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Influence of Demographic Factors on Women's Participation in Political Leadership in Rongo Constituency, Migori County, Kenya

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Abstract:

The purpose of the study is to investigate the influence of demographic factors on women's participation in political leadership in Rongo Constituency, Migori County, Kenya. A lot of strategies have been formulated both nationally and internationally to make it possible for women to participate in political leadership yet the level of women's participation in this field remains low not only in Kenya but world over. Kenya remains challenged in ascendancy of women into political leadership. At the moment in East Africa, Kenya is the worst performing in women's political leadership it only has 19.7 percent of women in the 11th parliament. In the history of Kenya, Rongo constituency has never been represented by a woman member of parliament and only one woman has ever run for the political office. Even the newly established senate assembly has no elected woman member of constituency assembly. The objective of the study is to assess the influence of demographic factors such as education and marital status on women's participation in political leadership. Literature was reviewed on the demographic factors and their influence on women's political leadership. The study adopted a mixed approach in the generation and analysis of data as well as the generalizations of the findings. The study employed a case study as the research methodology. It applied questionnaires and interviews as data generation techniques. The data generated was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The study concluded that women's marital status and educational level influence their participation in political leadership. The study recommends that education of women should be promoted more. The education curriculum should also include political training right from the primary education level to tertiary level. Similarly, women should negotiate for sharing of domestic responsibilities with other members of the family in order to have time to focus on political careers if they so wish to. There is also need for civic education in Rongo constituency, Kenya to help propagate issues of women emancipation.

Keywords: Demographic factors, educational level, marital status, participation, political leadership

1. Introduction

Gender equality in the political arena has not been easy to achieve. Despite the fact that most countries have embraced democracy, a fifty-fifty gender political participation in political leadership has not been realized. The low political participation by women is not limited to Africa; it is global, with the Nordic countries being among the notable exceptions. (Sir leaf 2010). The Nordic countries are about to close the gender gap as the percentage of women parliamentarians is 41.1 percent. Rwanda and Bolivia are the only countries that have achieved a gender balance in parliament. The percentage of women in Rwandan parliament is 63.8 % while Bolivia is 53.1 % thus the two countries rank top in world female representation in parliament. On the other hand, there are six countries in the world: Micronesia, Palau, Qatar, Tonga, Vanuatu and Yemen, with no women parliamentarians (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2015).

Kenya is quite challenged with regard to women's ascendancy into public political leadership positions. Twenty years after the re-introduction of democracy in Kenya, for instance, the best representation of women in parliament is the current 11th parliament. Kenya has only about 19.5 % women representation, trailing far behind the global average of 22.3% women representation in parliaments (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2015). Over the past decades, other countries in the East African region have surpassed Kenya on all measures of gender equality indices (Kamau 2010). Kenya ranks 74 in the world in the female representation in parliament (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2015).

The political arena is still dominated by men while women rarely run for elective posts. According to Lijphart (1999), political participation is good for democracy, but democracies are plagued by systematic inequalities in participation. One of the most persistent has been according to gender, such that women are found to participate less than men, suggesting that half the populations interest are less well represented (Scholzman 1994). If democracy is going to put down strong and healthy roots, it must profit from all the full and equitable participation of women in national and local leadership positions and in a full range of advocacy roles (National Democratic Institute, 2010).

2. Literature Review

Demographic factors like education, religion and marital status influence women's participation in political leadership (Khan 2010). It seems evident that formal education should be strongly associated with political participation for women and for men (Goetz 2003). Indeed, the American Sociologists Burns and Schozmann (2001), on the basis of decades of research into the factors influencing women and men's engagement into politics in the USA concluded that, education is especially a powerful predictor of political participation. Matland (2005) in Oduol (2010) suggest that education has led many a woman in the society to join political parties or participate in political parties. Education is the most important channel for encouraging women to speak out.

Empirical studies in Asia suggests that illiteracy and low level of educational attainment presents a most disempowering factor for women's development (Khan 2010). Two thirds of the total illiterate in the world are women (UNESCO, 2006) .60 percent of the 135 million children in the world between ages seven and eighteen who are not receiving education are girls; and only one out of every four girls who begin primary school remain in the school four years after (Negash, 2006) in Khan (2010). Despite the introduction and provision of free and compulsory primary free tuition in secondary education girls access to education remains limited, in part due to traditional attitudes as well as high dropout rates due to pregnancy, early and forced marriages (estimated at 80 000 annually). In Kenya whereas the Education Act provides for the right of pregnant girls to continue with their education until and after giving birth, pregnant girls continue to be expelled from schools (FIDA 2012).

Studies in Nigeria shows that most customs often prefer sending the male child to school over the females, who is expected to nurture siblings and be married off. This marginally increases the illiterate women and stiffens their competition with their male counterparts in politics (Agbalajobi 2009).

Empirical studies in India suggest that literacy has a strong impact on women's capacity to perform in the political institutions (Mohan et, al. 2005). In Nigeria it is expected that women who are educated will be more and will want to participate in political leadership. (Adedamola et, al. 2010). According to Khan (2010) educational attainment helps women to be empowered by building money earning capability among them, developing confidence to face challenges, enhancing the ability to make decisions regarding themselves and the society.

There is a wide variation between countries, however in the relationship between women's education level and their representation in formal politics. The United states which outranks other industrialized democracies in terms of the number of women in higher education has seen persistently low numbers of women in formal politics, reaching an all high of just 19.4% % of congress in 2015 (IPU 2015).Uganda, Rwanda and Mozambique among the poorest countries with adult literacy levels of just 41, 60.2 and 28.7 percent respectively have parliaments in which between 25 to 45 percent of legislators are women (Goetz 2003).Similarly in Kenya, provinces such as Nairobi and Central that claim higher levels of education still lag behind in the number of women parliamentarians (Kamau 2010).

However, studies by Oduol (2008) suggest that in Kenya many women do not only lack basic education but also have inadequate political training that can enable them participate effectively in the political arena. This leads to a situation where women are not taken seriously even when they declare their candidature. Omtatah (2008) states that democracy cannot function without an informed electorate. An uninformed, or misinformed public cannot participate in its government; it can only be used by it.

Empirical studies in the U.S.A show that marriage and parenthood are anticipated to have a stronger negative effect among women than men, where marriage may even boost participation in men (Rotolo 2000). Empirical studies in the Netherlands and the USA suggest that married women participate less in politics than single women (Bolzendahl & Coffe 2010). Once married women's leisure time declines to a great extent than men's, and women tend to increase the amount of time spent on housework (Sayer 2005). Studies done in Kenya by Kamau (2010) shows that many women would rather join politics when their children have grown up or after their husbands have died. Thus, marriage might lower political participation among women and boost it among men (Rotolo 2000).

Empirical studies by (Khan 2010) in Asia show that greater marital duration develop a relation of trust between husband and wife that provides opportunities to acquire more authority. In this regard empirical studies by Tareque et al. (2007) stated that younger wives in Bangladesh were kept under strict control of their husbands as compared to elder wives. Eventually tight control of husbands on young wives restricts their freedom.

As with marriage, Dutch findings indicate that divorce changes the resources that people have, and the effect is generally stronger and more negative for women (Poortman 2000). However, Bolzendahl and Coffe (2010) found out that being divorced is linked to increase in women's involvement in politics. Empirical studies in Kenya by Kamau (2010) found out that majority of women in politics are widowed, divorced or never married. The married ones have to get the full support of their husbands

3. Methodology

This study employed the case study method. According to Creswell (2007) case study is a piece of research which involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system. The case study method allows for an in-depth understanding of different perspectives of an issue using multiple techniques of data generation and involving participants within their real life contexts within the boundary of the case. Non - probability sampling suited this study because as Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) assert, the focus was on in-depth information on a particular issue and not on making inferences or generalizations. Hence, the study targeted participants who were known to have the information that served the purpose of this study (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). Non - probability sampling suited this study because as Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) assert, the focus was on in-depth information on a particular issue and not on making inferences or generalizations. Hence, the study targeted participants who were known to have the information that served the purpose of this study (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). The major aim of sampling in research is to identify the

participants who are likely to give rich and in depth information on the issue being studied so that we learn the most about it (Dörnyei, 2007). In this study, we selected 60 women of varied educational level and marital status were chosen for the study. The women were selected from the three different wards of Rongo Constituency. The techniques of data generation which were used for the study are interviews and questionnaires. Research on views, perceptions, feelings and attitudes is best done using questionnaires and interview schedules (Bell 1995). The data was analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively.

3.1. Findings and Discussions

90% of the married respondents stated that they would not participate in politics because of their marital status. They stated that they would not have time to concentrate on a political career. The married women indicated that a political career is so time consuming that it would interfere with the necessary time they required to take care of their children and husbands. They also indicated that a political career entailed spending a lot of time away from home, an issue that their husbands may not support. According to literature reviewed Rotolo (2000) suggests that marriage is anticipated to have a stronger negative effect among women than men, where marriage may even boost participation in men and vice-versa for women. 65% percent of single respondents said that their marital status cannot be an hindrance to their participation in political leadership, 35% of the single respondents indicated that they would not vie for a political office because the electorates may not vote for them because of their single marital status. According to them the electorates would delve into their personal lives in an attempt to understand the circumstances surrounding their marital status. Rongo Constituency is a traditional society, where marriage is upheld as the ideal marital status, being single is frowned upon: a mature woman who is out of school is expected to be married. Empirical studies in the Netherlands and the USA suggest that married women participate less in politics than single women (Bolzendahl & Coffe 2010). Once married women's leisure time declines to a great extent than men's, and women tend to increase the amount of time spent on housework (Sayer 2005). 55 % of divorced women stated that their marital status would not hinder their participation in political leadership. The women indicated that they were at liberty to choose which career to pursue. This concurs with the findings of Bolzendahl and Coffe (2010) that being divorced is linked to increase in women's involvement in politics. On the same note Kamau (2010) also found out that in Kenya majority of women in politics are widowed, divorced or never married.

70 % of educated women said they would not be interested in running for a political office because the political arena is chaotic and characterized by emotional, verbal and physical abuse. 30 % of the educated women said they would be interested in running for a political office because of the glamour, the fame and the financial benefits that come with holding a political office. On the other hand, 90% of uneducated women said they would not be interested in running for a political office while 10 % said they would wish to vie for a political office. According to Adedamola et, al. (2010) it is expected that women who are educated will be more willing and will want to participate in political leadership. For the case of Rongo constituency it is important to note that as much as more educated women than uneducated ones would be interested in running for a political office, the number of educated women who would vie for a political office is low. This is a pointer that there may be other factors that greatly shape women's decision to run for political office.

3.2. Conclusion and Recommendation

The study concludes that demographic factors like marital status and education level influence women's participation on political leadership. It was established that marital status greatly influences women's participation in political leadership. Married women indicated that they would not have time to vie for political leadership. On the other hand, single, divorced, widowed women seemed more willing to venture into political leadership. It was also concluded that education level had an influence on women's participation in political leadership. Those who had no formal education, did not show any interest in political leadership. On the same note the willingness of women to participate in political leadership increased with the level of education albeit minimally.

The study recommends that women should be empowered more. Girl child education should be promoted because even though much has been done to enhance it there still exist some challenges. Education is an empowering factor and for that reason discriminatory practices like marrying off girls at a tender age should be discouraged. The education should also include political training right from the primary education level to the tertiary level. In addition, women need to challenge the gender roles which leave most domestic responsibilities in their hands. Women need to negotiate for sharing of domestic responsibilities with other family members in order to have time to focus on careers for instance political careers if they so wish to.

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