

Gender and Citizenship at the Grassroots: Assessing the Effect of NGO Initiatives in Social Mobilization and Political Empowerment in Kenya and Bangladesh

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Introduction

This article assesses the impact that social mobilization/political empowerment¹ initiatives led by NGOs have had on the gender dynamics of every-day expression of citizenship at community level in Kenya and Bangladesh. Dominant discourses on gender and citizenship have tended to focus on structural constraints on women's exercise of citizenship rights, as manifested in laws, policies and design of public institutions. Without denying the reality of these structural constraints, this article seeks to make visible the role of agency in the construction of citizenship: the micro-level day-to-day expressions of citizenship, the influence of NGO-led social mobilization/political empowerment initiatives in cultivating that agency, and the gender dynamics that are implicated in day-to-day expressions of citizenship.

This article builds on earlier writings based on two micro-level studies in Kenya and Bangladesh². In both Kenya and Bangladesh, there has been significant investment primarily by NGOs³ in social mobilization/political empowerment of people at the grassroots level. Both micro-level studies tracked down people at the grassroots level who have taken part in NGO-initiated social mobilization/political empowerment, in order to assess the degree to which those initiatives could be said to have contributed to democratization through the

¹ Throughout this article we will use the two terms, social mobilization and political empowerment together. 'Social mobilization' is the preferred term in Bangladesh for what NGOs do in helping local groups/associations to organize around social, political and economic activities that benefit members and the communities in which they live. The preferred term in Kenya is 'political empowerment', due to the history of the initiatives discussed here. A majority of them were initiated in the context of countering the pervasive one-party state as it manifested itself at the grassroots level, and therefore the political dimension was given prominence, although as will be evident from the discussion that follows, the impact of the initiatives goes beyond political empowerment narrowly defined.

² See Musembi (2010); Kabeer & Mahmud (2010). The studies were undertaken under the auspices of the Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability, as part of a broader Working Group on Deepening Democracy. Although the two studies were separate and distinct, the survey questionnaires were developed in close consultation so as to ensure as much scope for subsequent comparison as possible.

³ The Bangladesh data relates exclusively to NGO programs. In the Kenya data all except one of the sixteen organizations are NGOs. The exception is the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission's program for training community paralegal workers. See list in Annex 1. All of the NGOs listed work in the human rights and governance sub-sector.

shaping of ‘active citizens’ at the grassroots level. The data in both country studies yielded a mixed picture, but was on the whole positive about the contribution of these NGO initiatives to the shaping of active citizenship at the grassroots level.

It was in the course of analysing the data for these earlier writings that the idea of zooming in on the gender dimensions of the data was born. In both contexts it occurred to us, upon disaggregating the data by gender, that there was a story to be told about the gender dynamics of day-to-day expression of citizenship in spaces that are not the usual site for debates on gender and citizenship. This article tells that story from two angles simultaneously by investigating:

- 1) whether women who have participated in these NGO initiatives in social mobilization/political empowerment display more active citizenship than women who have not⁴; and
- 2) how men and women who have participated in these initiatives compare (in other words, have these initiatives had the effect of closing the gender gap in the exercise of active citizenship at the grassroots level?)

We then interrogate why it is that social mobilization/political empowerment initiatives have had the effect of closing the gender gap in some areas and not in others.

Background note on methodology

Both sets of data are based on surveys. The Bangladesh survey covered 600 respondents linked to the initiatives of two organizations: Samata and Nijera Kori. The balance between ‘long-duration’ and ‘short-duration’ participants is as shown in Table 1 below. The two organizations are described briefly in Annex 1.

The Kenya data covers 500 respondents, who are split into two categories of 250 each: those who have participated in NGO initiatives for social mobilization/political empowerment (participants) and those who have not (non-participants). Selection of the ‘participants’ drew from men and women cutting across the initiatives of sixteen organizations listed in Annex 1.⁵ The Kenya data are not presented so as to show a

⁴ In the case of Kenya, the comparison is between female participants and female non-participants. In the case of Bangladesh, the comparison is between women who are long-duration members of groups mobilized through NGO initiatives (long-duration female participants) and women who are short-duration members (short-duration female participants).

⁵ The non-participants were selected as follows: after purposively selecting the participants, whom we identified through the records of the NGOs, we targeted people who could be considered ‘peers’ of the participants in terms of age, gender, income and educational level. In each of the ten districts covered by the survey, we drew the non-participants from the same geographical locality as the participants. So for instance, if we interviewed a school teacher who was trained as a community paralegal worker we would find another school teacher in the locality who was not trained, to join the non-participants group. This enables us to

comparison among the different NGOs; it simply compares participants with non-participants. The Bangladesh data on the other hand, makes comparison between long-duration and short-duration participants, and also notes comparison across the two organizations represented. Thus, the make-up of the Bangladesh respondents breaks down as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Survey Sample: Bangladesh

Name of Organization	Number of Participants			
	Short-duration		Long-duration	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Samata	50	50	100	100
Nijera Kori	40	60	100	100

The socio-economic profiles of respondents for both Bangladesh and Kenya are presented in Annexes 2 and 3 respectively. In general, long-duration participants were generally older than short-duration participants (Bangladesh). There is a mean age gap of 10 years between short-duration and long-duration participants in the Bangladesh data. Overall, long-duration participants are less educated than short-duration participants. Among the Kenyan respondents, female participants register the highest numbers for completion of secondary school, but male participants come out ahead for attainment of tertiary or university education. In terms of income, female non-participants record the highest number earning below \$50 per month, while male participants record the greatest representation in the category earning above \$125 per month, although income levels in general are low.

In this analysis we assume that a statistically significant difference in the percentage of 'long-duration' and 'short-duration' participants (in the case of Bangladesh), or in 'participants' and 'non-participants' (in the case of Kenya) reporting positively on an indicator (say, voted in the last election or ever participated in a protest) shows that the social mobilization/political empowerment programmes have had an impact on a specific outcome of interest.

We are of course aware that impact attribution in the social sciences is methodologically fraught since causality is seldom unidirectional or even linear. In addition, we are relying, for purposes of this article, on straightforward comparisons between long-duration and short-

minimize to a degree, the significance of other differentiating factors (gender, age, income and level of education) other than the key variable, namely the fact of having participated in social mobilization/political empowerment initiatives.

duration participants (Bangladesh) or between participants and non-participants (Kenya), without controlling for possible background differences (age, education, economic status) that might contribute to reported differences in the outcomes we are observing.

Gender and citizenship

Citizenship is a deeply gendered concept. Defining 'citizen' and 'citizen action' has historically carried connotations on gender roles and gendered spaces. Different theoretical strands of feminist critique of the concept of citizenship converge around a critique of the public-private demarcation that pervades the discourse of citizenship. The divide between public and private is an arbitrary one and can take many different forms, but the one that feminist critics of the concept of citizenship are most concerned about is the 'patriarchal' one that marks off a 'domestic' sphere that is separate and distinct from the rest of political, social and economic life (Lister 2003: 119)⁶.

In the two dominant conceptions of citizenship, namely the liberal conception of citizenship as a status or right, and the civic republican notion of citizenship as duty, emphasis is placed on the public sphere interaction between an abstracted individual – 'citizen'- and the state. In the classical liberal conception, the state's obligation to uphold the citizen's rights is largely confined to the public sphere, the legitimacy of state action in the private sphere of domestic relations being heavily contested. Feminist critiques draw attention to pervasive unequal gender relations in the private sphere and therefore take issue with a conception of citizenship that excludes experiences in the private sphere. Full and equal citizenship for women therefore depends, according to this view, on full inclusion in political processes and in economic activity, the latter being important for accessing social citizenship rights, which necessitates fundamental restructuring of the private sphere, specifically the division of labour (Lister 2003: 138).

The civic republican tradition historically conceives of citizenship as active engagement in political or civic affairs, and therefore tends to construct the citizen as political actor, and to define the public sphere narrowly so as to put a premium on *formal* political participation. Therefore feminist critics influenced by this tradition decry the devaluing of 'citizen action' in the private (read domestic) sphere, and insist that the work that women do in the private sphere (such as 'care work'- Bubeck 1995) should count as 'citizen action'; as a valid contribution to the polity- to the construction of citizenship.

This article seeks to advance this debate by drawing attention to two shortcomings in the framing of the debate. First, the literature focuses exclusively on the patriarchal divide between private and public and fails to see how the patriarchal divide overlaps with other permutations of the public-private divide so as to deepen the gendered construction of

⁶ The 'patriarchal' demarcation between public and private differs from other demarcations, such as that between state (public) and market (private), or between state (public) and religion (private). Lister 2003.

spaces as public or private. One such permutation is the boundary between formal and informal with respect to politics. A narrow civic republican conception of citizen political action will often focus on formal political processes and overlook day-to-day localized political action that tends to be less visible to macro-level analyses. This translates into excluding the experiences of a majority of women because women 'have tended to practice politics on the local stage' (Lister 2003: 29). As Lister points out, there are very few writings in the civic republican tradition that treat as 'citizen political action' localized activities such as collective action and 'self-help' (Lister 2003: 26-30).

The empirical data from these two studies therefore form a significant contribution because they take the debate on gender and citizenship beyond the usual figures on formal political representation of women which mean little for the majority of women. Rather, this article presents figures on gender dynamics of local-level day-to-day citizen political engagement broadly conceived. Further, beyond the handful of writings that seek recognition of 'self-help' activities as citizen political action, this article pushes civic republicanism's rigid boundary by focusing concretely on the gendered dynamics of engagement with and participation in institutional spaces at the local level which are often at the intersection of formal and informal politics.

The second shortcoming in the framing of the gender and citizenship debate that this article draws attention to is the artificially abrupt disjuncture between private (in the sense of domestic) space and public (in the sense of formal politics and formal paid work) space, as if there were no intermediate spaces in between. Much of associational life at the grassroots level falls within such an intermediate space: informal employment, religious institutions, institutions that consolidate and enforce custom, and informally organized community-based groups. In developing country contexts this intermediate sphere is second only to family in the degree to which it mediates people's experience of citizenship, with the gendered outcomes that attend such mediation. It is this intermediate sphere, rather than the sphere of formal politics and formal paid work that has the most influence on the lives of the majority of women.

This article therefore analyses the gender dynamics of the expression of citizenship in everyday life by examining the ways in which women and men participate in these intermediate spaces, how they engage with local-level institutions cross-cutting formal and informal, and whether having had exposure to NGO-led social mobilization/political empowerment initiatives makes a difference to one's ability to engage effectively.

Why 'Citizenship'?

The question may be asked: 'why use the lens of citizenship in contexts where, in the first place, it is not the language in which people speak of their day-to-day experiences? Specifically, why apply the lens of citizenship to a social group (i.e. women) that is both formally and substantively excluded by this very same legal construct?

We choose to apply the lens of citizenship for four reasons. First, even where people do not “speak the language of citizenship in their everyday lives” (Lister 2003:5), the state is implicated in all manifestations of authority- public or private- in their lives, and therefore the lens of citizenship still expresses the ideal of their relationship to that entity. Therefore, whether or not the NGOs whose initiatives we refer to here expressly say so or not, they are working within the paradigm of ‘active citizenship’. Their interventions are about getting people to exercise their agency by knowing and claiming their rights and, facilitating rights-claiming by others in order to hold the state and other powerful social actors to account. In Foweraker’s terminology, they are facilitating a shift from ‘political dependants’ to ‘political citizens’, by helping people translate petitions into demands and favours into rights (Foweraker 1995:92). It is therefore appropriate to apply the citizenship prism in evaluating the impact of these NGO interventions at the grassroots level: whether these initiatives have succeeded in shaping an active citizenship at the grassroots level, and in what ways that impact is gendered.

Second, while literature on gender and citizenship emphasizes that the dominant traditions in analysing citizenship are defined by silence around the value of the work that women do in the domestic sphere, this paper observes that a similar silence is found also in regard to that amorphous intermediate sphere known as ‘community’ or ‘community life’. Casting this study in terms of citizenship therefore performs an important symbolic function of drawing attention to the gender-differentiated terms of engagement in ‘community life’. It profiles the value of women’s contribution in this sphere, particularly in short-duration and emerging roles such as decision-making in community-based dispute resolution, which, like domestic work, risk being ‘normalized’ into official and analytical insignificance or outright invisibility.

Third, both Kenya and Bangladesh have witnessed vibrant struggles for recognition and implementation of full citizenship rights (equality) for women. However, writings about these struggles have tended to dwell on national level struggles, such as mobilization for constitutional and formal legal change. Neither the writings nor indeed the struggles themselves have done enough to acknowledge the contribution of grassroots/ micro-level mobilizations for women’s full citizenship (Nyamu, 1999; Nazneen et al 2010; Chari-Wagh 2009; Therefore to speak of women’s grassroots level participation/mobilization as ‘citizenship’ signals the importance of that linkage between local social mobilization/political empowerment efforts and national level legal and institutional reforms in the construction of women’s active citizenship. At a conceptual level it also challenges a narrow classical civic republican notion of citizenship that makes informal localized political action invisible by withholding the badge of ‘citizen action’ from it (Lister 2003:30-31).

Fourth, by focusing on the activities of women and men at the grassroots level in formal political processes as well as community life, we are zooming in on the centrality of agency in shaping citizenship. This is an important counterweight to the overwhelming emphasis-

in the gender and citizenship literature- on structural constraints on women's citizenship as expressed in laws, policies and the design of public institutions. Our choice to examine micro-level expression of agency is not to deny the existence of these structural limitations to women's citizenship; it is simply to acknowledge that these structural limitations do not completely obliterate agency (Lister 2003:6).

Findings

Does participation by women in social mobilization/political empowerment programs increase their chances of being 'active citizens'? How do male and female participants compare: have the NGO programs had the effect of closing the gender gap in the exercise of active citizenship at the grassroots level?

In order to respond to these questions, we first need to spell out outcomes that characterize 'active citizenship', and indicators for those outcomes. We developed three outcomes based on an adaptation of Archon Fung's (2003) list of contributions that associations make to the democratization process:⁷

- a) Outcome 1: manifest civic virtue and political skills;
- b) Outcome 2: predisposed to challenge abuse of power;
- c) Outcome 3: predisposed to use institutional channels in engagement with the state

We have organised discussion of the data according to these three outcomes.

Outcome 1: Manifest Civic Virtue and Political Skill

Among the contributions that Archon Fung identifies as emerging from the literature on the contribution of civil associations to democracy is the fostering of civic virtue and political skill. Taking the shaping of active citizenship as an aspect of the democratization process, we group a range of activities together as indicators for measuring this outcome. The spectrum of activities ranges from the most formal and highly visible manifestation to the least formal. We have classified these activities into three categories of indicators, namely: formal political participation, being active in 'community informal life', and being active in 'community public life'⁸. For formal political participation we clustered together activities

⁷ Based on a survey of the literature, Archon Fung identifies six contributions that associations make to democracy, among them, fostering civic virtues and teaching political skills; Offering resistance to power and checking government; Improving the quality and equality of representation of interests; and Creating opportunities for citizens and groups to participate directly in governance. The three broad outcomes that we use in this assessment draw from the first and second, and a combination of the last two. See Fung 2003.

⁸We have split community-level citizen action into two categories, namely, community informal life and community public life. The distinguishing feature is degree of proximity to formal public structures, so that

relating to participation in formal electoral processes, namely voter registration, actual voting, political party membership and leadership, and campaigning. For community informal life we clustered together activities that relate to serving fellow community members with the aim or effect of facilitating their interaction with government officials and other powerful social actors. For community public life we clustered together public service activities that are more visible as they require the respondents' direct involvement in institutional spaces, often in a leadership capacity.

Overall both men and women who have participated in political empowerment/ social mobilisation programs at the grassroots level score very well on the indicators for civic virtue and political skills. In Kenya, participants are well ahead of non-participants. In Bangladesh long-duration participants generally scored higher than short-duration participants.

Tables 1:1 and 1:2 present the data.

Table 1:1 Manifest civic virtue and political skill: Bangladesh

Indicator (% of 'yes' responses)	Samata				Nijera Kori			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	Long- duratio n	Short- duratio n	Long- duratio n	Short- duratio n	Long- duratio n	Short- duratio n	Long- duratio n	Short- duratio n
1. For mal Politi cal Parti cipat ion								
1(a) registered to vote (all HH	94 ²	86	100 ¹	82	96 ²	85	87	83

service on public committees and arbitration of disputes will fall into community public life, but giving advise to community members on how to access services, or exercising leadership in a religious organization will fall within community informal life.

members)									
1(b) voted last national elections	93	72	95 ¹	66	96	68	95 ¹	70	
1(c) own decision to vote	40	38	33 ¹	6	33	43	33	23	
1(d) campaigned in local elections	61 ²	46	30 ¹	12	59 ²	40	25 ¹	12	
2. Active in community informal life									
2(a) accompanied others for service	65	46	57 ¹	38	55 ²	38	34	27	
2(b) others come for advice	90	62	94 ¹	60	77	48	73	60	
2(c) provide info on public services	86	72	91 ¹	60	59	40	51	37	
3. Active in community public life									
3(a) Member of village 'shalish' (active in dispute arbitration)	55 ²	26	27 ¹	4	62 ²	45	19 ¹	5	

3(b) Has actually conducted 'shalish'	30 ²	10	13 ¹	0	33 ²	18	11	5	
3(c) Served in public committees	19	8	11 ¹	2	41 ²	10	18 ¹	5	

Note: 1=difference between 'long-duration' and 'short-duration' female respondents is statistically significant;

2= difference between 'long-duration' female and 'long-duration' male respondents is statistically significant

Table1:2 Manifest civic virtue and political skill: Kenya

Indicator (percentage of 'yes' responses)				
	Men		Women	
	Participants	Non-participants	Participants	Non-participants
1. Formal political participation				
1 (a) registered to vote	100	93	99	92
1(b) voted in last general election	90	82	86	79
1(c) Active in political party	30	24	26	18
1(d) holds leadership position in political party	14	9	10	8
2. Active in Community Informal Life				
2(a) has accompanied people to gov office to assist them	93	65	88* ¹	50* ¹
2(b) has advised people on how	95	63	93* ¹	53* ¹

to access gov services				
2(c) has drafted letters for people needing assistance	80	44	77* ¹	36* ¹
2(d) has served as leader of clan/kinship group	45	17	40* ¹	18* ¹
2(e) has served as leader in church/religious group	64	50	64* ¹	44* ¹
3. Active in Community Public Life				
3 (a)active in dispute arbitration	89	56	83* ¹	37* ¹
3(b) Has served on committee for public amenity (board of school, health facility, community cattle dip)	67	41	64* ¹	37* ¹
3 (c) has served as village elder	12	9	15	9
3 (d)served in neighbourhood council	28	17	27	11

Notes: * Difference is statistically significant at 5%.

1 = Difference between female participants and female non-participants is statistically significant.

Interpretation

Formal Political Participation

The statistics on voter registration for both Bangladesh and Kenya reflect generally high levels of voter registration across all categories of respondents.⁹ Even so, the registration rate for non-participants (Kenya) and short-duration participants (Bangladesh) - both male

⁹ There is a slight difference between the Bangladesh and Kenya data on registration to vote and actual voting. In the Bangladesh survey the data relates to all eligible household members, while in Kenya it relates to the individual respondent. This is the reason why the Bangladesh data in some instances appears to suggest that more people voted than were registered to vote- it simply reflects different responses by different household members. Hence the figure of 87% who registered against 95% who voted in the case of long-duration female respondents of Nijera Kori.

and female- are slightly lower than that of participants (Kenya) and long-duration participants (Bangladesh). This suggests that participation in political empowerment/social mobilization programs does create greater awareness and willingness to exercise citizenship through participation in the formal political process.

With regard to actual voting, the rates drop across the board (not everyone who registers votes), with the exception of long-duration male participants drawn from Nijera Kori in the Bangladesh sample. In both countries, the drop between voter registration and actual voting bears noticeable gender differences. In the case of Bangladesh, notice that long-duration male participants of Nijera Kori actually register no drop between registration and actual voting, while long-duration male participants of Samata only lose one percentage point between registration and actual voting. Long-duration female participants of Samata lose five percentage points. However, the fact that short-duration participants, whether male or female, record drops in the double digits (ranging from 13 to 17 percentage points) makes it clear that the fact of participation in social mobilization/political empowerment initiatives definitely increases one's propensity to actually participate in electoral processes.

This gender difference with respect to the drop between voter registration and actual voting is also notable (though not statistically significant) in Kenya, where women in both categories (participants and non-participants) record a larger drop than male respondents (13 percentage points for both categories, compared to 10 percentage points for male participants, and 11 percentage points for male non-participants).

Also notable are the figures on 'own decision to vote' (Table 1:1). Among the women it is clear that long-duration participants possessed greater capacity to make their own decision to vote compared to short-duration participants (10 percentage points difference for Nijera Kori women, and 27 percentage points for Samata). Thus, with participation in these initiatives women are learning to make their own decisions about their vote in a context where women usually have to vote according to the wishes of male family members.

The data do establish that participation in political empowerment/social mobilization initiatives predisposes people to active participation in formal political processes. Do they also establish that participation in political empowerment/social mobilization programs enables women to close the gender gap with respect to these activities relating to the formal political process? With respect to all the activities clustered under this indicator, male participants (in the case of Kenya) and long-duration male participants (in the case of Bangladesh) seem to enjoy the greatest advantage/benefit. However, although generally the male advantage prevails, in Bangladesh the gender gap appears reduced in magnitude. In fact, for Samata long-duration female respondents record 100% registration of household members with 95% actually voting compared to 94% and 93% respectively among long-duration male participants of Samata. The opposite is seen with respect to campaigning in elections, for although both women and men benefit significantly from involvement in social mobilization/political empowerment programmes, the initial male

advantage increases with participation. In Kenya too the male advantage increases with respect to holding leadership positions in political parties. In other words participation in social mobilization/political empowerment programmes in both contexts seem to benefit men more than women when it comes to active participation in political parties.

This male advantage cannot be explained simply by reference to higher levels of formal education, for the data on formal education is rather more mixed than this: although male participants in the Kenya data post the highest figures for tertiary or university education, female participants post the highest figures for secondary education. Higher levels of higher education may translate into more opportunities and the connections necessary, for instance, for involvement in political parties. However, it does not provide a full explanation for these figures. We would argue that other factors such as availability of time, decisional autonomy, mobility, and belonging to networks also influence the rate of participation and ability to exercise leadership in political parties, and all these factors point to gender-difference.

In the case of Bangladesh long-duration male respondents are more likely to have formal schooling, but on the other hand belong to less better-off households compared to long-duration female respondents (Table Annex 2). So socio economic status is not consistently associated with the apparent male advantage. This sex differential probably indicates that social mobilization/ political empowerment programmes have not yet been able to make inroads into these strongholds of male public space.

Active in community informal life

The second category of indicators for civic virtue and political skill (namely, being active in community informal life) assessed activities which are essentially about utilizing one's abilities (e.g. literacy and the knowledge acquired through social mobilization/political empowerment initiatives) to facilitate other community members' interaction with authorities and other powerful social entities. In Bangladesh we note an increase in active participation in community informal life for women and men, corresponding to their length of involvement in social mobilization/political empowerment initiatives¹⁰. The achievement is greater for women involved in social mobilization programmes compared to men because there is a closing of the gender gap (difference between long-duration female and long-duration male respondents) for all three indicators (with the exception of the indicator 'accompanied others for service' in the case of Nijera Kori).

¹⁰ The increase in active participation in community informal life with length of involvement in social mobilization programmes is also statistically significant for long-duration female Samata respondents, but not for others.

The Kenya data on these activities (2(a) to 2(c) in Table 1:2) lead to the same conclusion: female participants come out way ahead of female non-participants. The difference between these two categories of respondents is statistically significant for all the variables. However, unlike the long-duration female participants of Samata in Bangladesh (who surpass the long-duration male participants with respect to two of the three activities), Kenya's female participants do not close the gender gap between them and the male participants. Even so, the gender gap relating to these activities does not register statistical significance. We can therefore conclude that the knowledge and confidence acquired as a result of participation in social mobilization/political empowerment promote women's active participation in community informal life most notably as providers of information on public services, and facilitators of other community members' interaction with government and other powerful social entities.

Interesting findings emerge from the Kenya data on an aspect of community informal life that was not addressed by the Bangladesh data: leadership in religious groups and leadership in clan/kinship groups:

Leadership in church and other religious groups actually registers equal participation between male participants and female participants, and the rate of participation is high (64%). In addition, the gap between the participants and non-participants (both male and female) is notably wide. This establishes that the fact of participation in political empowerment/ social mobilization programs does have a bearing on community leadership, and crucially, it generates a positive spill-over effect in the form of closing the gender gap in leadership in key social institutions, such as religious institutions. This closing of the gender gap carries two possible explanations: the first, that these institutions place a high value on the skills and knowledge acquired, and for that reason, men and women get an equal chance to exercise leadership so long as they have taken part in these political empowerment/social mobilization programs. The second possible explanation is that churches and other religious institutions tend to house 'women only' sub-groups, led by women, which would then exaggerate the numbers of women reflected as occupying leadership positions. Even assuming that the second explanation is the correct one, the fact that non-participant women trail behind suggests that even in 'women only' sub-groups within religious institutions, participation in social mobilization/political empowerment initiatives does give women an advantage.

Similar positive spill-over effects can be observed with respect to leadership in clan/kin groups. Women who have taken part in social mobilization/political empowerment register 40%, while female non-participants register 18% and male non-participants 17%.

These findings raise an interesting question: why is it that women who have taken part in political empowerment/social mobilization programs have been able to make such significant gains in closing the gender gap in institutions that are seen as generating and/or enforcing norms that do not support gender equality? One possible response might be that

we need to examine the degree of influence that these women actually exercise, in order to ascertain that it is not a case of presence without influence (Goetz & Gaventa 2001); that the women, for instance, do not occupy these positions on an apolitical platform of 'women's empowerment' that does not amount to a radical challenge to gender inequality. Still, such a response does not account for this high degree of 'presence' in a supposedly hostile environment. Another possible response might be the optimistic view that contrary to being hostile environments, women are taking advantage of 'safe' spaces within their networks of religion and kinship to exercise their leadership skills and exert influence over community informal life.

Community Public Life

The third category of indicators for civic virtue and political skill is being active in community public life. The activities here encompass involvement in dispute arbitration, serving on local public committees and institutions of local governance. The Bangladesh data show that gender differences are starker for this third category of indicators than they are for the previous two. They also show service on public committees to have the most limited scope for participation, both for men and women across all categories of respondents, women's participation being very severely restricted. Still, long-duration participants are more likely than short-duration participants to serve on public committees. However, although the propensity for being active in village dispute arbitration through the 'shalish' increases with participation in social mobilization/political empowerment programmes for both women and men, the sex differences among long-duration participants are significant, so that the male advantage with respect to being a member of and conducting 'shalish' persists.

The Kenya data on 'serving on public committees' vary depending on the type of committee. The more politicized constituency level committees do not register high scores for participants, whether male or female.¹¹ However, the more localized committees whose data is reported in *Table 1:2*, (i.e. those that manage community amenities such as schools, health facilities and cattle dips) register significantly high levels of participation for men and women who have taken part in social mobilization/political empowerment initiatives. Indeed, female participants of these initiatives have a much higher chance of being named to these committees than women or men who are non-participants (64%, 37% and 41%

¹¹Data was gathered on seven public committees. As the rates of participation are very low the differences do not register statistical significance. However, on percentage points there is a clear pattern whereby participants, whether male or female, register higher rates of participation the more distanced a committee is from the direct control of the Member of Parliament. This is because appointments to constituency-level committees controlled by the Member of Parliament, with no stipulation as to the procedure for constituting the committees, are largely dependent on networks of patronage. For further discussion of this point based on the Kenya data see Musembi (2010).

respectively). Even though there is still a gender gap between them and their male counterparts, the gap is not statistically significant.

We note that in both countries participation in social mobilization/political empowerment is able to increase propensity for becoming active in dispute arbitration for both men and women. The Bangladesh data distinguishes between simply being a member of a village shalish and having actually been involved in conducting shalish. On both of these points, long-duration participants come out way ahead of short-duration participants. The gain for women is particularly noticeable. In both organizations, short-duration female participants register single digit figures (zero for short-duration female participants in Samata) both for membership in shalish and actual involvement in conducting shalish. These figures double and in some cases quadruple with participation in social mobilization/political empowerment programmes.

The Kenya data shows that women's participation in social mobilization/political participation more than doubles their chances of being involved in dispute arbitration (compare 87% for female participants to 37% for female non-participants). However, comparing between male and female non-participants, one would not be wrong to observe that in the area of dispute arbitration, men seem to have a 'social advantage' that sees them named to serve in these capacities, while women only access these spaces by demonstrating skills acquired and possibly leveraging connections built through programs such as those on social mobilization/political empowerment. An analogous observation may be made with respect to the Bangladesh data, where short-duration male participants still manage to register levels of membership and participation in shalish that are much higher than those of short-duration female members.

In summing up on Outcome 1 (Manifest civic virtue and political skills), the data definitely call for a re-think of the approaches used in evaluating gender difference in expression of political citizenship. For one, the understanding of 'political life' needs to be much broader. The focus tends to be on numbers of women with respect to voter registration, voting, contesting for office, and holding office.¹² These are all important, but there is little or no data on gender differences in levels of political party participation (Goetz & Musembi 2008), and certainly no data at all on the kinds of micro-level citizen political action examined here. Shifting the focus to every day expressions of citizenship makes visible political activity that would not otherwise be visible. It would also provide a measure that is a more accurate reflection of most people's reality, rather than the reality of only that tiny minority that contests for political office.

¹² See, for example, database operated by Inter-Parliamentary Union (<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>).

This micro-level analysis also gives more information on where emphasis needs to be placed in order to work toward closing the gender gap in political citizenship in the broader sense. Political parties definitely need to be made a site of struggle, as well as public committees.

Outcome 2: Predisposed to challenge abuse of power

The second outcome on the basis of which we evaluate the social mobilization/political empowerment programs is whether they result in individuals who are predisposed to challenging abuse of power, and how women and men compare with respect to this quality. The indicators for this outcome are in three categories. The first category is awareness of rights, which we take as a proxy for the ability to recognize abuse of power, which then positions one to challenge such abuse. The second category is participation in protest. The third category is ability to directly engage public officials.

Table 2:1 Predisposed to Challenge Abuse of Power: Bangladesh

Indicator (% of members responding 'yes')	Samata				Nijera Kori			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	Long-duratio n	Short-duratio n	Long-duratio n	Short-duratio n	Long-duratio n	Short-duratio n	Long-duratio n	Short-duratio n
1. Rights Awareness								
1(a) Understands term 'rights'	81	60	85 ¹	38	95 ²	85	81	73
1(b) Can speak against injustice	19 ²	0	2	0	45 ²	0	29 ¹	5
2. Participation in protest								
2(a) Has participated in protest to claim right	96 ²	6	84 ¹	2	95 ²	20	83 ¹	10
3. Able to directly								

engage public officials								
3(a) Can speak to TNO (gov official)	46 ²	34	30	16	41	38	30	20
3 (b) Can speak to UP Chair/member (elected representative)	99	90	89 ¹	80	98	95	82 ¹	73
3 (c) Has ever been invited by UP for discussion	77 ²	50	63 ¹	6	60 ²	38	33 ¹	18

Note: 1=difference between 'long-duration' and 'short-duration' female respondents is statistically significant;

2= difference between 'long-duration' female and 'long-duration' male respondents is statistically significant

Table 2:2 Predisposed to Challenge Abuse of Power: Kenya

Indicator (% of members responding 'yes')				
	Men		Women	
	Participants	Non-participants	Participants	Non-participants
1. Rights Awareness				

1 (a) Has received training on 'rights' ¹³	Yes	N/A	Yes	N/A
2. Participation in protest				
2 (b) Has taken part in public campaign/protest	51	27	51* ¹	24* ¹
3. Able to directly engage public officials				
3 (a) Has confronted local councillor on an issue ¹⁴	20	10	19	9
3 (b) Has taken part in monitoring use of local funds (LATF)	25	14	22* ¹	8* ¹
3 (c) Has confronted Member of Parliament on an issue	12	2	6	3
3 (d) Has taken part in monitoring use of local funds (CDF)	23	7	10	5

Notes: * Difference is statistically significant at 5%.

1 = Difference between female participants and female non-participants is statistically significant.

Interpretation

Rights Awareness

¹³ The programs of all the organizations had rights awareness as a centre piece of the training, so all participants had received training in rights.

¹⁴ The range of issues enumerated by respondents was wide, the main ones being bias in selection of recipients for educational bursaries, failure to follow through development projects and fraudulent inflation of costs for public projects. This applies to both the Councillor and Member of Parliament.

Rights awareness speaks to the capacity and willingness to challenge abuse of power. In order to assess understanding of rights, the Bangladesh survey asked respondents whether they understood the meaning of the word 'rights', then asked them which right was most important. Therefore, those respondents who answer 'yes' to this question signify a belief that they understand the term rights (not based upon an assessment by the researcher of the accuracy of the response), which thus indicates familiarity with the term and the awareness that one has rights that may be legally claimed.

The data show that the belief that one understands the meaning of rights increases with participation in social mobilization/political empowerment. Indeed, for Samata there is a closing of the gender gap (compare 85% for long-duration female participants to 81% for long-duration male participants).

A second component ('can speak against injustice') is added to this indicator with respect to the Bangladesh data. This is because ability to speak against injustice is indicative of one's confidence in one's understanding of rights and therefore of just entitlements. It is remarkable that almost all short-duration participants felt they could not speak against injustice (zero for both male and female short-duration participants of Samata, zero for male short-duration participants of Nijera Kori, and 5% for female short-duration participants of Nijera Kori). The contrast with long-duration participants stands out, particularly for Nijera Kori men (compare 45% with 0%) and NJ women too (compare 29% with 5%). However, for women in Samata there is hardly any difference between short-duration and long-duration female participants (compare 0% with 2%). It is also remarkable that men benefit to a greater extent than women from participation in social mobilization/political empowerment programmes in Bangladesh with respect to being vocal against injustice.

The Kenya survey took rights awareness for granted among participants, because human rights training is the centrepiece of most of the programs. The real test therefore is in whether the participants are able to utilize their rights awareness to score well in the indicators that follow.

Participation in Protest

This second category of indicators, "participates in protests to claim rights" indicates ability to act on knowledge of rights, to recognize wrongful use of power in violation of rights, and therefore willingness to take action to challenge abuse of power. It is clear that participation in social mobilization/political empowerment has very significant impact for both women and men in building capacity for protest from fairly low levels. In the case of Bangladesh compare 6% to 96% for short-duration and long-duration male participants respectively in Samata, and 2% to 84% for short-duration and long-duration female participants respectively. Nijera Kori posts similarly impressive figures (20% to 95% for men, and 10% to 83% for women). As between male and female long-duration participants however, a

gender gap remains, with female participants trailing their male counterparts by 12 percentage points in both organizations.

Although on this indicator the Kenyan respondents do not post the high figures registered in Bangladesh, the data definitely show that people who have taken part in social mobilization/political empowerment are twice as likely to participate in protest compared to those who have not. This is true for both men and women. The gender gap does close with respect to this indicator: female and male participants both score 51%.

The relatively higher figures for Bangladesh seem very likely to be related to the fact that members of both Samata and Nijera Kori (unlike the members of the more common micro finance NGOs) receive training on how to organize protests and participate effectively in protests. This is because these organizations mobilize people precisely on the basis of their unequal experience of enjoying rights, building awareness of rights (land, salinization of water bodies by commercial activities, gender based violence), and the need to claim rights collectively. There are historical reasons why the Kenya figures are not as high: As noted earlier, the roots of NGO-led mobilization at the grassroots level were in the context of the pervasive one-party state. In most of the 1990s, therefore, putting up a visible challenge to the improper use of power that characterized the one-party states, particularly its overbearing local manifestations, was a crucial plank of the NGO initiatives. The relatively low figures posted are reflective of a shift in emphasis since 1997, from this open confrontation of state power through high profile public demonstrations.¹⁵ A survey in the pre-1997 period would most likely have registered figures similar to Bangladesh.

Ability to directly engage with public officials

The third category of indicators assesses the extent to which people actually have access and opportunity to engage with public officials at the local level. Access and opportunity are necessary in order that people might exercise their capacity to act on their knowledge by making complaints or demands for accountability, and thus are part of assessing predisposition to check abuse of power at the local level. In Bangladesh, survey questions with respect to this indicator related to engagement with local government officials (TNOs) and elected representatives (Union Parishad chair and members). In Kenya, survey questions on this indicator concerned confronting the councillor (elected local government representative) and the Member of Parliament on issues of improper exercise of power.

¹⁵ 1997 marked the adoption of an Inter-Parties Parliamentary Group (IPPG) agreement, in which the government committed to shedding off some of the worst laws and practices that shored up the one-party state. Since the IPPG deal, donors took the view that it was no longer necessary to fund the type of civil society activism that emphasized challenging the one-party state, and NGOs involved in this kind of work either concluded their operations, or changed their approaches to an emphasis on 'equipping' citizens to take part within the formal spaces provided in the post-1997 climate. Interview with Morris Odhiambo, Executive Director, Centre for Law and Research International (CLARION), September 6th, 2006, Nairobi; see also Mutunga (1999).

These questions were then followed up with questions on whether a respondent was involved in any initiative to monitor these leaders' use of local development funds under their control (LATF in the case of the councillor; CDF in the case of the Member of Parliament)¹⁶.

In Bangladesh the data show that access and opportunity with respect to the Union Parishad (UP) chair or members (elected local representatives) are generally good for both men and women, although men in general seem to have better access and opportunity than women. However, figures on engagement with the TNO suggest much reduced access and opportunity across the board, but even more so for women (30% for long-duration, 20% or less for short-duration). The TNOs tend to be highly educated government officials from outside the locality. Nonetheless, the data also show that participation in social mobilization/political empowerment does have an effect in increasing engagement with the TNO for both men and women, but more so for women.

In addition, the Bangladesh data also reveal a dimension not explored in the Kenya data: that being a participant in social mobilization/political empowerment initiatives definitely increases one's chances of being invited for discussions with local elected representatives (UP), an indication that local public officials take the respondent seriously. The most dramatic increase is with respect to women in Samata (from 6% for short-duration participants to 63% for long-duration participants). But for all the indicators the male advantage is reduced, even if it does not disappear, by participation in social mobilization/political empowerment programmes.

The Kenya data on this indicator show that men and women who have participated in social mobilization/political empowerment initiatives are twice as likely to engage public officials by taking up contentious issues with them, and also by holding them to account for their management of public funds. With regard to the gender dynamics among participants, notice that the scores are close with respect to confronting the local councillor on abuse of power (20% for men, 19% for women). However, the gap widens with respect to confronting the Member of Parliament (12% for men, 6% for women). At higher levels of engagement with political leaders, it seems, male participants are twice as likely to take on issues of abuse of power compared to female participants. What accounts for this difference? Definitely opportunities to access the (often elusive, often male) MP; the networks that might help 'connect' one to the MP and his inner circle are differentially distributed across lines of class, social status and gender, among others, and this data only

¹⁶ The Local Authority Transfer Fund (LATF) and the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) refer to decentralized funds earmarked for community development projects and direct service provision to local residents, established in 1998 and 2003 respectively. LATF is under the control of local government authorities, with the central actors being the elected councillors. The CDF is under the direct control of the elected Member of Parliament. For further elaboration on decentralized funds and the opportunities for citizen engagement see Musembi (2010).

gives a glimpse of that. This difference also manifests itself in the figures on monitoring the use of local funds. With respect to the Local Authority Transfer Fund (LATF), the gap between male and female participants is 3 percentage points (25% for men, 22% for women), while the gap with respect to the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) is 13 percentage points (23% for men, 10% for women). LATF is more local, in the control of the local council, while the CDF is under the control of the MP.

Therefore whereas participation in social mobilization/political empowerment no doubt increases a person’s access and opportunity to engage directly with public officials, a gender gap (albeit not a statistically significant one) remains to the disadvantage of female participants in those programs. This gender gap is reflected in the overall findings on Outcome 2, namely, one’s predisposition to challenge abuse of power: whereas participation in social mobilization/political empowerment initiatives has proved to be a key determinant in women’s predisposition to challenge abuse of power, a gender gap still remains between female and male participants.

Outcome 3: Predisposed to use formal institutional spaces for engagement with the state

The third outcome on the basis of which we assess the social mobilization/political empowerment initiatives is whether they result in individuals who are more likely to be knowledgeable about formal institutional spaces, and to use them in their engagement with the state.¹⁷ We have grouped the indicators with respect to this outcome under two categories: knowledge about institutional channels, and actual utilization of those formal institutional spaces. The results are presented in Table 3:1 and 3:2 below.

Table 3:1 Predisposed to use Institutional Channels: Bangladesh

Indicator	Samata	Nijera Kori	
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¹⁷ This outcome is formulated based on an adaptation of one of the contributions on Fung’s list, namely, ‘improving the quality and equality of representation of interests’. By this Fung refers to the effect that associations have in equalizing access to law makers and policy makers and taking advantage of invited spaces for public participation. The studies are rooted in contexts where access to the state is predominantly personalistic, determined by one’s ability to mobilize connections and resources. We therefore took the view that knowledge about, and utilization of institutionalized channels marks the emergence of an alternative mode of engagement with the state, one that is more likely to promote equal access, as opposed to informal networks that promote unequal access to the state. Evidence of greater knowledge about, and greater use of institutional channels by participants relative to non-participants (Kenya) or long-duration participants relative to short-duration (Bangladesh) would show that social mobilization/political empowerment initiatives have had a positive impact with respect to this outcome. In a related study, Houtzager and Acharya conduct research into the impact of civil associations in facilitating people’s ‘direct relations’ with public institutions, rather than relations that are mediated, for instance, through patronage networks. See Houtzager & Acharya (2008).

(% responding 'yes')	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	Long-duratio n	Short-duratio n	Long-duratio n	Short-duratio n	Long-duratio n	Short-duratio n	Long-duratio n	Short-duratio n
1. Knows about formal institutional spaces								
1 (a) Knows how to file court case	54 ²	42	29 ¹	10	56 ²	18	27	18
1 (b) Has received training from/on government	23	8	35 ¹	16	9	8	16 ¹	5
1 (c) Knows how to conduct 'shalish'	30 ²	10	13 ¹	0	33 ²	18	11	5
2. Has utilized formal institutional spaces								
2 (a) Has placed demands to elected representatives (UP)	91 ²	56	69 ¹	36	88 ²	50	67 ¹	33
2 (b) Has placed demands to local government	44 ²	4	32 ¹	0	38 ²	18	13	10

official (TNO)									
2 (c) Has obtained information from public officials	64	58	58 ¹	16	58	35	47 ¹	25	

Note: 1=difference between 'long-duration' and 'short-duration' female respondents is statistically significant;

2= difference between 'long-duration' female and 'long-duration' male respondents is statistically significant

Table 3:2 Predisposed to use Formal Institutional Spaces: Kenya

Indicator (% responding 'yes')				
	Men		Women	
	Participants	Non-participants	Participants	Non-participants
1. Knows about formal institutional spaces				
1 (a) Knows about the Local Authority Transfer Fund, (LATF) and its policy on public participation (LASDAP)	96	64	85* ¹	42* ¹
1 (b) Knows about the Constituency Development Fund (CDF)	98	89	92	80
2. Has utilized formal institutional spaces				
2 (a) Has attended LASDAP meeting(s) convened by local council	59	48	55* ¹	40* ¹
2 (b) Has made project	54	35	45* ¹	28* ¹

proposal/suggestion to local council				
2 (c) Has been involved in preparing proposal to access CDF funds	46	22	38* ¹	14* ¹

Notes: * Difference is statistically significant at 5%.

1 = Difference between female participants and female non-participants is statistically significant.

Interpretation

Knowledge About Formal Institutional Spaces

In assessing respondents' knowledge about formal institutional spaces, the Bangladesh data relied on three indicators: whether they know how to file a court case; whether they know how to conduct 'shalish', and whether they have had the opportunity to attend government training (which presupposes that they would have acquired some knowledge about formal institutional spaces).

On all three indicators the data show that the longer one has been a participant in social mobilization/ political empowerment initiatives, the more likely it is that he/she will have knowledge about formal institutional spaces for engaging with public officials. For women in particular, their participation in these initiatives makes a big difference. However, here too gender disparity between long-duration participants persists. Notice that although in both organizations the number of long-duration female participants who have had the opportunity to access government training exceeds the number of long-duration male participants who have had such opportunity, the women still trail behind their male counterparts when it comes to self-assessing knowledge of specific formal processes such as filing a court case and conducting shalish.

The Kenya data on knowledge about formal institutional spaces focused on two indicators, both of which concern knowledge about two institutionalized procedures for influencing the allocation of development funds that have recently been decentralised to the local level. The Constituency Development Fund (CDF) only dates back to 2003. The Local Authority Transfer Fund (LATF) has been in place since 1998, but only since 2001 has it been accompanied by administrative regulations that institutionalize citizen participation in decision-making concerning allocation of the fund at the local level (the LASDAP- Local Authority Service Delivery Action Plan- Guidelines).

Comparison between female participants and female non-participants shows clearly that participation in social mobilization/ political empowerment initiatives definitely increases women's levels of awareness about formal institutional spaces for interaction with the state. With respect to LATF, the awareness level literally doubles (42% for female non-participants, 85% for female participants).

Comparison between female participants and their male counterparts yields slight differences that do not register statistical significance.

Utilization of Formal Institutional Spaces

This second category of indicators focused on very local formal institutional spaces for interaction with the state. In the case of Bangladesh, the survey questions related to whether a respondent had ever placed demands before the local elected representative (Union Parishad level), and the local government official (TNO), and whether they had ever sought and obtained information from public officials. Once again, the UP registered the highest numbers, most notably for long-duration male participants. Long-duration female participants came in second, with very significant gender gaps between the two categories of long-duration participants (compare 22 percentage points difference for Samata, and 21 percentage points difference for Nijera Kori). Placing demands on the TNO also registered very significant gender gaps.

Equally noteworthy is the hugely significant difference between long-duration and short-duration female participants, signalling that participation in social mobilization/political empowerment initiatives does make a difference for women's ability to utilize formal institutional spaces. Notice, for instance, that with respect to placing demands on the TNO, short-duration female participants in Samata register 0%, while long-duration female participants in the same organization register 32%.

With respect to obtaining information from public officials, the biggest difference is between long-duration and short-duration female participants (compare the 'gain' from 25% to 47% for Nijera Kori, and from 16% to 58% for Samata), signalling once again that for women, participation in social mobilization/political empowerment initiatives is a crucial factor in their ability to obtain information and therefore engage with public officials. On this indicator, the gender gap among long-duration participants remains, but is not statistically significant.

The Kenya data on this second category of indicators yields a pattern similar to that of Bangladesh: while the gap between male and female participants is not statistically significant, the gap between female participants and female non-participants is statistically significant. As in the Bangladesh data, this pattern shows that participation in these initiatives is a crucial factor in facilitating women's ability to utilize formal institutional spaces at all.

Conclusion

In literature on the role that associations play in democratization, some have called for studies that address the specific question of whether participation in associations can compensate for social disadvantage (Houtzager & Acharya, 2008). This article has shown that a particular type of social disadvantage, namely gender inequality, can be overcome to a great degree, through the initiatives of organized civil society. The social disadvantage that women start out with does begin to diminish with their participation in initiatives intended to foster active citizenship at the grassroots level. A comparison between women who have participated in social mobilization/political empowerment initiatives and women who have not has yielded a significant positive result on all the indicators, with the exception of the rate of voter registration, which tends to be high across the board.

However, comparison with their male counterparts who have participated in social mobilization/political empowerment initiatives shows significant gains in some areas and persistent male advantage in others. With respect to formal political participation, for instance, significant gains have been made with respect to voter registration and voting, but not with respect to exercising leadership in political parties and taking part in election campaigning. Similarly, with respect to participation in community public life, these women have registered gains with respect to serving on committees that manage community amenities and as decision-makers in community-based dispute resolution mechanisms. However, the gender gap persists quite significantly with respect to opportunity to serve on public committees that depend on appointment by politicians or senior government officials.

Male advantage is similarly visible, though reduced with participation in social mobilization/political empowerment initiatives, with respect to the data on direct engagement with public officials and utilization of institutional spaces. The gender gap on these indicators gets more significant the higher up the public official or institutional space in question is. There is some indication- stronger in the case of Bangladesh than that of Kenya- that civil society initiatives are not enough to erode the power of male networks that control public political space at the grassroots level.

Our data suggest that the explanation for gender inequality in the expression of citizenship at the grassroots level lies more in the sphere of public political space- i.e. in spaces that manifest a greater degree of formalization- than in informal community-based interaction. The data on community informal life shows female participants of social mobilization/political empowerment initiatives being called upon to play a crucial role of facilitating other community members' engagement with, and access to services from, government officials and institutions. In other words, they have great scope to enable active citizenship and possibly change the terms of engagement between the state and citizens

who perhaps would otherwise not claim their rights. They also show women taking up leadership roles in religious and kin-based institutions, ordinarily viewed as the preserve of male private power. We can therefore conclude that the NGO initiatives in question have clearly played a role in placing women in both formal and informal spaces of leadership and visibility, but the persistence of male social advantage in the more formalized spaces of community public life suggests that there is further work to be done in directly challenging these networks of exclusion, and deepening social legitimacy for women's exercise of voice and authority.

Taken together, the data discussed in this article force us to step back and analyse the persistence of male social advantage in citizen political action at the grassroots level irrespective of country context. There is a clear signal that the intervention of civil associations does build and facilitate agency, which is crucial in overcoming social disadvantage. However, structural constraints can prove difficult to surmount in some areas. Facilitation of agency must therefore inevitably be combined with institutional reform in order to confront and remove the structural barriers that make it possible for opaque networks of the socially advantaged to thrive and exclude. Liberal feminist critics of the concept of citizenship draw attention to these structural barriers, but they obscure the crucial role of agency in shaping citizenship. Feminist critics oriented toward civic republicanism do emphasize agency in the construction of citizenship, but based on a narrow conception of what counts as citizen action. This article has offered an approach that enriches both strands of feminist critique by broadening the scope of citizen action and shedding light on the amorphous intermediate sphere between public and private that tends to be neglected. This has made it possible to pinpoint the specific areas in which further investment is needed if we are to succeed in closing the gender gap in expression of active citizenship at the grassroots level.

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Annexes

Annex 1: Kenyan organizations whose initiatives are covered by the study

Name of Organization
ActionAid
Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (CJPC)
Centre for Governance and Development (CGD)

Centre for Law and Research International (CLARION)
Educational Centre for Women in Democracy (ECWD)
International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA)
International Commission of Jurists(ICJ)
Kituo cha Sheria (Legal Advice Centre)
League of Kenya Women Voters
Legal Resources Foundation (LRF)
Kenya Community Paralegals Association (KCPA)
SNV (agency connected to Netherlands embassy)
WAFNET
Women's Resource Centre and Development Institute (WRCDI)
Pathfinder
Coalition on Violence Against Women (COVAW)

Annex 2

Respondent profile: Bangladesh

Socio-economic status Indicators	Samata				Nijera Kori			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	Long-duratio n	Short-duratio n	Long-duratio n	Short-duratio n	Long-duratio n	Short-duratio n	Long-duratio n	Short-duratio n
Mean age (yrs)	45.8	30.7	39.7	33.3	40.7	35.8	43.3	30.7
% Formal education								

No formal edu	70	25	58	27	51	14	58	27
Class 1-5	18	17	30	11	22	13	22	17
Class 6-10	7	5	10	12	19	9	17	15
SSC+	5	3	2	0	8	4	3	1
% HH owns homestead land	66	28	72	44	59	32.5	65	45
% HH owns cultivable land	77	34	65	34	55	30	60	18.3
% HH head is female	0	0	4	2	0	0	14	3
% HH faces food shortage	24	30	13	38	41	55	33	60

Annex 3: Respondent profile: Kenya

Socio-economic status Indicators	Participants		Non-participants	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Age (number of respondents)				
18-34	29	22	66	63
35-50	56	69	41	47
51-65	38	26	16	9
Over 65	9	1	4	4

% Formal Education				
Not completed secondary school	23	23	39	57
Completed secondary school	49	53	46	32
Has tertiary/university education	27	24	15	11
% Monthly income				
Below Kshs. 4000 (\$50)	33	42	53	72
Between Kshs. 4001 and 10,000 (\$50- 125)	27	27	31	17
Over Kshs. 10,000 (\$125)	40	31	16	11