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Participation of Elite Women in Political Leadership in the Maasai of Narok South Sub County, Kenya

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the historical challenges hindering the elite women participation in National leadership in Kenya. The paper notes that though women have shown that they have the potential to effectively participate and engage in national development, they still face a lot of challenges. Elite women participation is still underrepresented in Kenya. Remains challenged in terms of ascendancy of women to political leadership in relation to their historical status. The researcher adopted the descriptive design and targeted all the elite women in Narok South Sub County. A sample of 330 elite women was selected using simple random sampling to participate in the study. The study used Questionnaires, focused group discussions guides and in depth interview schedules to collect the required data tools. Both descriptive and inferential data analysis methods were used. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to aid in analysis of quantitative data. The qualitative data was analyzed by identifying common themes in textual data. The study established that the historical events about women and politics have an influence on the participation of women in politics today. Most of the respondents recounted that all through, politics has been regarded as a male dominance activity where only very few women can be found. In the Maasai community, it was noted that women's place is in the kitchen and at home and that women are not supposed to talk before men from the cultural perspective. These issues have their origin from the historical believes about women and leadership. Women felt they were intimidated by the patriarchal society which has been defined by historical happening where men are regarded as being supreme and having full control over women. On strategies that can be used to improve on this situation, the respondents said that there is need to educate the girls and stop marrying them off at a tender age. There is also need to give women autonomy in their operations so that they can be able to decide what is best for them and also there is need for men to be sensitized on the role of elite women so that they don't consider them as competitors with wrong motives. Findings of this study are expected to contribute to the theoretical and empirical knowledge on how to empower elite women to participate in political leadership and inform policy formulators.

Keywords: *Elite women, participation, education, historical, political*

1. Introduction

Over the decades, issues concerning women have taken on new dimensions and received varied treatment by the United Nations and its specialized agencies. Gender equality was first declared a development agenda in the United Nations Charter of 1945, and was subsequently addressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) of 2000. In spite of the international declarations affirming the rights and equality between men and women of which Kenya is a signatory, existing literature shows that women still constitute a disproportionately small percentage of those participating in political decision-making and leadership.

The Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003), and the African Plan of Action was to accelerate the implementation for the advancement of Women in political participation (1999). Many global Conferences have been held including Cairo Conference on Population and Development in 1994, Fourth World Conference on Women of 1995, and World Summit for Social Development of 1995 which affirmed that inequalities still persist in women's political representation despite the progress made globally in improving their status, through the establishment of a national task force on gender and education in 1995, a national policy on gender and education was not formulated until 2008 (Republic of Kenya 2007). The policy provided a framework for planning and implementation of gender responsive education, as well as research and training but it suffered numerous setbacks.

Despite subscribing to international commitments to empower women, Kenya still lags behind in the East African region in terms of women representation in politics and decision making. Political participation is the degree and form of involvement of citizens in governance and related institutions of society (Igwee 2002). It thus involves participation in political campaigns and debates, attending strategy meetings of political parties, voting during elections, vying as candidates for elections, and holding of key government and political party positions. Equal political participation of both genders is one of the critical pillars of good governance which entails freedom of expression, freedom of association among other fundamental rights (Igwee 2002).

The third Millennium Development Goal (MDG), categorically states that by 2015 all countries, Kenya included, need to eliminate gender disparities at all levels of education and labor relations. On this note, the Constitution of Kenya guarantees equal rights and freedom for women and men and upholds the principles of non-discrimination and equality. Articles 27(8) and (81) (b) of the Constitution provides for not more than two thirds representation of one gender in elective and appointive positions as a way of bridging the gender gap. The participation of women in decision-making and politics is a human rights issue enshrined in the Constitution that has addressed many issues that have been at the heart of the clamor for gender mainstreaming in Kenya from the 1980s (The Kenyan constitution 2010).

The exclusion of women from politics and other decision making structures in Kenya is a result of multiple structural and functional factors that vary in different social contexts across the newly established 47 Counties. It appears that the society as a whole has not yet acknowledged women's leadership rights and abilities. When the National Rainbow coalition (NARC) government was elected in 2003, it established the Gender Commission and an autonomous Ministry of Gender. The National Policy on Gender and Development of 2000 provided a framework with which the government could address gender imbalances strategically through established legal and institutional frameworks towards women empowerment and decision making. In the year 2012, the Gender Inequality index in Kenya was ranked at position 145 out of 186 countries according to the Human Development Report 2013. Available data indicates that gender inequity is still prevalent in the country, currently the National Assembly, Senate and County Governments do not meet the minimum one third gender constitutional representation requirement (Ouma&Maina 2010).

Throughout the history of politics in Western and African countries, women political representation has been very low. Women have been seeking to participate alongside men in governance and decision making in all aspects of public life but progress has been slow due to many challenges in their way. These challenges take the form of small conflicts over access to resources, which add up to slow participation of women in political, economic and social empowerment (Aili, 2000). The possible explanation for this scenario could be that gender issues in politics have not received due attention and redress. Women are always relegated to the peripheries of political leadership and marginalized. In their public and private lives, women have to struggle to articulate their desires and to find their own voices. Since Kenya attained her independence in 1963, women have been seeking to effectively participate alongside men, in governance and decision-making processes in all aspects of public life. Since then to the present date women participation still remains very low (Nyokabi, 2010).

In Kenya, and especially at the grassroots level, a number of factors hinder more than half of the population in their participation in politics. It is more apparent amongst the pastoralist communities (African Press International, 2007). Pastoralists' women remain marginalized and have little or no representation in local and national Government. In this context, very few were nominated or elected in the recent general elections, (Kipuri,2008) given the low political ranking regionally and globally in respect to female representation in Parliament currently standing at 9.9% of the total MPs in 2008-2012 Tenth Parliament (Nzomo, 2012). This compares poorly with Kenya's eastern neighbors and partners in the East African community that have all attained 30% female presence in their respective parliaments. Rwanda's (56.3%), Tanzania (36.0%), Uganda (34.9%), Burundi (32.1%); similarly South Africa (44.5%), Mozambique (39.2%) and Angola (38.6%) have also attained the threshold. Despite the new Kenyan constitution that ruled that 30% threshold would be progressively achieved, women still lag behind (Nzomo, 2012).

Women status and representation in politics and national development has remained very low since time in memorial. Women could not talk in any meeting where men were present or giving their decisions concerning any matter in the society. In case there is information required by men they cannot stand in a meeting, instead a man will stand on their behalf while they give the information, women's roles were purely domestic, their voters' cards would always be in the custody of their husbands, who will determine whom they will vote for, women were restricted from political participation (Ole lemein, 2014).

The Maasai women face great marginalization socially, economically and politically (Ole Lemein). The status of a Maasai woman in the society is unrecognized, even when it comes to land issues; a recent example is Peris Tobiko who faced challenges as the first Maasai woman to be elected to National assembly. This society had notably built gender tension and perceptions, especially regarding her place in marriage. They generally believe that a woman being in political leadership would bring bad omen, animals would die and many other misfortunes would befall the community. Such assumptions only sustain the long held patriarchal gender stereotypes (Ole lemein, 2014). This paper sought to find out how history issues have affected the participation of women in political issues in Kenya.

2. Statement of the Problem

Women around the world find themselves politically underrepresented in parliament and far removed from decision-making at all levels. In Kenya, and particularly in the Maasai community, women constitute slightly over half of the total population and form a critical portion of enhancing democratization of the political system in the country. There is still gender imbalance in Kenya's political field which is reflected also in Narok South Sub-County. Over the years, many elite women in Narok South Sub-County have attempted to enter political field at different levels. Despite the existence of programs of social-economic empowerment for poor women in such places, Narok included, the impact of these initiatives has apparently not been felt in Narok. Low women participation is the clearest indicator of low representation of Maasai elite woman in political issues since Kenya attained independence. It is against this background that this study sets out to investigate the historical challenges women face in Narok South Sub-County face in representation to political leadership.

3. Objective of the Study

To trace the historical trends of Maasai women participation in political leadership in the Maasai community of Narok South Sub-County.

3.1. Research Questions

What are the historical trends of the Maasai elite women political participation in leadership in the Maasai community of Narok South Sub-County?

3.2. Literature review

The colonial administrative, economic and social systems introduced in Africa in general and Kenya in particular, embodied Western notions of state and society with their distinctions between public and the private spheres and accompanying ideas about women's traditional bases of influence, authority and power (Hay, 1995). The status of women in the Maasai community, economic and social systems is based on traditional influence, where authority and power are vested in men. The current study seeks to establish the relationship between the Maasai pastoralist patriarchy and elite women's participation in political leadership in Narok South Sub-County.

The marginalization of women's institution during the colonial period was perpetuated through colonial policies. The colonial era left African women more politically disoriented and disempowered. While, African males were the first to learn the three R's (reading, writing and arithmetic) in schools, African females were confined to the three B's (that is baby, bath and broom) which confined them to the domestic sphere. Colonial education for girls was geared towards providing educated men with good wives and home makers. Schools girls were taught needlework, nurturing babies, cooking and bathing. The boys in the colonial elite schools were prepared to become good public servants while women were denied intellectual skills and grounding needed to engage them in modern politics (Nakanyike, 1991). This current study seeks to assess the relationship between education and role assignment and its influence on elite women participation in Narok South Sub-County.

Kenya women's presence and political participation in leadership and governance has a long history dating from pre-colonial through colonial to post colonial period. The legendary WanguwaMakeri-(1901-1909) defied patriarchal structures and rose to become a formidable leader who is said to have brought development and peace among to her community. Many "unsung heroines" accomplished similar feats; including those who actively participated in the Country's liberation struggle of the 1940s and 1950s. Indeed, it is said that Wangu Maker ruled large parts of Murang'a and commanded considerable respect because of her innovative skills in leadership, demonstrating that women can make significant difference even in hostile environments (Nyakwea, 1994). With existing patriarchal structures elite women can still make significant difference and actively participate in political leadership in Narok South Sub County.

Since Kenya attained formal independence in 1963, women have been seeking to effectively participate in governance and decision-making in all aspects of public life. But in the first four decades of postcolonial rule, progress towards women's access to formal political leadership positions has been slow due to a combination of structural obstacles that include: deeply embedded patriarchal socio-cultural values, undemocratic institutions and policy frameworks and low levels of civic and gender awareness. Narok South Sub-County has its historical trends but this current study seeks to investigate why there is low participation of elite Maasai women in Narok South Sub-County in particular.

The study adopted the Radical feminist theory, by Grossman (1957) who states how race, class, ethnicity, and age intersect with gender and the theory of Empowerment Douglas & Perkins (1993). Empowerment according to this study refers to empowering women by enabling them take more active roles in decision-making and increase their ability to generate choices and exercise bargaining power and a commitment to work towards changes. The two theories proposed in this study are deemed to have full potential in addressing the emergent issues in this gender-political study. The strengths of these theories have also been informed by the literature review that points out the need to do this study in order to fill the sociological knowledge gaps emerging in the respective literature excerpts.

4. Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was adapted to study. A sample of 330 elite women was selected from amongst the elite women in Narok South sub County. The study applied primary and secondary data collection methods from men and

women and key informants in order to analyze the factors influencing elite women participation in political leadership with respect to the variables in the study. The study included in-depth interview, questionnaires and focus group discussion to gather information from elite Maasai women. A pilot study was undertaken for the purpose of pre- testing of the research instruments to be used in the study. This study was necessary since it gave an allowance for checking statistical and analytical procedures; it gave a chance to reduce problems and mistakes in the study (Isaac & Michael, 1995). Hertzog (2008) suggested that 10 to 30 participants are sufficient for the pilot study in a survey research. The reliability results indicated an alpha reliability coefficient of 0.684 hence accepted for further analysis and the validity was computed using KMO measure of sampling adequacy the validity was obtained as 0.583 and hence considered valid. Both descriptive statistics (mean) and inferential statistics (chi square) were used in analyzing the data.

5. Results

The results of the study indicated that historical events and trends have an effect on the participation of elite women in politics in the county. Majority of the respondents disagreed that Elite Women political leadership is accepted in Narok South Sub County, this was due to the cultural standing in the community that women are not allowed to talk before men. It was also noted that there is a very high resistance to women processes in Narok South Sub County. In this case it was noted that men even interfere with the free operations of the women groups because they feel intimidated by the groups. The county officer for gender indicated that,

“Men ensure that women do not get any form of freedom and in that case they even join the women groups so that they can monitor what goes on in the groups. In case the men feel that the group is not up to any good in their perspective, then they force their women to quite”

The study also noted that the forms of women historic exclusion from political structures hinder elite women from political participation in Narok South Sub County. Majority of the respondents agreed, indicating that since time before women were supposed to take the back sit when it came to issues of politics. Even those who had attained education, they were still regarded not fit to hold any public office. This perception is what has kept women out of the political arena till now. Though the respondents disagreed that Women fit only for domestic roles in Narok South Sub County, but the reality was that most men considered women only for the domestic cores. In fact one woman indicated that, for this to be felt, women are left to carry all the cores of the home while men don't bother with anything. This preoccupation of the women is a strategy to make them not think of anything else but the family and home. This elicited a lot of debate in the focus groups; one of the participants indicated that;

‘personally I am the bread winner for the family since my husband has no work but at the end of the month he is the one to decide how the money will be spent and since I am to sit and make the home and ensure the children are fine, he sometimes withdraws all the money and spends with friends and leaves me to struggle to feed the family. This is serious but , then it is according to how our culture and the past history has forced us, so you will never have time to think of engaging in politics’

If perceptions changes in the community am able to participate in politics but the way things are women are not allowed to participate. The overall mean obtained from the question items was 3.382 meaning that more than 50% of the respondents agreed with most of the statements. It is therefore noted that historic challenges affect women participation in politics.

The chi square test result shows that there is a strong significant relation between historic events and women participation in politics in the county (chi square =510.7, p-value = 0.000)

6. Conclusions

It is concluded that historical trends have a very significant association with the participation of women in politics. This shows that women are still intimidated in getting into politics because of the culture of the community. The political environment is dominated by men and hence women are looked down upon because of what history dictates.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings it is recommended that the community should remove the historic barriers baring women from participating in politics and give them a chance to explore their potential.

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