



The Status of Women's Leadership in Kenya's Legal Sector



This report was produced by Co-Impact.

Co-Impact brings together local changemakers and funders from around the world to make health, education, and economic systems stronger and more inclusive—creating impact that lasts. Our commitment to advancing gender equality and women's leadership is central to this goal.

A key part of our mission is advancing women's leadership and gender equality in law and economics. These fields play a powerful role in shaping public policy and determining how resources are allocated, decisions that ultimately affect people's rights and the quality of services they receive. Our goal is to not only see more women rise into leadership roles in institutions of economics, law, and justice, but also to ensure they are supported to lead with confidence, influence, and agency. We believe this is essential to building a more just and inclusive society.

This report is the first in a four-part series we commissioned in 2024 to examine women's journeys and leadership contributions within the fields of law and economics in Kenya and Nigeria. Through this series, we aim to deepen our understanding of women's lived experiences—including the barriers they face in navigating their careers and advancing to leadership positions where they can shape and influence the law and the economy. While this report is not intended to be a definitive research study, it seeks to complement and contribute to the growing body of work on women's leadership in law and economics in Africa. We hope the stories and experiences featured here inspire you to see the promise and potential of a world where women lead as equal partners in advancing just, equitable, and inclusive societies.

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Cover illustration FEMNET/Nzilani Simu.

All photos used are courtesy of FEMNET. Photos were taken from a convening held by FEMNET, in partnership with Co-Impact, from July 14th to 16th, 2025, in Nairobi, Kenya, on the theme "Women Leading in Shaping Justice Across Generations."

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Foreword

This report is part of a four-part series commissioned by Co-Impact in 2024 to deepen our understanding of women's leadership journeys in law and economics across Kenya and Nigeria. Grounded in evidence, these reports examine institutions spanning the Judiciary, Legislature, Attorney General's offices, academia, private firms, public economic institutions, banks, think tanks, professional bodies, and development organisations. They offer a comprehensive view of where women are leading, where gaps persist, and how institutional policy and societal factors shape women's entry, retention, and advancement.

At the current pace, the United Nations estimates it will take 140 years to achieve gender parity in workplace leadership and 47 years to reach equal representation in national parliaments.

In law and economics, women are graduating in strong numbers and building deep expertise, yet they remain underrepresented in leadership. These two domains matter because law shapes how rights are protected and justice is delivered, while economics determines how resources are allocated, which priorities are funded, and whose needs are reflected in national development strategies. Leadership in these fields influences the rules, incentives, and structures that affect millions.

The findings of these reports make clear that the issue is not a lack of talent or ambition. It is institutional.

Structural and informal barriers continue to shape how women advance and sustain leadership. Gender-blind appraisal systems, unequal access to mentorship and professional networks, workplace cultures that inadequately account for caregiving responsibilities, opaque promotion pathways, and entrenched leadership norms all contribute to unequal outcomes. In economics, women are disproportionately filtered out before

reaching senior technical and policy influence. In law, representation does not consistently translate into authority, visibility, or long-term retention at senior levels.

Importantly, these reports make one point clear: progress cannot be left to chance. At Co-Impact we believe that advancing women's leadership requires deliberate institutional reform. Symbolic representation is not enough. Institutions must move beyond compliance toward genuine transformation in reforming appraisal systems, reshaping workplace cultures, strengthening mentorship, dismantling informal power networks, and creating clear pathways for advancement. Only then will women not just enter leadership spaces but lead and thrive in them.

For funders and practitioners committed to systems change, this body of work highlights a critical opportunity. Investing in women's leadership in law and economics is not only a matter of equity; it is fundamental for durable institutional reform and inclusive development. When women lead, institutions become more responsive, governance becomes more legitimate, and policy decisions better reflect the realities of diverse communities.

We are deeply grateful for the leadership and long-term partnership of the Gates Foundation, whose sustained investment enables this work. We thank the authors for their rigorous research, the women who generously shared their experiences, and our partners across Kenya and Nigeria who continue advancing women's leadership.

We hope this body of work contributes meaningfully to evidence, dialogue, and collective action toward institutions in which women not only enter leadership spaces — but thrive and lead.

Mary Wandia
Co-Impact Regional Director, Africa.

1 Introduction



The Constitution of Kenya 2010 heralded a new era prioritising gender equality. It requires the State to take all necessary steps to ensure that no more than two-thirds of positions in elective and appointive bodies are occupied by members of the same gender.¹

It represents the culmination of sustained efforts to enhance women's rights in Kenya, both in letter and spirit, in the context of a history of marginalising women's rights activism. So this recognition in the supreme law of the land was undoubtedly momentous.

It has manifested in enhanced representation of women in leadership positions. Significant affirmative action has been taken to improve girls' access to education. Initiatives have included addressing gender barriers blocking girls' access to school, and revising university admission policies to support female applicants.

The impacts flow from the school gate to the bar. In 2024, for the first time since the inception of the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE), more girls (50.1%) sat the exam than boys (49.9%). This marks an important change from 2023, when girls made up 49.9% of candidates². The trend continues in higher education, with more women enrolling in law faculties. According to the Commission for University Education, female enrollment in law programs has steadily grown and now surpasses that of men. In the 2024/25 academic year, women made up 54.5% of law students³, up from 53% in 2022/23⁴.

More women are joining the legal profession than ever before. Between 2009 and 2019, women's membership in the Law Society



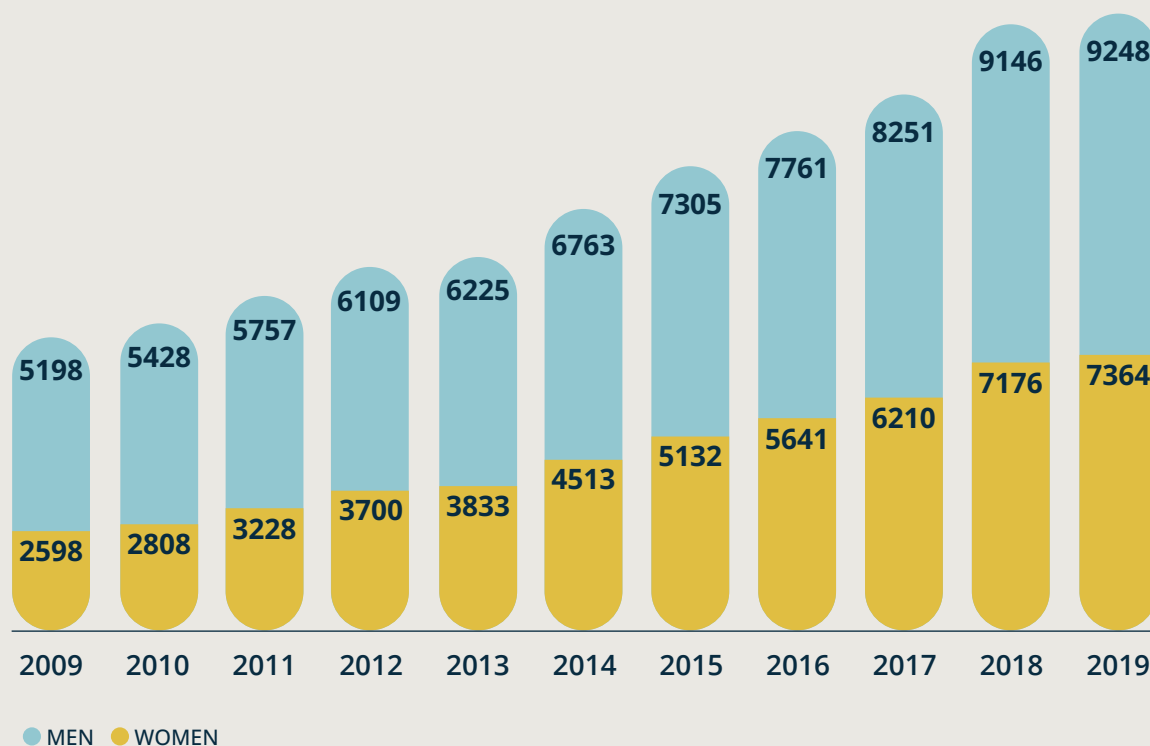
FEMNET/Co-Impact convening, July 2025.

¹ Constitution of Kenya 2010, art. 27(8).

² <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/gender/gender-milestone-more-girls-than-boys-sat-2024-kcse-exam-4884440>

³ Commission for University Education- 2024/25 University Statistics Report

⁴ Commission for University Education- 2022/23 University Statistics Report

TABLE 1: LAW SOCIETY OF KENYA MEMBERSHIP NUMBERS BY GENDER, 2009 TO 2020 ⁷

of Kenya rose significantly from 33% to 44%.⁵ Currently, there are 10,885 female advocates (44%) against 13,775 male advocates (56%).⁶

This study's findings are intended to inform strategic and programmatic planning within Co-Impact and other gender equality focused organisations. It assesses the status of women in leadership in law in Kenya by interrogating the legal framework, institutional policies and regulations that are facilitating this leadership. It also discusses the barriers that impede women's progress and assesses responses such as gender-intentional strategies. Finally, it explores collaborative strategies to support women to advance to leadership with *agency, influence and impact in Kenya's legal sector*.



⁵ International Development Law Organization, Women's Professional Participation in Kenya's Justice Sector: Barriers and Pathways (2020).

⁶ Law Society of Kenya data.

⁷ International Development Law Organization, Women's Professional Participation in Kenya's Justice Sector: Barriers and Pathways (2020).

2 Conceptual Framework





This study conceptualizes leadership in broad tiers beyond formal management positions or positional leadership to also emphasize thought leadership and influence as essential domains.

The study also extends the scope of leadership in law to include career paths beyond those typically pursued by lawyers, drawing on data from the bar, bench, prosecution, in-house legal departments, academia, legislature, civil society, and the executive.

It uses a genealogical lens, interrogating the trajectory of women's leadership in law, and highlighting the changing practices and rationales that inform or undermine women's leadership across different generations of women lawyers.

It examines the representation of women in top leadership roles vis-à-vis their lived realities alongside those of other female lawyers in order to explore substantive equality. While procedural equality is bringing Kenya closer to numerical parity between female and male lawyers, numbers don't tell the whole story. So the study examines the practices and strategies that enhance the attainment and retention of women's leadership. It offers an assessment of the access to leadership opportunities and barriers impeding access in order to bring greater insight.

Adopting a feminist lens, the study deconstructs the notion of parity based on the occupation of women in top leadership

positions. It also critiques the idea of homogeneity, which, focusing on women already in leadership, discounts barriers to leadership experienced by other women. For instance, some respondents, had not experienced gender-based discrimination as they advanced in their careers. This was their lived experience.

“I have not experienced gender discrimination so far.”

Study respondent

However discrimination is not always consciously perceived. So the study engages with the morphing layers of patriarchy and unmask the danger of increasingly subtle patriarchal control which can be harder to discern.

“I am often asked, ‘You have the top leadership, what more? Haven’t you arrived?’”

Study respondent

3 Methodology





The study was conducted in 2024 and uses mixed methods, informed by the objectives. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used to engage with the lived realities of women in the legal profession. Desk research of existing studies on women's leadership in law provided further quantitative data including the number of women in leadership in different spheres.

Field research was undertaken through:

1. INTERVIEWS WITH PEOPLE WORKING IN THE DIFFERENT SPHERES OF LAW

30 participants were interviewed from different spheres of law, drawn from institutions as follows:

Critical Institutions: influencing public policy, resource allocation, national priorities, and gender issues;

Academic institutions: serving as the main pipeline for the critical institutions;

Supporting institutions: serving the constituencies, for example professional associations, networks or convening agencies;

Others: for example accountability organisations that champion change in hiring, retention, and professional development.

2. PARTICIPATORY OBSERVATION

Observation of the Women's Breakfast hosted during the 2024 Annual Law Society of Kenya Conference, and participation in the 2024 Women on Boards Conference.

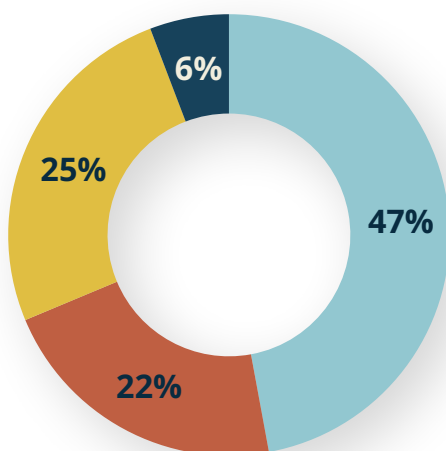
3. SURVEY

A questionnaire circulated through various lawyers' groupings. Fifty-one lawyers participated in the survey. Details of age, gender and career stage are detailed in charts below.



CHART 1: SURVEY PARTICIPANT AGES

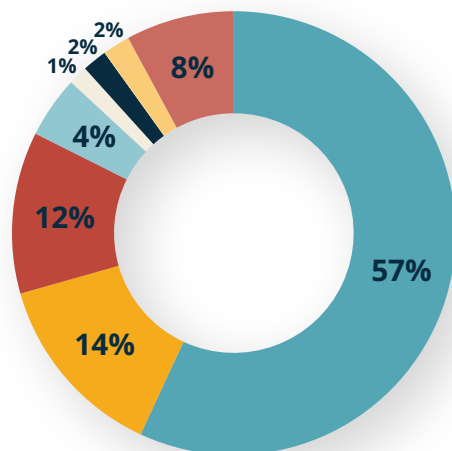
Under 35 35-45 46-55 66-75 Over 75



Number of participants: 51

CHART 2: SPHERE OF LEGAL PRACTICE

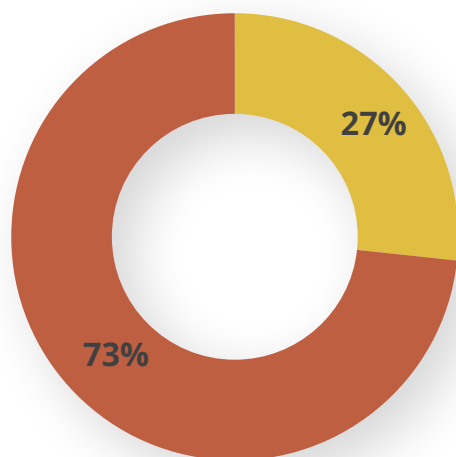
Legal practitioner Public Service Corporate Bench
Research & Consultancy Lawmaking Civil Society Other



Number of participants: 51

CHART 3A: CAREER LEVEL – LAW FIRM

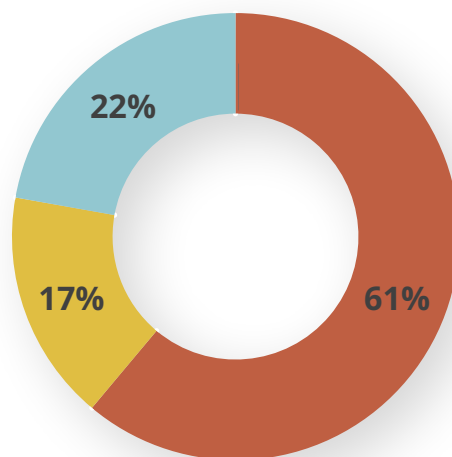
Partner Associate



Number of participants: 51

CHART 3B: CAREER LEVEL – OTHER SPHERES

Entry Mid Senior



Number of participants: 51

4. WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE

At the end of the research fifty participants representing different spheres of the legal profession attended a roundtable to review the research findings and provide further insights.

*All respondents participated voluntarily and all references to respondents have been anonymised through coding.

4 Summary of Findings



4.1 Profile of Women in Leadership in Law in Kenya

Significant strides have been made in recruiting women to leadership positions in law in Kenya. Most of the top leadership roles within critical institutions in Kenya's law and justice sector are currently occupied by women (see Table 4.1.1)

TABLE 4.1.1: LEADERSHIP IN THE CORE LEGAL INSTITUTIONS

	INSTITUTION	LEADERSHIP POSITION
1	Judiciary	Hon. Lady Justice Martha Koome, Chief Justice of Kenya Hon. Lady Justice Philomena Mwilu, Deputy Chief Justice Hon. Winfridah Mokaya, Chief Registrar of the Judiciary
2	Office of the Attorney General	Hon. Dorcas Oduor, Attorney General
3	Law Society of Kenya	Ms Faith Odhiambo, President
4	Chartered Institute of Arbitrators (CIArb)	Jacqueline Waihenya, Chairperson



FEMNET/Co-Impact convening, July 2025.

While the Law Society of Kenya ushered in its second female President in 2024, analysis of prominent law firms reveals there are fewer consistent levels of female representation here (see Table 4.1.2). Out of the sixty-six Senior Counsels, only eleven (17%) are women. In high-profile cases, women are also less visible. For instance, during the 2022 presidential petition, only two women out of 88 top lawyers representing different parties involved in the seven consolidated petitions addressed the Supreme Court.

TABLE 4.1.2 PROPORTION OF FEMALE PARTNERS AND ASSOCIATES IN A SELECTION OF PROMINENT KENYAN LAW FIRMS

	FIRM	PERCENTAGE OF ASSOCIATES WHO ARE FEMALE	PERCENTAGE OF PARTNERS WHO ARE FEMALE
1	Kaplan & Stratton Advocates	70%	57%
2	Bowmans	60%	32%
3	Dentons Hamilton Harrison & Mathews	50%	21%
4	Anjarwalla & Khanna	64%	48%
5	Oraro & Company Advocates	55%	58%
6	CMS Daly Inamdar Advocates	65%	43%
7	ENSafrica	61%	22%
8	TripleOKlaw Advocates	36%	18%
9	MMC Asafo	71%	33%
10	Ashitiva	85%	63%
11	Munyao Muthama & Kashindi	73%	78%
12	Iseme Kamau & Maema Advocates	55%	56%

Meanwhile, the number of female deans of law faculties has been increasing steadily. In the seventeen public and private law faculties, six deans are female, and eleven are male. Furthermore, the number of female academics within individual law faculties is encouraging (see Table 4.1.3).

TABLE 4.1.3 WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN MANAGEMENT ROLES IN SELECT UNIVERSITY FACULTIES OF LAW

	INSTITUTION	LAW FACULTY MANAGEMENT	
		Male	Female
1	University of Nairobi	2	6
2	Egerton University	1	1
3	Catholic University of East Africa	2	5
4	Strathmore	3	3

However, significant, and deeper inequalities persist. Many female lawyers remain in junior positions, while men still hold most partner-level roles in private law firms (Table 4.1.2). At the University of Nairobi Faculty of Law—the largest in Kenya—women are also more likely to occupy lower-level posts (Table 4.1.4).

TABLE 4.1.4: DISTRIBUTION OF FEMALE ACADEMICS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI FACULTY OF LAW

	DESIGNATION	NO. OF FEMALE ACADEMICS
1	Professor	3
2	Associate Professor	2
3	Senior Lecturer	11
4	Lecturer	14
5	Tutorial Fellow	6

4.2 Barriers Impeding Women's Attainment and Retention of Leadership in Law

4.2.1 LEGAL AND POLICY BARRIERS

The constitutional imperative to ensure gender balance is absolutely necessary for optimal access to leadership for women. However, while appearing non-discriminatory, gender-neutral laws and policies fail to recognise gender nuances and can disadvantage women in their effects. Respondents in this study emphasised the inadequacy of laws and policies in acknowledging and responding to the unique needs of women. This often results in indirect discrimination or subjects women to undue hardships.

Respondents also emphasised that beyond legislation, implementation is critical. For instance, fourteen years after the promulgation of the

Constitution, the National Assembly is yet to meet the two-thirds rule (see Table 4.2.1).

Specific gender-related obstacles such as sexual harassment, insecurity and the masculine construction of leadership are major barriers to the progression of women into leadership roles. Sexual harassment was singled out as a major barrier leading to denial of opportunities for women who reject sexual advances and adverse psychological effects which impact performance.

Respondents reiterated the need for clear policies. They also noted that whilst the Sexual Offences Act⁸ and the Employment Act 2007⁹ provide a framework for addressing sexual harassment, systemic bottlenecks in the justice chain pose a challenge. Moreover, many victims are reluctant to pursue justice through the court system owing to societal pressures.

TABLE 4.2.1 COMPOSITION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

YEAR	FEMALE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT	MALE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT
2013	68 (19%)	281 (81%)
2017	76 (22%)	273 (78%)
2022	82 (23%)	267 (77%)

Source: IEBC records or National Assembly of Kenya

⁸ Section 23.

⁹ Section 6.

Physical violence was also identified as a significant barrier, particularly for women aspiring to political leadership. Violence deters many qualified women from pursuing political ambitions such as law-making. Respondents observed that, while the Elections Act 2011 requires duty-bearers to prevent and refrain from violence¹⁰, these ideals are yet to be realised.

4.2.2 INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

Additional barriers embedded within institutional frameworks and operating at different levels limit the possibility for progression for women in law. Respondents highlighted the following barriers:

1. Gender-blind or ambiguous appraisal mechanisms, for instance annual targets that do not factor in maternity leave or appraisal mechanisms that require extraneous input such as lobbying.
2. Rigid, inconvenient working hours that are in conflict with caretaking obligations.
3. Weak induction mechanisms.
4. Lack of intentional and effective information sharing on career progression.
5. Lack of targeted and gender-intentional capacity building strategies.
6. Sexual harassment and hostile work environments.

“Lack of proper key performance indicators and other structures in a small law firm makes you a slave to the partners' moods and whims.”
Study respondent

“In the early stages of my career, organisational policies were not gendered. For example, promotion policy requiring certain courses meant that if a staff member was on maternity when the course was offered, it meant they lost out on the promotion...”
Study respondent

¹⁰ Section 5(d); section 6(a)&(b); section 9.

4.2.3 SOCIAL BARRIERS

Women who are ascending to leadership roles are often disadvantaged by being subject to masculine standards. Patriarchal norms and standards underpinning institutions perpetuate enduring barriers. Barriers identified by respondents include:

“**Cameras are always rolling for female leaders.**”
Study respondent

1. Male and female stereotyping and perceptions of leadership as the preserve of men.
2. Masculine construction of leadership and the suppression of “feminine” attributes.
3. Masculine framing of the legal profession.
4. Culture of female deference to men in the private and public realms impacting women’s capacity to be seen as a leader.
5. Caretaking obligations and work-life balance that disproportionately affect women in the workplace.
6. Limitations in strategic networking and access to decision-making spaces for women in law.
7. Intersectional discrimination, for example, being a woman with a disability, a woman with low social status, a single woman, a young woman, or a Muslim woman, creates overlapping barriers that hinder progress into leadership roles.

“**We are getting women into leadership within the mould of male leadership. Norms of leadership remain unchallenged. We have not carved out space for ourselves. There is no appreciation of values that women bring to leadership.**”
Study respondent

Typically, men are gifted with loud voices. Some clients think good representation has to do with sound and aggression as opposed to the content.”

Study respondent

When opportunities arise that align with your qualifications, it's essential to have people who will advocate for you, even in your absence ... And when in leadership, one needs people who will support you.”

Study respondent

There is inadequate support for women in top leadership... The equivalent of ‘boys’ club’ is non-existent.”

Study respondent

Being a woman with a disability, people had low expectations of me. My good performance came as a shock.”

Study respondent

My predecessor was light-skinned – I was body shamed because of my dark skin tone. I also had to contend with ethnic labelling.”

Study respondent



4.2.4 ECONOMIC BARRIERS

Women's career growth is often hampered by the lack of resources necessary to pursue deeper skills and knowledge or to strengthen strategic networks. Respondents outlined two fundamental ways that economic challenges hinder them:

1. Limited access to leadership and technical training because of their cost.
2. Limited access to strategic networks.

“One needs to engage in strategic activities such as golfing, joining members' clubs, etc., to build strategic networks. For many of us, those sorts of activities are beyond our reach.”

Study respondent

4.2.5 INTERNAL BARRIERS

Barriers that are self-imposed also play a role in the patriarchal socialisation of women. In fact, the term 'self-imposed' barriers is an oxymoron, as women's perception of themselves is shaped by the social construction of gender. Self-limiting beliefs exclude women from existing opportunities. This takes different forms including:

1. Reluctance to pursue greater opportunities.

Women are often reluctant to pursue opportunities which they may perceive as unreachable. Comparing the number of women and the number of men vying for political positions illustrates this. Table 4.2.2 details data on the number of women taking part in political elections between 2014 and 2023. In total, 617 women were gazetted to run for political positions as Governor, Senator, Member of the National Assembly or Woman Rep in 2023. While this number is a significant increase from previous years we have data for, it does not reflect the large numbers of female graduates in the country who are eligible to serve in political positions.

2. Imposter syndrome and self-doubt.

Patriarchal socialisation and subordination of women over time has entrenched self-doubt. While the normalisation of female leadership is gradually lessening this barrier, it insidiously limits some women from pursuing their full potential. This caution can, at times, constrain decision-making and limit effectiveness.

“Women tend to pursue opportunities that are seen to be less technical, in the fear that they may not excel in more technical engagements. For instance, women in ADR shy away from technical matters like construction arbitration and settle for family matters.”

Study respondent

5 Gender-Intentional Interventions that Accelerate and Sustain Women in Leadership



It is not all gloom, despite the significant barriers for women in leadership in law. Some private and public institutions have put in place interventions that help the recruitment, promotion and thriving of female lawyers. This study identified the following policies as enablers for women's leadership in the workplace

These interventions mitigate the barriers discussed above. They also help keep women on the career progression ladder. They target legal and policy frameworks, the operational framework of the institutions, female lawyers themselves, and society as a whole.

5.1 Legal and Policy Interventions

There are several laws and policies that set minimum standards for institutions in relation to gender equity. They range from constitutional and statutory to policy imperatives.

The Constitution is the foundation on which women lawyers can build their leadership and thrive. Article 27 (8) provides that not more than two-thirds of the members of elective or appointive bodies should be of the same gender. In addition, Article 250 (11) provides that the chairperson and vice-chairperson of a commission shall not be of the same gender. These provisions are useful in the upward mobility of women lawyers, especially those in the public service. There are many statutory and policy provisions with similar intentions and outcomes. Some are specific to women. Others apply to both men and women but are especially useful to women as they navigate through intersectional circumstances such as disability laws and policies. Some are stand-alone policies, while others are incorporated into human resource policies.

- The Constitution
- Employment Act
- Disability Act
- gender policy
- recruitment policy
- anti gender-based violence and sexual harassment policy
- flexitime policy
- telecommuting policy
- job-sharing policy
- equal work for equal pay policy
- childcare policy
- mentorship and sponsorship policy
- commission and award policy
- sexual harassment policy
- whistle-blowing policy
- gender diversity policy
- gender budgeting policy (to ensure special circumstances that affect women are taken into consideration during budgeting at the beginning of the year)
- gender mainstreaming policy
- transfer policy
- menopause policy (to demystify it and provide counselling for the impacted workforce)
- disability policy



Though they are of no impact until life is breathed into them through implementation, laws and policies are a good starting point.”

Study respondent

5.2 Institutional and Operational Strategies

Institutions rely on the practices, traditions and initiatives at the workplace for operational effectiveness. They are easy to overlook but can yield high-impact results when implemented thoughtfully. There are institutions that have incorporated women friendly approaches in their institutional operations and have created a conducive environment for the hiring, promotion, thriving and visibility of women lawyers in various spheres. These operational strategies include the following:

1. Some institutions have mainstreamed gender considerations in their strategic priorities, action plan, activities, budget and monitoring and evaluation. This ensures that women are not overlooked in recruitment, promotion or training.
2. Setting gender quotas during recruitment and including gender inclusion in the shortlisting stage both increase the chances of recruiting women.
3. Identifying women with leadership potential at an early stage can assist them to attain the highest potential. For example, creating a personal development plan to progress to a leadership role and tasking managers with oversight responsibility for ensuring that the plan is activated through gender-sensitive development activities.
4. The establishment of family support arrangements in the office is an innovative operational approach to support women. Examples include the creation of nursery spaces at the workplace to enable nursing mothers to bring babies to the office; facilitating the attendance of babysitters during conferences and workshops; working half days (implementing flextime); and providing facilities such as a lactation room with refrigerators.
5. There are institutions that have successfully dealt with sexual harassment by establishing hotlines for reporting, and sanctioning failure to report sexual harassment witnessed against another person.
6. In some organisations, there are reward systems which identify and affirm those who excel in silence.
7. Some institutions intentionally assign women challenging roles to bring out their potential. For example a woman lawyer might be assigned to Constitutional and human rights divisions in the judiciary, or terrorism cases for the ODPP. This not only gives them the chance to excel but also enhances their visibility.



When an opportunity came for me to lead a team in the African region, I was pregnant with my last born. The woman in me thought I could not go when I was pregnant or after childbirth. My line manager, however, assured me, ‘We shall push the opportunity forward for you to have your baby in Kenya, but tell us when you think you will be ready to go.’ I said I would be ready to go in a year’s time. Their response was, ‘You can go with your baby, your nanny and if you wish, you can go with the whole family.’

Study respondent

5.3 Interventions to Enhance Agency, Facilitate Mentorship and Overcome Internal Barriers

Investing generously in initiatives that are targeted at individual women is a strategy which enhances the agency of women and brings clarity to their goals in their journey to self-actualisation. Example interventions include:

1. Establishment of a Women Leadership Academy for those with political ambition, including women lawyers. The topics covered in the academy include Party Politics, Finances and Technical issues like Election Disputes, Personal Branding, and use of media including social media.
2. Preparing shortlisted candidates for interviews with the Judicial Service Commission.
3. Organising annual members' retreat for women lawyers.
Offering female leaders coaching from culturally sensitive male lawyers to support them in male dominated environments such as:
4. Organising both organic and structured mentorship programs.;
5. Incorporating male champions in IAWJ;
6. Leveraging on the expertise and experience of retired Judges in mentorship and training of women Judges and magistrates.



Before going for an interview... a senior-ranking female government officer sat with me for four hours telling me, 'This is how it is going to look like; this is what you will need to learn to be successful.' I did not go in blindly."

Study respondent



A man advised me not to oversell the female card ... For example, as CEO, if you are responding to an issue of extra-judicial killing, you start crying. There is the accepted public image of what leadership looks like- decisive, commanding, knowledgeable, informed, prepared-which are more natural to men. Respond to what people are looking for in leadership."

Study respondent

5.4 Strategic Networking

60% of lawyers who participated in the survey attributed career advancement to strategic networking. Some institutions recognise that merit is not enough to propel and sustain one in a position of leadership. They utilise strategic networking platforms that offer opportunities for women lawyers to gain access to and thrive in leadership spaces.

Examples include:

- **Networking through associations of women lawyers.** Both the Principal Secretary and Cabinet Secretary for the relevant ministry were women. When they launched a national legal aid scheme, the female lawyers' database at the FIDA secretariat was an important resource for seeking suitable candidates. As a result the scheme launch was led by a female lawyer.
- **Networking at high profile conferences.** High-level national and international conferences offer spaces where women can experience professional visibility and gain confidence from the experience. Sponsoring them to attend events such as the LSK Conference and the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women is a concrete example of how strategic networking can be supported in organisations.
- **Collaboration with international partners.** Engaging in collaborations with international partners for fellowships to support research, supervision and pedagogical skills to accelerate the promotion of female faculty in the academy is another example of this kind of support for women in law.



FEMNET/Co-Impact convening, July 2025.



One needs to engage in strategic activities such as golfing, joining members' clubs, etc., to build strategic networks. For many of us, those sorts of activities are beyond our reach.”

Study respondent



FEMNET/Co-Impact convening, July 2025.

5.5 Social Interventions

Interventions that go beyond the professional to the social domain have been used to address the systemic barriers to women's attainment and ability to thrive in leadership roles. They can disrupt ingrained patriarchal norms both within and without the organisation. Examples include:

- In the public sector, there is a historical culture of the office being elevated above the occupant. Deference is given to the office, regardless of the gender of the person holding it. This may be a remnant of colonialism, but it is useful for women who occupy those offices, as deference to the office comes automatically. Unfortunately, this may not be the case in the private sector.
- Some organisations hold quarterly gender sensitisation training sessions for the entire institution to create awareness around gender dynamics at the workplace.
- 15th October is an Annual Gender Awareness Day (15th October) in some institutions and it is often compulsory for all students and staff to attend and discuss various gender issues in the institutions.
- Giving women the opportunity to serve in challenging departments or divisions instead of "safe" places can have the effect of changing mindsets around gender roles and women's abilities.

5.6 Economic Interventions

These are interventions made by institutions to support women, who often are paid less than men and have to balance their paid work and their unpaid caregiving roles at home. The interventions include:

- Subsidising the expenses of female lawyers to enable them to attend external training and conferences organised by professional bodies.
- Sponsoring monthly breakfast sessions and book clubs for women where the more experienced offer mentorship.

6 Recommended Practices and Areas of Improvement



Despite the promising interventions outlined above, the work terrain for women in law remains uneven. Improvement cannot be left to chance. The strategic recommendations that follow offer improvements to the institutional, societal, and personal environment for women lawyers to enable them to access, attain and thrive in positions of impact and influence.

Contextual considerations:

- This study considers impact, visibility and the extent to which women lawyers become opinion shapers in discourses around their work areas alongside numbers of positions.
- It is impossible to focus on institutions without interrogating the individual agency of the women who constitute them. Some strategies, while appearing to target individual women, will also ultimately impact the institutions.
- The proposed interventions are multidisciplinary. The barriers to women's leadership are steeped in a long history of patriarchal mindsets, practices, and norms that are not limited to or by the letter of the law.

6.1 Strengthening the Policy Framework

Institutions need to have well-developed gender-sensitive policies in place to address the complex issues that affect women lawyers in the workplace. This prevents tokenistic responses. Policy interventions are needed both in workplaces and at the Law Society of Kenya. Priority should be given to the following policies:

- flexitime
- telecommuting
- job sharing
- equal work for equal pay
- childcare
- mentorship and sponsorship
- commission and award
- sexual harassment whistle-blowing
- gender diversity
- menopause policy

Stakeholder engagement and awareness-raising about the content of policies should also be a priority. Effective monitoring and evaluation tools are also needed to ensure that policies do not gather dust on the shelves unused. Regular audits will also help to identify policies that require amendment or updating.



For example, some respondents suggested amending the Judiciary Transfer Policy to include zoning the country and restricting transfers within the zones to support women with family commitments.

Technology can help with the implementation of most of these policies. For example, remote working and virtual courts enable women to work from home, supporting their work-life balance as they progress in their careers.



It is important to grow the profiles of individual women leaders in law around whom excitement can arise and spread to the general public."

Study respondent

6.2 Countering Societal Barriers

Women leaders, whether in the judiciary, academia or the Law Society of Kenya, confront gender stereotyping daily. The interventions highlighted below are designed to normalise women's leadership in the legal field and to highlight women's professional capability:

INVESTING IN CURRENT WOMEN LEGAL LEADERS

This can be achieved by improving the spaces already occupied and led by women and enhancing their visibility as hard-working, impactful, capable leaders. For instance, supporting the success of the women currently leading in the judiciary with more resources.

CROSS-FERTILISATION

Building links between female lawyers with different knowledge and skills, cross-fertilising and sharing knowledge and skills to enhance everyone's performance. This is a more productive approach than pointing fingers. For instance, those in academia can research issues that would improve visibility for women in the judiciary, or track and document jurisprudential impact for women judges. This will be to the benefit of all women in law.

TELLING OUR STORY

This study has revealed undocumented stories of success by pioneer women lawyers who have made their own path to the top. There is a wealth of knowledge and experience held by elders. It would be helpful for women in law to document and tell their own stories for posterity in order to promote and normalise female leadership. Social media, journal articles, newsletters, and "coffee table books" for the judiciary and Law Society of Kenya are all spaces where stories could be told.

CATCH THEM YOUNG

Demystifying female leadership and influencing the mindset of potential lawyers when they are young will have a big impact. This can be achieved through initiatives that target high schools and law faculties.



In school, we used to be told, "You are the brightest girls in the country, and you are the ones who will run this country."

Study respondent



FEMNET/Co-Impact convening, July 2025.

USE OF MEDIA

Using media to disseminate empowering messaging is not new for Kenya. For example, positive messaging about girl children. Sharing messaging about Women leaders in law in the media can help change the narrative. For example, profiles on the Chief Justice or the Attorney General.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Countering societal barriers cannot fully succeed without some degree of direct engagement with society. This is especially critical for areas where women's leadership is still culturally frowned upon, like in coastal parts of Kenya. The engagement here can be led by Muslim female lawyers in conjunction with religious leaders and the Kadhis.

6.3 Responding to Financial Vulnerability

Financial support is an important intervention to support more women in

law to become leaders. For example, academic fellowships for women will enable them to spend time on research and publications which will enhance their professional standing. In the commercial sector, sponsorship is an important intervention that can support women. For example, law firms should offer sponsorship for annual conferences, CPD and short courses.

6.4 Enhancing Strategic Networking Skills

Women need support to develop strategic networking skills that can enable and sustain upward mobility in their career. This support can come from organisations and from women who are already in leadership roles.

They include:

ENHANCING VISIBILITY

For example, facilitating the membership of women lawyers to key organisations and clubs.



I was a beneficiary of women already inside opening doors for others. We met in the washrooms, and they said, 'You need to apply. ... Men do it for each other all the time. ... The 'boys' club'."

Study respondent

HOLDING THE LADDER

Affirmative action and adherence to the "two thirds rule" can help women who already hold positions of influence to be assertive in advocating for other deserving and competent women to get leadership roles.

CREATE A MULTIDISCIPLINARY COMMUNITY OF FEMALE LAWYERS

There are several women caucuses for women lawyers. For example, Women on Boards Network (WOBN), Women in ADR, Women Lawyers in Finance, Muslim Women Association, and Motherhood and Law. Communities of this kind should be encouraged where none exists. For example, a caucus for female law students, Women in the Law School of Kenya Council, and Women in the Office of the Directorate of Public Prosecution (ODPP). These caucuses are important for more collective impact.

INTER-GENERATIONAL DIALOGUE, NETWORKS AND MENTORSHIP

This is important for the sustainability of women's leadership as it facilitates the creation of a "staircase" of leaders. It will also respond to a growing generation gap and equip women lawyers to counter patriarchy across generations.

BASELINE SURVEY

It is easy for older women lawyers to assume they know the concerns, needs, interests, challenges and aspirations of their younger counterparts. A baseline survey will help to establish factual evidence of needs and would be useful in informing the content of future training.



I took my CPS course immediately after admission due to mentorship by my seniors and therefore, I hold the requisite experience to hold the senior positions in any organisation that I choose to serve."

Study respondent





Establishing transparent criteria for promotion, allowing rotation to give experience in different areas of law and leadership ... and fair and objective performance evaluations would enhance women's ascension to leadership."

Study respondent

6.5 Strengthening Institutional Practices

Improved institutional practices will have a tangible impact on improving the working environment for women in law. They include putting in place:

- Performance measurements mechanisms.
- Joint and separate gender onboarding sessions.
- Strategic planning that centres gender issues and policies.
- Transparent awards system.
- Physical facilities that acknowledge the needs of women during pregnancy, menstruation and menopause.



6.6 Strengthening Agency Through Training and Mentorship

These are strategies that institutions can invest in to enhance women's agency and assist them in self-actualisation. They include:

TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

This may be carried out within the institutions or externally but facilitated by the institutions. Possible training modules may include:

- personal branding
- A to Z of leadership
- career and life skills
- unleashing potential
- using networking skills
- dealing with spouses and other domestic issues
- judgment writing
- emotional intelligence
- soft skills
- responding to social media trolling



A CEO in a human rights NGO was one of my mentors. When I was in FIDA, they would call me and ask, 'Why haven't you spoken up?' or 'I watched you on TV, why were you fidgeting?'

Study respondent



We need a 'Bad Girl's Curriculum' where women are told it is okay to be assertive ... We need to deconstruct."

Study respondent

FORMALISING AND OPERATIONALISING PEER REVIEW IN JUDICIARY

Women judges and magistrates need safe spaces to question themselves and deal with their weaknesses without fear of sanction. The environment of their peers is one such space. For example, this could be facilitated through the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ).

MAINSTREAMING GENDER-RELATED TRAINING

This could be hosted in the Kenya Judicial Academy with IAWJ being used as the incubation centre.

SUPPORTING MENTORSHIP INITIATIVES

Mentoring is critical among female lawyers. Many female lawyers in leadership roles credit their rise to being mentored by other women. Mentorship should be embraced and supported at the institutional level regardless of the form, whether structured or spontaneous. It should, however, be authentic, organic, relational and devoid of familiarity gaps in terms of cadre status or social background.



7 Conclusion



This study has mapped out the status of women in leadership within Kenya's legal profession. It highlights the barriers they encounter and the interventions that could aid their recruitment, promotion, and professional success in private and public sectors. The study has revealed the need for strategies at the institutional, societal and personal level, to enable women lawyers to access, thrive, and advance into roles of significance and influence. The proposed interventions target both institutional and societal levels.

The interventions at the institutional level include strengthening policy frameworks; addressing the financial vulnerabilities of women by sponsoring activities that will support their career progression; facilitating networking opportunities; mainstreaming gender sensitive practices and embedding mentorship and training programs that will enhance women's agency. The study has also found that female lawyers navigate for space, leadership and visibility in a patriarchal society and this cannot be ignored. Further strategies are recommended to normalise women's leadership in the legal field and to profile the capability of women lawyers who are already in positions of leadership.

There is still a need for continuing research to enrich the dialogue surrounding women in leadership in law. In particular:

- I. The evolving nature of patriarchy and its modern expressions that may impede the advancement of young women lawyers;
- II. A comprehensive baseline survey to assess the experiences, concerns, needs, interests, challenges, and aspirations of young lawyers, law students, and aspiring lawyers (from Generation Z and younger). This will ensure that interventions for this demographic are grounded in evidence and are thereby relevant.



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