A cross-departmental task force should be established to address systemic barriers to women's participation identified through these feedback channels. Collaboration with external women's rights organizations is encouraged to gain insights and best practices for promoting gender equality in male-dominated sectors.

Finally, the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Interior should allocate specific budget for initiatives aimed at enhancing women's participation in the security sector through improved communication strategies. Policy

frameworks should be developed that mandate regular reporting on progress towards gender equality goals, including communication effectiveness. These ministries should also facilitate inter-agency collaboration to share best practices and resources for promoting women's participation across the entire security sector.

Suggestions for Further Study

While this study has provided valuable insights into how the Kenya security sector uses communication to promote women's participation, it has also revealed areas that warrant further investigation. Future research could explore the effectiveness of specific communication interventions in real-time, perhaps through action research projects. There is also a need for more in-depth analysis of the informal communication networks that influence women's experiences in the security sector. Additionally, studies examining the role of male allies in promoting women's participation through communication could offer new perspectives.

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