

## INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF PROFESSIONAL WOMEN ON THEIR POLITICAL RIGHTS IN LUSAKA, ZAMBIA

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Women's access to information on their political rights contributes to their empowerment through participation in political decision-making. However, there is currently little that is known about women's access to information on their political rights in Lusaka, Zambia. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate professional women's access to information on their political rights in Lusaka, Zambia. 70 professional women participated in the study. Specifically, the study investigated women's awareness of their political rights, the sources of information on their political rights and the extent to which they exercise their political rights. This study was a survey in nature largely centered on quantitative methodology. The target group consisted of professional women in both private and public sector organizations based in Lusaka. Seventy randomly selected participants from 14 institutions participated in the study using self-administered questionnaires. The findings revealed that professional women are aware of their political rights and access this information to a great extent through various sources including Internet, friends and relatives, phones, newspapers, television, radio, libraries and information centers and institutions dealing with women issues. However, the findings revealed that women do not exercise their rights to a large extent as they face various problems including limited education, inadequate financial resources, lack of information and understanding of political systems and processes, discrimination, stereotypes, family responsibilities, political violence, religious and customary traditions and practices as well as poverty. The study recommends for intensified sensitization and advocacy of women's access to information on their political rights especially in rural areas.*

**Keywords:** Freedom of access to information, woman suffrage, political participation, women's political rights, human rights, voting, women empowerment, Zambia.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In every society, information is an indispensable resource for economic, social, political and cultural development (Karelse and Sylla, 2000). Those who have access to it are undeniably deemed privileged as it leads to opportunities that generate resources for a richer and more varied life. Information is the precondition for society and certainly for individuals to make informed decisions, choices, actions as well as answer life's questions at all levels of time and space. It has the potential to fight the three enemies of development: poverty, disease and ignorance (Mulauzi, 2007). Every member of society has the right to access information in any format. This is affirmed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which declares access to information as a universal human right as follows:

*"Everyone has the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers" (United Nations, 2005).*

This is a unique human right, according to Daruwala and Nayak (2007), as it is from this right that other basic human rights can flow. In other words, it is a right to realize all. No society can develop effectively if its individuals are deprived of relevant information. Society's aptitude to develop veritably depends on the ability of individuals to access information and knowledge. Hence, access to information, according to Opoku-Mensah (2000) should no longer be considered as a luxury but a human need and a basic human right. Of particular importance is access to information on political rights as it can better marginalized peoples' circumstances especially women. Women's access to information on their political rights is critical to their full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. Generally, access to information, according to Ward (2013), empowers people to:

- (i) Take action: Access to information is absolutely critical for people to take action. Information helps people to grow their confidence, empowerment, voice, and to increase skills and knowledge to be able to act in an appropriate manner. It helps individuals to determine priorities for public spending, receive equal access to justice, and hold their public officials accountable. Even peoples' aspiration towards leadership grow over time as confidence and knowledge grows.
- (ii) Know and exercise their political rights: Access to information is critical for growing citizens' capacity to not only know but also exercise their rights. Without information, it is difficult to understand how things ought to be done, that is, to identify what is wrong or right. Information equals power which leads to claiming rights
- (iii) Know their responsibilities: Information empowers individuals to have the opportunity or ability to act independently and take decisions within their powers and control.
- (iv) Develop new skills: Information empowers people to develop new skills (Banisar, 2013) including academic, information, decision making, research, leadership and communication skills, which are in one's life.

It has been widely acknowledged that information particularly on political rights is potential power that can facilitate women's involvement in decision-making. It can empower women to make more effective decisions regarding political participation; assist women to scrutinize official policies and suggest alternatives they feel could be more effective; helps women to participate more fully in public life; is critical for holding government and service providers accountable;

bridges gender gaps and helps to shift power in decision-making processes; and can link women with the needed resources for achieving economic empowerment (The Carter Center, 2017).

Daruwala and Nayak (2007) observed that though we live in the age of information, where information can be accessed and shared at the click of a button, and span the globe in an instant, a lack of information continues to frustrate people's ability to make choices, participate in governance and hold governments accountable for their actions. This is supported by the Carter Center (2017) who posits that in more than 90 countries around the world, one-half of the population is limited in their full enjoyment of the right to information and the myriad benefits that it may provide. In the rare instances when requests for information are disaggregated by gender, statistics demonstrate that women do not access information at the same rate as men. This situation affects the poor and marginalized such as women (The Carter Center, 2017; Oyelude and Bamigbola, 2012; Primo, 2003; Daruwala and Nayak, 2007) who need information the most. About half of the world's population is women who are ideally supposed to contribute half of the world's economic, social and political input, but this is not the case (Oyelude and Bamigbola, 2012). Instead, they remain the silent majority with limited participation in political affairs of states (Mulauzi, 2007).

A number of factors affect women's access to information including high illiterate rates, limited skills, unemployment, discrimination and violence against women and poverty. In terms of education, women are much less likely than men to be literate. They make up two-thirds of the world's illiterates. As of 2015, literacy rate for females in Zambia stood at 56% compared to 70.9% for their male counterparts (IndexMundi, 2016). Employment is shown to have the strongest and most direct impact on access to information. Women in developing countries like Zambia have fewer job opportunities mainly because they are less skilled. For instance, the employment participation rates of women in Zambia stood at 69.8% for women compared to 80.9% for men in 2014 (United Nations Statistics Division, 2017). In fact, Ngoma (2016) posits that only ten percent of Zambian women are in skilled employment, while the majority (65%) are in agriculture. Women's inadequate skills inhibit them from occupying high positions in the formal sector, which would offer them higher incomes and other opportunities. Thus, many women lack disposable income to pay for information access because they tend to give more attention and higher priority on household needs such as food, health, education and clothing other than information (Mulauzi and Albright, 2009). Several studies show that women with high income levels are more likely than those with low levels of income to seek information (Nikoloudakis et al, 2016 and Zschorlich et al, 2015).

Women are also faced with the challenge of political discrimination and all sorts of violence including political violence in Zambia and other parts of the world and as a result, their rights including those pertaining to access to information are violated. Violence against women is perpetuated by cultural orientation; initiation ceremonies and payment of bride price which makes men feel superior over women. Women become submissive and obedient even when they are physically, sexually and mentally abused (Ngoma, 2016). The Central Statistical Office (2013) reported that in Zambia, 43% of women aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence since the age of 15 and the perpetrators of physical violence among the ever married are husbands or partners (63%) while 17% of women reported having experienced sexual violence.

Although poverty levels affect men and women, women are more vulnerable because they have lower education than men and have a very small share in formal employment (Ngoma, 2016). Statistics show that of the 74% poverty levels in Zambia, 80% of these are women and children (NGOCC, 2012). Primo (2003) ranked poverty as a number one problem facing women worldwide. Women's access to information is central to combatting poverty. Information does not only build trust between government and its citizens but also allows those living in poverty to exercise their rights and hold decision makers to account (Randel, 2013). It reduces corruption and empower individuals to make more informed choices as well as take control over the decisions that impact their lives.

Without information, women tend to be ill-informed about their political rights. They are often at a loss to relate basic facts about the players, issues, and rules that surround political life and as a result participate less in politics and decision-making processes. They also lack visibility and voice to enable them to define and influence policy priorities and access resources as they can neither develop or express informed opinions nor play an active role in influencing the policies that affect their lives. They are unable to effectively monitor and hold government to account in various areas, and to enter into informed dialogue about decisions which affect their lives if they lack information. Information lays the foundation for women to know their political rights and empowers them to position themselves at the center of the political dialogue. Thus, Wilkins (2004) asserts that most development agendas fail simply because one of the most important ingredient, information, is neglected especially among women. One of the main challenges to the failure of women to exercise their political rights is that many governments often fail to actively promote awareness of these political rights among women. Even when women do come to know about their rights through the media or civil society awareness campaigns, they often feel completely powerless to effect any real change in their circumstances by exercising their political rights. The purpose of this study was to investigate whether professional women in Lusaka, Zambia access information on their political rights.

## **1.1 Background**

Before economic development took off (i.e. more than two hundred years ago), women had few rights as they were considered the property of men (typically either a father or a husband) and had no intrinsic rights of their own (Doepke, Tertilt and Voena, 2012). They were treated as the inferior sex and could not take part in public life, especially in areas pertaining to politics, education as well as in philosophical, medical and religious traditions. Because women were considered major sources of temptation and evil, and who were intellectually inferior to men, they were often thought of as weaker than men, unable to perform work requiring muscular strength, or even intellectually underdeveloped (Direct Essays, 2016). Owing to this, it was expected that a woman's place should be in the home, to prepare food, take care of the children, wash clothes, etc., instead of the 'heavier' jobs like hunting and plowing. According to Doepke, Tertilt and Voena, women usually could not own property or sign contracts, they had no control over their own bodies, they could not vote, they had no legal way to end a marriage, and they had no access to their children after a separation and they could not get an abortion based on their own personal decision and beliefs. By and large, they had fewer legal rights, and far less job opportunities than men.

It was however, observed that although women were thought of as the weak sex, their duties were quite strenuous. In this vain, gender equality does not discriminate by sex. Women ought to be

accorded opportunity to participate politically. Since most women lacked the educational and economic resources that would enable them to challenge the existing social order, women generally accepted their inferior status as their only option. All these happenings gave birth to women's political rights movement liberation. These movements started questioning and re-evaluating these traditional views and this is how society began to give the recognition and rights women deserved. According to Wikigender (2015), women's political rights began to unfold, for instance, as part of end of colonialism (before obtaining economic rights) in most African countries and in stages (i.e. basic economic rights came first, political rights were next and equal treatment in the labour market and greater control over their own bodies ultimately followed) for England and United States respectively (Doepke, Tertilt and Voena, 2012). It proved that women are just as good as men in all ways, and that women can do most things equally.

Women's political rights were ratified by the United Nations as far back as 1953 in New York. These rights were arrived at through recognition that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or indirectly through freely chosen representatives, and has the right to equal access to public service in his country, and desire to equalize the status of men and women in the enjoyment and exercise of political rights. The political rights of women are stipulated in the Convention on the Political Rights of Women as follows:

- i) ARTICLE I: Women shall be entitled to vote in all elections on equal terms with men, without any discrimination.
- ii) ARTICLE II: Women shall be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies, established by national law, on equal terms with men, without any discrimination.
- iii) ARTICLE III: Women shall be entitled to hold public office and to exercise all public functions, established by national law, on equal terms with men, without any discrimination.

The **right to vote** is the most important element of the electoral system through which individuals can use to influence governmental decision-making. This is one of the fundamental political rights of citizens. The right to vote contains the twofold obligation of ensuring the right to vote representatives and to stand for election. In these respects, women are to have the same rights as men. The right to vote is universal and equal, in the sense that it is the right of every citizen that has reached 18 years of age to vote and be elected regardless of class, ethnic, racial, economic or other affiliation. The law may determine under what conditions aliens also have voting rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, according to Ferguson (2003), adopted unanimously by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, recognizes the integral role that transparent and open elections play in ensuring the fundamental right to participatory government. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Article 21 states that:

*Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his/her country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot or by equivalent free voting procedures.*

The role that periodic, free elections play in ensuring respect for political rights also is enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights, the Charter of the Organization of American States, the African



(Banjul) Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and many other international human rights documents (Ferguson, 2003). At national level, the Zambian Constitution, article 49 (I) of the constitution stipulates that women and men have the right to equal treatment including the right to equal opportunities in cultural, political, economic and social activities. At regional level, the Southern African Development Community protocol (SADC) on gender is committed to fair gender politics and policies and has set a target of 50% representation of women. However, the University of Minnesota Human Rights Center (2003) argues that while the *right to vote* is widely recognized as a fundamental human right, this right is not fully enforced for millions of individuals around the world. Consistently marginalized groups include women who lack access to the vote for a variety of reasons including status, poverty, gender, illiteracy, intimidation, or unfair election processes.

The right to vote is an important one especially for women. As Wolf (2008) puts it: "Your vote is your voice as ... [a] citizen. Voting give individuals the opportunity to be heard, to hold elected officials accountable for their decisions and to have a say in important issues that affect their community. It has been widely recognized that women are the silent majority. Voting gives an opportunity even to the silent majority women to be heard, represented, express their opinion on how government should be run and above all, to have an influence on all aspects of their lives and ensure that their concerns are addressed. On Election Day, every vote matters". Voting is always a better form of expression of ourselves than not voting and constantly criticizing the current state of affairs (Ciesielczuk, 2015). Voting is the foundation of any democratic nation. It is a privilege which involves a certain degree of responsibility. According to Ciesielczuk (2015), many people argue that their vote does not really count. The truth, according to Ciesielczuk, is that every vote counts! In order to make democracy effective, all people must be an active group of participants, not simply observers. One who does not vote does not have the right to complain. Voting is one of the most fundamental civil duties (Ciesielczuk, 2015). The low turnout in the 2015 Presidential elections is a source of concern. This was a clear indication that many women underestimate the importance of voting in elections. It is important to remember that the right to vote does not just come by. Many individuals shed blood in order for this right to be granted and to ensure that the tremendous sacrifice and effort of those who fought for this right does not go in vain, there should be wide participation by all in voting. While the right to vote is widely recognized as a fundamental human right, this right is not fully enforced for millions of individuals around the world.

Women's **right to be elected to publicly elected bodies** refers to the right of women to be nominated as candidates for election and to have the democratic chance of winning a seat in the elected body. It also extends to the right not to be discriminated against during tenure of political office. Discrimination against women is an offence against human dignity. The term *publicly elected bodies* is the counterpart to the concept of elections, encompassing even those bodies that have only an advisory role (Wittkopp, 2012). According to the United Nations (2005), electoral rights mean much more than simply the right to vote. Women can participate by becoming advocates, activists, political party members and candidates. Women can also be active participants in civil society, providing an entrée into the political arena. Government machineries, electoral management bodies, NGO's including women's groups and networks, the media, and trade unions and other associations can provide avenues for women's political participation (UN, 2005).

The right to **hold public office and to exercise all public functions** goes beyond formal participation and voting to substantial issues: the right to participate in formulation and implementation of government policy and the right to hold public office and perform public functions without discrimination (Wittkopp, 2012). Public office encompasses the vast variety of non-elective public employment and the right to influence politics not only through voting but also through other less formal channels. Under this right, women are supposed to participate in civil society including public boards, and local councils and the activities of the organizations such as political parties, trade unions, professional and industry associations, women's organizations, community-based organizations or other organizations concerned with public and political life (Wittkopp, 2012). The term serve as a blanket clause in the Convention completing the term public office to cover every State-related occupation in public and political life (Wittkopp, 2012). Public functions are all activities that are carried out in the interest and for the benefit of the public. They need not be controlled by public authority such as in the case of judiciary and need not necessarily be carried out by public officers, as where public functions are outsourced to private entities. It also encompasses not only all areas in which acts of individuals can be attributed to the State but also privatized companies that are heavily regulated by the state (Wittkopp, 2012). The phrase 'at all levels' refers to both public offices and public functions. Women have the right to be represented at all branches and levels of government and all levels of seniority (Wittkopp, 2012).

Freedom of expression (implying a free press and other media) and freedom of assembly and association are essential adjuncts to the political rights though not specified in the Convention on the Political Rights of Women. Access to **free expression** is vital both to support the development process and as a development goal in its own right. However, illiteracy, discrimination, poverty, cultural and religious customs in most cases restrict various minorities' rights to expression and assembly in many countries around the world. When people are unable to communicate their ideas, views, worries and needs effectively, they get excluded from meaningful participation in society, and from the opportunity to better their own circumstances. Similarly, the rights to **freedom** of peaceful **assembly** and of **association** serve as a vehicle for the exercise of many other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. Specifically, the right to peaceful assembly must be promoted and protected because it is a life blood of any functioning democracy and is the catalyst for exercising one's rights to freedoms of association, expression and even the core right to political participation in the governance of the affairs of the country. The right to peaceful assembly empowers individuals to express their political opinions, engage in literary and artistic pursuits and other cultural, economic and social activities, engage in religious observances or other beliefs, form and join trade unions and cooperatives, and elect leaders to represent their interests and hold them accountable. Women are entitled to enjoy all these rights and freedoms on the same basis as men.

The rights of women are enshrined in many national, regional and international instruments and Zambia has ratified and acceded to a number of these human rights and women's political rights instruments. The Zambian Constitution, at national level, is the legal framework which protects the rights of both men and women in the country. The Constitution, according to Web Editor (2016), emphasises the equal worth of men and women, and the need for gender equity and equality in all aspects of life in line with international, regional and sub-regional instruments on gender which Zambia is party to. This emphasis, according to Web Editor, is a reminder that women need not look down upon themselves but should regard themselves as being equal to the task, just like

the menfolk. Such provisions should motivate women to enhance their participation in politics (Web Editor, 2016). In terms of policy framework, Zambia has been implementing the National Gender Policy. This is a national strategy for advancement of women. According to Mukuka (2013), the National Gender Policy takes into account the issues and concerns contained in strategic documents such as the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in 1979, the Beijing declaration and platform for action in 1995; the SADC Declaration on Gender and development in 1997 and the Millennium Declaration and Development Goals in 2000.

The government also prioritized gender equality and women's empowerment in its National Development Plans. For instance, the government systematically mainstreamed gender in all sectors of the economy in its fifth and sixth National Development Plans. At institutional level, the Office of the Minister of Gender and Child Development and Parliamentary Committee on Legal Affairs, Human Rights and Governance provide political leadership and policy guidelines on mainstreaming in national development and oversight and accountability for gender mainstreaming within the public sector respectively. The Gender Consultative Forum and the Sector Advisory Group on Gender also play critical roles on dialogue on key gender issues.

At regional level, the SADC protocol on gender is an important one. There is also the African Charter on Human and People's Rights of Women in Africa. At International level, Zambia is a signatory to many international instruments and conventions that call for the promotion and advancement of women across all sectors. These include the United Nations Organisation universal normative instruments such as the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, international Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, international Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, International Labour Organisation Convention on equal pay for equal work of equal value. Other international policy and strategic documents to which Zambia is party at global level include the Sustainable Development Goals and Beijing Platform of Action. All the above instruments are legally binding commitments that require the nation to respect, protect and fulfil women's political rights.

Thus, women access to information and knowledge on their political rights is key to exploring and creating more economically, socially and environmentally sustainable development pathways. Information is a major means of freeing women from poverty, oppression and raising their socioeconomic standards (Darch, 2009). It can enable women to exercise their political rights and responsibilities as well as voice thereby effectively monitoring and holding government to account, and to enter into informed dialogue about decisions which affect their lives.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

Women represent slightly more than half (50.35%) of the electorates in Zambia as compared to males (49.65%), yet they do not exercise political power or form alliances that would promote their interests, change government or eliminate discriminatory policies. Women, in other words have not necessarily participated at the decision-making level. At global level, Bridge (2016), argues women make up just 22% of the world's Members of Parliament, 18% in the executive



branch and 19% cabinet ministers. Not only does this gender imbalance result in unrepresentative policies, but it denies women the right to participate and have a political voice (Bridge, 2016). Similarly, in Zambia, female representation at Cabinet level, Parliamentary level and other senior executive positions at both national and local levels remains dismally low in relation to the proportion of women in the population (Diakonia Zambia, 2013 and Nkonkomalimba, 2010) (table 1).

Table 1: The distribution of women in decision making positions

<b>Decision making position</b>	<b>1964</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>
Cabinet Ministers (%)	4.8	10.6	10.6	12	23.8	28.8	13.6	9.1	17.4	10.5	10.5	10.5	24	33.3
Member of parliament (%)	-	-	-	5	19	14.7	-	13.9	15	11.5	16	12.6	13	18
Deputy Ministers (5)	-	-	-	-	8.9	18.2	-	17.2	12.5	15.8	15.8	15.8	12.5	Position abolished

Source: Gender in Development Division, 2011; NGOCC, 2011; Central Statistical Office, 2012; Nkonkomalimba, 2010, Nyirenda, 2015).

Additionally, Nkonkomalimba (2010) posits that only 18.6% of the members of the Constitution Review Commission were women while the Electoral Reform Technical Committee consisted of 19% women. Exceptionally, Nkonkomalimba argues that the Anti-Corruption Commission is the only public institution that was constituted by 60% of women. At local Government level, women are only represented by 7.3%. In the civil service, female representation is not any different from the political arena. At the Permanent Secretary level, female representation stands at 19% while at the Director level women only account for 23% (Nkonkomalimba, 2010). Thus, according to Nkonkomalimba, with the exception of the ACC, the statistics not only provide a clear indication that women still lag behind in assuming critical decision-making positions, but also Zambia's failure to attain the 30% SADC target of women representation in decision making structures by the year 2005(Nkonkomalimba, 2010).

According to The Carter Center (2017), various tools such as poverty, illiteracy, violence, and inadequate opportunities for quality participation are applied to address the web of adversities facing women. However, insufficient focus has been paid to the power that access to information on political rights can play in confronting these challenges. Although recent years have witnessed a plethora of research and programming related to voice, participation, and empowerment of women, access to information particularly on political rights, has been implied rather than explicitly identified as a core ingredient for success. Prominently, when focus is placed on women's ability to fully and effectively exercise their fundamental right to information, the considerable gender irregularities become even more apparent (The Carter Center, 2017). Ironically, it is arguable that while women are the least likely to demand and receive access to information, they are perhaps the most in need of this potent tool (The Carter Center, 2017). However, there is currently little that is known about women's access to information on their

political rights in Zambia. It is against this background that investigating whether professional women access information on their political rights was imperative.

### **1.3 Research objectives**

#### ***1.3.1 General objective***

The general objective of this research was to investigate the extent to which professional women in Lusaka, Zambia access information on their political rights.

#### ***1.3.2 Specific objectives***

The specific objectives of the research were to investigate;

1. The extent to which professional women are aware of their political rights in Lusaka, Zambia
2. Establish the sources of information for professional women on their political rights in Lusaka, Zambia
3. The extent to which professional women exercise their political rights in Lusaka, Zambia

#### ***1.3.3 Research questions***

The research questions of the research were as follows:

1. Are women in Lusaka, Zambia ware of their political rights?
2. What are the sources of information for professional women on their rights in Lusaka, Zambia?
3. To what extent do professional women in Lusaka, Zambia exercise their political rights?

### **1.4 Definition of key terms**

*Professional:* A professional will be taken to mean a person who is paid to undertake a specialized set of tasks and orchestrate them with uncommon skill. Traditional examples of professionals included doctors, lawyers, librarians, and sports men and women but is now more widely used to include estate agents, surveyors, environmental scientists, educators and many more.

*Right:* The term *right* in this study is taken to mean “a liberty of freedom which a human being possesses by virtue of being human. They cannot be surrendered but can be violated. They are inalienable, inherent and interconnected” (UN, 2006).

*Women:* The word *women* refer to persons of female gender, including girls (Wittkopp, 2012).

*Women’s political rights* are a class of rights that protect women’s freedom from infringement by governments, social organizations, and private individuals. They ensure women's ability to participate in the political life of society and state without discrimination or repression. These rights, according to Wikigender, may or may not be institutionalized, ignored or suppressed by law, local custom, and behavior in a particular society. Women’s political rights are grouped together and differentiated from broader notions of human rights because they often differ from

the freedoms inherently possessed by or recognized for men and boys, and because activists for this issue claim an inherent historical and traditional bias against the exercise of rights by women and girls.

*Political participation:* This implies participation of individuals as voters, lobbyists, elected representatives, trade unionists and public officials in the various branches of government. Political participation stems from the freedom to speak out, assemble and associate. It goes beyond political parties. Participation is the responsibility of all citizens. Effective solutions to international, national, regional and local problems can best be found when all citizens including women can exercise on an equal basis their right to participate fully in decision-making process.

*Information:* Information in this study is taken to mean “intelligence and knowledge that contributes to the social, economic, cultural and political well-being of society...,” (Lundu, 1998: 11).

*Access to information/information access:* In this study, the concepts of *access to information* and *information access* have been used interchangeably to imply the freedom or ability to identify, obtain and make use of data or *information* effectively. In this context, it also implies getting to know and exercise political rights such as women being able to demand to be informed about public issues; occupy public offices; stand for elections, monitor the conduct of public leaders and representatives; express their own opinions; vote in elections; debate issues; attend community meetings, become involved in private, voluntary organizations and even protesting.

## **2.0 METHODOLOGY**

This study was a survey in nature largely centered on quantitative methods. The study surveyed professional women in Lusaka, Zambia on their access to information on their political rights in both public and private sector institutions of Lusaka. A total of fourteen purposively selected institutions, seven public and another seven private were selected from which 70 professional women were randomly selected. Primary data collection was done using self-administered questionnaires. The public sector institutions included: Ministries of gender and Child Development, Education, Community Development and Social Services, Lands, and Mines & Minerals Development. While the private sector institutions included: Forum for African Women Education in Zambia (FAWEZA), Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), Women in Law in Southern Africa (WLISA), Women for Change, Women’s lobby group and Non-Governmental Coordinating Council (NGOCC). The focus on women organizations or institutions is due to the fact that many of these, “though working for women and pushing the women’s agenda forward still do not understand the importance and the need for ... information [on women’s political rights] or have very little understanding of it” (Hambuba, 2009).

## **3.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1 Age and level of education of the respondents**

The results obtained from the field indicated that the majority of the respondents 33(47.1 %) in the study were in the age group 26 to 34 years old. While 30 (42.9 %) of the respondents were in the

age group 35 to 44 years old, 7(10%) of the respondents were aged above 45 years old. The findings further revealed that there were no respondents who participate in the study aged below 25 years old. It can therefore, be concluded that the majority of the respondents who participated in the study were young and middle aged (42.9%).

With regards to the highest level of education attained, the majority of the respondents indicated that they were educated up to college level (64.3%) and 25 (35.7%) went up to university level. The findings affirmed the fact that respondents who participated in this study were literate and professionals. In terms of levels of management respondents belonged to in the organization, 12 (17.1%) were in top management, 28(40%) were in middle management and 30(42.9%) were in lower management levels. Thus, majority of the respondents who participated in the study were in lower management levels as those in top management were few. More women are in lower management positions as compared to men.

### **3.2 Respondents' awareness of their political rights**

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they know what women's political rights are. The results from the field indicated that a total of 67(95.7%) of the respondents indicated that they know what women's political rights are and only 3(4.3%) of the respondents said they do not know what women's political rights are as shown in table 2 below.

*Table 2: Respondents awareness of their political rights*

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
YES	67	95.7
NO	3	4.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>

The respondents were further asked to state the political rights women have in Zambia and the results obtained from the field as shown in table 3 below revealed that 67(95.7%) of the respondents indicated the right to vote, 66(94.3%) reported the right to be elected, another 66(94.3%) stated that women have the right to hold public office and take part in the in the conduct of public affairs while 61(87.1%) reported that women have the freedom of association, again 61(87.1%) indicated that women have the freedom of speech/ expression and 61(87.1%) said indicated that women have the freedom of assembly.

*Table 3: Respondents knowledge of political rights*

<b>Political right</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Right to vote	67	95.7
Right to be elected	66	94.3
Right to hold public office and take part in the in the conduct of public affairs	66	94.3
Freedom of association	61	87.1
Freedom of speech	61	87.1
Freedom of expression	61	87.1
<b>Other (s)</b>	0	0

Overall the findings from the field suggests that professional women know their political rights. These findings concur with those of Nkonkomalimba (2010) whose findings on young people's perceptions on women's political rights in Zambia revealed that the young people were generally aware about the rights of women and were able to state most of the rights women have. The results of the current study could be attributed to the fact that professional women in Zambia have a rich background of education (i.e. university and college) as revealed above. Education is the foundation for building awareness as it provides literacy skills to people. Literacy plays a critical role in as far as information access is concerned. It helps individuals to identify effective ways of informing themselves on various aspects of life including political rights. Literacy enables people to understand information presented in complex technical language; identify appropriate and reliable sources and assess quality of information, use effective information retrieval strategies; interpret and use information appropriately; obtain and evaluate evidence-based information; evaluate and weigh evidence to make an informed; communicate ideas clearly; and effectively share information. Thus, "the power of literacy lies not just in the ability to read and write, but rather in a person's capacity to apply these skills to effectively connect, interpret and discern the intricacies of the world in which they live" (Neilson, 2014).

Furthermore, literacy is a basic tool for acquiring, sharing and exchanging information and knowledge. It creates quest for information, self-learning and understanding, thereby generating the demand for information and knowledge services (Mulauzi and Albright, 2009). The more educated a woman is the more likely she is to seek information (e.g. on family planning) and evaluate information sources. Education gives a woman confidence, status and ability to access information. Literacy skills assist individuals to develop or utilize media and technology to effectively navigate, discern, decipher and apply information that surrounds them. Thus, education in general is an essential competency of individuals to not only create, gather, exchange and use information but also become good citizenship, engage in self-discovery and self-fulfillment behaviors. In other words, it promotes political democracy. The power of education is affirmed by World Health Organisation (2013) who contend that education is an important prerequisite for greater political involvement and acts as a vehicle through which social and political consciousness



can be raised. It also increases women's knowledge of their rights and is important for increasing advocacy efforts.

Additionally, professional women who participated in the study were in employment and this implies that they had disposable income to enable them access different sources such as newspapers, radio, libraries and information centers, television, magazines and Internet to mention but a few. Most professional women are able to access these different sources of information either at work or at home mostly free of charge. Even when it cost money, professional women earn an income to afford access to these sources of information as earlier mentioned. Again, there are a number of advocacy and sensitization programmes in Lusaka on women's political rights as compared to rural settings. These include sensitization workshops, training, peer education in schools, radio or television discussion programmes, International Women's Day sensitization programmes as well as school lessons on gender equality. The other reason is that there are a number of institutions dealing with women's political rights in Lusaka than anywhere else in the country. Additionally, the institutions from which participants were drawn deal with issues of gender and it is possible that accessing information on political rights of women is an area of interest. While many urban people can have access to these sources of information, rural people face challenges such as limited Internet connectivity, distance, lack of disposable income, language barrier, limited information literacy skills and limited knowledge and skills to use Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

### **3.3 Sources of information on women's political rights**

Information sources are the key agents of political socialization. Relevancy and easy accessibility of information sources are crucial factors if information is to be effectively used by the users. This study thus, investigated the sources of information readily available to professional women in Lusaka to access information particularly on their political rights. Results from the field as indicated in table 4 revealed that 47 (67.1%) of the respondents accessed the information using Internet, 54 (77.1%) interpersonal sources such as friends and relatives, 61 (87.1%) mobile phones, 55(78.6%) newspapers, 64(91.4%) television, 61 (87.1%) radio and 49 (70%) indicated that they obtained information through other sources that include institutions dealing with women's rights or affairs such as Forum for African Women Education in Zambia (FAWEZA), National Legal Aid Clinic for Women (NLACW), Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF), Zambia National Women's Lobby Group (ZNWL), Women for Change (WFC), Non-Governmental Coordinating Committee (NGOCC), Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), Women in Law in Southern Africa (WLISA), Human Rights Commission, Zambia Civic Education Association, Gender in Development Division (GIDD), Zambia Media Women Association (ZAMWA) and the Ministry of Gender and Child Development.

*Table 4: Respondents' sources of information on political rights*

Source	Frequency	Percentage
Internet	47	67.1
Interpersonal sources e.g. friends/relatives	54	77.1
Mobile phones	61	87.1
Newspaper	55	78.6
Television	64	91.4
Radio	61	87.1
Other (s)	49	70

According to the study, it can be safely concluded that professional women use a variety of sources (both print and electronic) to look for information on their political rights as the percentage difference in the scoring of each sources is minimal. As mentioned above, the results are not surprising as these sources are more accessible to urban people than rural dwellers. Besides, the sources are affordable for respondents that participated in the study since they earn an income.

### **3.4 Extent to which women exercise their political rights**

The study further sort to solicit information whether women exercise their political rights. 40 (57.1%) indicated that they do not exercise their rights due to various reasons (table 4) and 30 (42.9%) indicated that they do exercise their political rights. The findings suggest that women continue to experience difficulties in exercising their rights such as limited education 30 (42.9%), lack of financial resources 50 (71.4%), limited information and knowledge 64 (91.4%), political violence 62 (88.6%), family responsibilities 54(77.1%), discrimination 59(84.3%), stereotypes 60(85.7%), religious and customary traditions and practices 5(7.1%) and poverty 40(57.1%).

Table 4: Barriers to exercising political rights

Barrier	Frequency	Percentage
Limited education	30	42.9
Lack of financial resources	50	71.4
Limited information and knowledge	64	91.4
Political violence	62	88.6
Family responsibilities	54	77.1
Discrimination	59	84.3
Stereotypes	60	85.7
Religious and customary traditions and practices	5	7.1
Poverty	40	57.1
Other (s)	0	0

There is a strong relationship between education levels and exercising political rights by women. Goetz (2003) noted a range of direct and indirect effects that formal education has upon political participation. Its direct effects include the acquisition of the knowledge and communication skills useful for public debate, and direct training in political analysis through courses with current events content. Its indirect effects include the benefits of voluntary engagement in school government, clubs, sports, and school newspapers; these arenas provide young people with an early apprenticeship for politics, where they can exercise leadership, develop civic skills of cooperation and negotiation, and acquire bureaucratic and organizational skills useful for political activity. Education enhances other factors supporting political engagement, such as access to high-income jobs that provide the resources and contacts for political activity, and access to non-political associations such as charitable organizations or religious establishments that can be a recruitment ground for political activity. As the results have shown above, most women in Zambia have low educational opportunities and as a result find it difficult to exercise their political rights.

Like in other parts of the world, women face financial difficulties in Zambia for them to exercise their political rights. This is what one of the respondents had to say on financial difficulties:

*Exercising political rights such as contesting in an election requires money. One should have invested enough to take up that decision...as a member of a political party, you are expected to put in money...people with money are preferred for leadership roles in the party. Otherwise, it is difficult to if not impossible, for a woman to run a successful campaign without financial resources as this venture is very expensive.*

Additionally, women have lower employment rates than men and their earnings are equally low to allow them join the political arena. The results of the current study are similar to those of Ritchie, Rogers and Sauer (2014) who found that very wealthy people were often candidates themselves, while other rich people contributed large sums to campaigns, but almost exclusively to male candidates. Female candidates, especially those running as independents, had little success getting wealthy people to contribute to their campaigns.

The findings that limited access to information and knowledge is a barrier for women to exercise their political rights concur with Stange, Oyster and Sloan (2011) argument that women frequently have less access than men to information about candidates and political platforms, manifestos, voting procedures and so on due to various reasons such as illiteracy. They lack knowledge and understanding of political systems, processes or about impact that political initiatives and policies may have upon their lives and this prevents them from constructively engaging in political democratic discussions and holding elected representatives accountable. They also lack of information on the political rights frameworks which support women's equality, advocacy and alliance strategies, policy making and the skills and Stange, Oyster and Sloan (2011) observed that failure to understand the rights, responsibilities and opportunities for change conferred by franchise means that women are always less willing to register as voters, stand as candidates, hold public office, exercise all public functions, freely express themselves, assemble or associate. For instance, the low voter turnout was observed in Zambia's 2015 presidential election as only 33% of voters turned up to vote. Katebe (2015), observed that the majority of those that did not turn out to vote were women and limited information on the exercise was cited as one of the reasons for this. Ward (2013) affirms this by stating that access to information is the missing piece of the puzzle. Women more often than men lack information to actively participate in all aspects of life including political affairs.

In fact, women's limited access to information leads to various violations of their rights to live free from political violence and discrimination. Access to information is a pre-requisite for women to know their rights and consequently demand them. According to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (2015), access to information allows women to be able to fully exercise all of their rights, and in particular, their political rights. It enables women at risk of suffering imminent acts of political violence to access the protection mechanisms established by national laws. The study by Lawless and Fox (2013) revealed that from their school experiences to their peer associations to their media habits, women tend to be exposed to less political information and discussions than do men and that they are less likely than men to think they will be qualified to run for office, even once they are established in their careers. Women's self-doubts are important (Lawless and Fox, 2013) because they play a substantial role in depressing the likelihood of considering a candidacy.

In Zambian politics, political violence is another challenge respondents faced in exercising their political rights. The current findings are supported by Ritchie, Rogers and Sauer (2014) whose findings revealed that women are most frequently victims of intimidation, verbal harassment and physical harm and group clashes. In Zambia, Muleya (2016) noted with concern that majority of the victims of physical beating by Zambia Police are usually helpless women who attempt to exercise their political rights. Muleya appealed for a transformation of Zambia Police from a force to a service by among other measures, applying modern techniques in crowd management as opposed to using traditional violent means instead of excessive use of force on defenseless and peaceful citizens expressing divergent and dissenting views. Online User (2015) made similar observations that women across the world who have attempted to participate to exercise their political rights have in one way or the other experienced political violence at the hands of cadres. It was argued that politics across the world especially Africa are often marred with insults, mudslinging, character assassination and violence. Such tendencies have deterred women particularly in Zambia from exercising their political rights for fear of being beaten, insulted or

their character assassinated. Sometimes, women politicians are threatened with exposure of their private lives which can be a source of embarrassment to them and their families. In most cases men are paid to insult and beat women politicians. Some women politicians are even accused of sleeping with men in the political arena to enable them ascend to the top and secure senior positions both at party and national levels (Online User, 2015).

The results of the current study further revealed that women have difficulties in exercising their political rights due to family responsibilities. According to one of the respondents:

*Exercising political rights like voting, meetings or training involve being away from home. It is difficult for most of us to leave family responsibilities to attend such because priority is on family responsibilities. Voting for instance can take one half or the whole day on the queue.*

Stange, Oyster and Sloan (2011) argue that women's double burden of work and domestic duties limit women's time or opportunity to follow electoral campaigns and to have the full freedom to exercise all other political rights. Hora (2014) observed that much of their time is consumed doing home based responsibilities than public oriented responsibilities. This according to Hora implies that men's psychological orientation to hold and solve domestic responsibilities and activities is sought to be very significantly low.

In Zambia, extensive discrimination against women continues to exist due to traditional roles of men and women. Women are not treated as equal to its men. In most cases, society stereotypes women as capable only of their traditional, gendered roles. Women are seen to be physically and emotionally weak. The consequence is that women remain excluded from the political decision-making processes as leaders, legislators, ministers and chief executives, and not enough of women's needs are incorporated into policy formulation. Further challenges to the fulfilment of women's political rights include negative customary practices which continue to place women in subordinate positions and often deter women from exercising their full potentials in their enjoyment of freedoms and rights. Women are believed to be politically inferior and are therefore, not as good as men. Similar to the findings of Nkonkomalimba (2010), Ritchie, Rogers and Sauer (2014) and UN (2015). Respondents in this study also considered some political rights (e.g. voting) to be in conflict with their religion. Respondents on this one argued that their religious beliefs do not allow them to vote. Although poverty levels affect men and women, women are more vulnerable because they have lower education than men and have a very small share in formal employment (Ngoma, 2016). They have to work very hard to meet the family requirements and, as a result, they neglect their own needs. Poverty reduces women's access to, information, education, income, food and health services which ultimately deprive them from exercising their political rights.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

This study has revealed that professional women are generally literate and they know their political rights as they were able to state them. Respondents according to the findings access this information through a number of sources including Internet, friends and relatives, phones, newspapers, television, radio, libraries and information centers as well as other institutions



especially those dealing with women issues. It has equally been discovered from the field that respondents to a great extent find it difficult to exercise their rights due to varied reasons such as limited education, inadequate financial resources, lack of information and understanding of political systems and processes, discrimination, stereotypes, family responsibilities, political violence, religious and customary traditions and practices as well as poverty.

## **5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Women in Zambia should exercise their political right to vote or as candidates as this is one sure way, according to Katebe (2015), that women can have a voice in ushering in leaders of their choice and thereby contributing to strengthening Zambia's growing democracy.
2. Media institutions, especially community radio stations should provide adequate coverage on women's political rights so that more women including those in rural areas can be sensitized on these rights.
3. There are still many rural districts in Zambia bordering neighboring countries which have no access to any Zambian radio or television and do not even have community radio stations and end up listening to foreign radio stations. Chiengi and Milenge district in Luapula plus Shangombo and Sesheke in Western are just a few of the examples. Information providers especially media institutions should consider reaching out to such remote areas by setting up community radio stations which can offer a platform for raising awareness on the political rights of women.
4. There is also need for the media institutions to play a more strategic and informative role of educating women voters particularly on the election process and on issues that matter to them as female. In this way, the media would be contributing to raising voters' aspirations and informed decision making for women when they are voting.
5. Education institutions should also promote awareness of women's political rights through research.
6. There is an obvious need for political parties in Zambia and other stakeholders to make a deliberate effort to increase and improve women's participation within their ranks.
7. The government and other stakeholders must see to it that there is a continued implementation of regional and international women's political rights instruments.
8. Civil society organisations and other stakeholders should assist in training political parties on basic principles of internal democracy, gender and democratic governance. This will ensure the inclusion of gender sensitive provisions in parties' constitution and manifestoes.
9. Government must translate women's political rights in other major local languages so that more women can acquaint themselves with these rights.
10. Women should encourage, support and motivate each other to exercise their political rights at all levels on equal terms with men.

### **5.1 Recommendations for Future Research**

Cultural and traditional practices as well as religious and sociological factors contribute to women's lack of access to information on their political rights. There is need for studies to establish those cultural and traditional practices as well as religious and sociological factors that hinder women's access to information particularly in Zambia and Africa at large. There is need to undertake a comparative study of men and women in as far as access to information on political

rights is concerned in Zambia. Further, this study was undertaken in an urban set up. There is need to undertake such a study in rural settings of Zambia.

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