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Women in Politics in Kenya: an Analysis of Participation and Barriers

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Abstract

Women constitute more than half of the world's population but their representation in the political arena has consistently been lower compared to men. Since representation is important in the allocation of resources, laws have been passed to guarantee gender parity in decision-making. In Kenya, the 2010 Constitution introduced a two-third gender rule to enhance parity in legislative bodies at both lower and national legislative bodies. From a sociological perspective, this paper assessed the extent of participation of women in the political development of Kenya. The qualitative study used interviews to analyse the contribution of women in politics. In all, 30 key informants, made up of 11 males and 19 females, were purposively recruited for the study. The study found that there were hindrances to women's effective political participation which included; political environment characterized by violence, discrimination based on gender and lack of support from fellow women. The study and its implication for policymaking has been discussed extensively.

Keywords: women, political participation, Kenya, culture, legislations

Mujeres en Política en Kenia: un Análisis sobre Participación y Barreras

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Resumen

Las mujeres constituyen más de la mitad de la población mundial, pero su representación en el terreno político siempre ha sido inferior a la de los hombres. Dado que la representación es importante en la asignación de recursos, se han aprobado leyes para garantizar la paridad de género en la toma de decisiones. En Kenia, la Constitución de 2010 introdujo una regla de dos tercios de género para mejorar la paridad en los órganos legislativos inferiores y nacionales. Desde una perspectiva sociológica, este documento evalúa el grado de participación de las mujeres en el desarrollo político de Kenia. El estudio cualitativo utilizó entrevistas para analizar la contribución de las mujeres en la política. En total, 30 informantes clave, conformados por 11 hombres y 19 mujeres, participaron en el estudio. El estudio encontró que había obstáculos para la participación política efectiva de las mujeres; el entorno político se caracteriza por la propaganda de la violencia, la discriminación basada en el género y la falta de apoyo de las demás mujeres. El estudio y su implicación para la formulación de políticas se ha discutido ampliamente.

Palabras clave: mujeres, participación política, Kenia, cultura, legislaciones

Democracy is underscored by the ability of all person to participate in politics equally.

Democratic principles value respect for citizens' rights to participation in elections, holding public office and being active in political party structures (Conway, 2011; Norris & Inglehart, 2011). Despite the increase in awareness and initiatives to empower women to take an active part in politics, they are less likely to be voted or appointed to public office (Foulds, 2014; Sifuna, 2006; Omwami, 2015). The promulgation of 2010 Constitution of Kenya was a major milestone in the fight towards gender equality as well as open up spaces for participation of women and their representation in decision-making processes. After years of adopting this new constitution, women continue to suffer setbacks whenever they seek not only elective but also appointment positions in Kenya. In the two parliamentary chambers, only few women have shown interest in contesting for parliamentary seats. For example, during the 2013 general elections, out of 1,908 aspirants who contested for the 349 National Assembly seats, only 197 were women which 69 were elected. Concerning the Senate chamber, out of 67 representatives, only 16 women were elected to present their counties. At the local county level, out of 623 women who contested, only 85 were elected compared to 1,365 males who were elected out of 9,287 contestants (Association of Media Women in Kenya, 2014; Gender Forum, 2013). Authoritative resource allocations are determined by these legislative bodies which underscores the relevance of gender parity in the decision-making process. Thus, this paper aims to document the barriers to the participation of women in the Republic of Kenya.

Democracy is strengthened and works effectively when opportunities exist for involvement or representatives of all citizens in the decision-making process of a country. Accordingly, the equal political participation of both genders is a critical pillar of good governance as everyone would have an equal voice in national discourses (Kabeer, 2005; Morojole, 2011; Sifuna, 2006). Politics plays a vital role in influencing the policymaking process, and the absence of significant numbers of women in influential positions would deny them a fair representation (Milligan, 2014; Norris & Inglehart, 2001; Sahabaya & Konadu-Agyemang, 2004). The leadership of women has been described as transparent, democratic and sensitive to pertinent issues than men (Barton, 2005; Conway, 2011; Kabeer, 2015). For instance,

women see government as a tool to serve the underrepresented or minority groups (Norris & Inglehart, 2001). More specifically, female parliamentarians tend to prioritise social issues such as childcare, equal pay, parental leave and pensions and gender-based violence and development matters such as poverty alleviation and service delivery (Musandu, 2008; Norris & Inglehart, 2001). Admittedly, with more than half of the Kenyan population being women, it means that inequalities in representation would further alienate them in the society.

Women groups has increasingly fought for political liberation in order to create a more inclusive society. The recent economic downturn has intensified arguments on the essence of encouraging women to participate in economic activities and by extension, increase their presence in the public spheres (Malik & Courtney, 2011; Sahabaya & Konadu-Agyemang, 2004). Previously, women were limited to life at home as their major tasks included cooking, raising children and taking care of home (Foulds, 2014; Kabeer, 2005; Sifuna, 2006). The recent economic crisis with its increasing hardships conscientise societies on the need to support women to participate in income generation activities to complement the efforts of men who are mainly the breadwinners of their respective families. The consequences of family poverty and rural poverty which mostly affects women has reinforced the need for their empowerment to enable them engage in productive activities (Boulanger, 2008; Milligan, 2014; Odhiambo, 2011). Despite laudable efforts at achieving equal political participation of women and men, there still remains a challenge as the former are usually outnumbered.

Disparities in participation have been linked to lack of availability of resources such as education, income, public status and centrality in organisations (Biegon, 2016; Kameri-Mbote, 2016). Women political participation has been intricately linked to the economic development; the more developed a country, the likely women would take part in politics (Conway, 2001; Norris & Inglehart, 2001). Based on this analogy, the gap between men and women could be wide in Kenya where there is low development, high corruption and political violence. The social order in Kenya affects the ability of women to enjoy their economic rights (Hughes, Mwiria, 1989; Kabeer, 2005; Milligan, 2014; Omwami, 2011). Socio-cultural beliefs and practices such as patriarchy and reverence of the elder continue to work against women empowerment and thus, giving them

limited resources and influence in societies (Boulanger, 2008; Mbarika et al. 2007; Morojole, 2011; Owuor, 2016; Sivi-Njonjo, 2016).

The change of constitution in 2010 was described as a new era in the political history of Kenya as the expectations were that there would be gender balance in the public sphere (Biegon, 2016; Sivi-Njobjo, 2016). Therefore, it is important to investigate from the perspectives of women and gender advocates, contemporary development in the political environment in Kenya. The study objectives are threefold; a) to measure the effectiveness of the two-third gender rule; b) to assess the contribution of women in national politics, and c) to discuss barriers to the participation of women in national politics. This empirical study will add to the literature on discourses on gender and political participation in the global south where the existing culture serves as a barrier to equal participation.

Women and political participation

Conceptually, the sociological approach provides an understanding of the extent of involvement of women in politics in Africa. Modernization with its accompanying industrialisation has been found to be a breakthrough to encourage the participation of women in public offices (Conway, 2001). As women assume more public roles, they become visible in influential positions which is likely to result in their increased participation in the political process (Barton, 2005; Foulds, 2014; Yiapan, 2002). However, this process is slow in sub-Saharan Africa where culture plays a role in determining the status of women in societies. Culture plays prominent role in determining the extent of women's involvement in activities outside the home (Kabear, 2015; Lawless & Fox, 1999; Kameri-Mbote, 2016; Mwangi, 1996; Omwami, 2011). For instance, some cultural values prohibit the active participation of women in politics as some societal values and norms proscribe their involvement in activities outside the home (Mbarika et al. 2007; Musandu, 2008). This contradicts political activities which put women at the forefront and engaging with men in public places.

Religiously, men are prepared for roles outside the home while women are trained to work at home. Besides, stereotype gender roles contribute to the lack of investment in the education of women in societies (Boulanger, 2008; Mbarika et al. 2007; Morojole, 2011). The patriarchal society in

Kenya has mainly assigned women to the domestic role which mainly dissuade them from mainstream political activities. In some marginalised communities in Northern Kenya such as the Maasai, the Samburu and Turkana, girls are not taken to school because parents have the notion that they will end in another man's house (as wives) and thus, they focus on educating the boys (Yiapan, 2002). These girls would grow up and become powerless in their communities as they are likely not to participate in national affairs.

The restraint of women to household jobs give them little time to be nurtured for public offices. There is a conflict between parental roles and marital roles and career opportunities for women (Norris & Inglehart, 2001; White, 2012). Women's family obligations, including especially childcare which may interfere with their ability to take on political jobs (Biegon, 2016; Kassilly & Onkware, 2010; Kameri-Mbote, 2016). In Kenya, there are limited childcare facilities and not every family could afford the cost of accessing these facilities due to limited income. Based on this, women become cautious in venturing into public roles which may affect their home or marriage. As a result, women are limited to narrow prescribed jobs such as nurses, secretary, clerks and even teachers which do not pay much in Kenya (Norris & Inglehart, 2001). More so, marriage is sacred, and women found to have divorced, or unmarried are disrespected in societies. In Denmark, most women in leadership positions were found to be divorced or unmarried (Norris & Inglehart, 2001) which is intolerated in Africa societies. Perhaps, women had no option than being submissive to the social roles and take up domestic jobs that would not give them much income for them to fund their political activities.

Poverty and unfair distribution of wealth contribute to the inability of women to occupy public positions (Biegon, 2016; Kameri-Mbote, 2016; Sivi-Njonjo, 2016). The contribution of women in domestic work and caregiving leave them with little income as they are usually not supported by the state (Black & Erickson, 2003; Bryson, 2003). Contrary, the social welfare in Nordic countries proffer explanation to the extent of participation of women in public sphere (Norris & Inglehart, 2001). Scandinavia operates social welfare programme which enhances fairness as every citizen is guaranteed at least a minimum living standards. In Kenya, there is lack of social support system as most women lack financial power to compete for

public offices (Biegon, 2016; Kameri-Mbote, 2016; Omondi, 2016). Democracy in Africa is not cheap, and much financial injection is required before individuals could be nominated to represent political parties (Malik & Courtney, 2011). Without sound financial support, women aspiring to be candidates of political parties might be unable to achieve their objectives as they are likely to lose out to the highest bidders who are likely to be males.

Women have fought for spaces in the political realm, but only a few gets the chance to participate in national administration. Leadership in Africa is typified by its exemplary masculinity as decision-making is consistently monopolised (Lawless & Fox, 1999; Mwangi, 1996; Sifuna, 2006). The notion is that men take the lead role while women follow their footsteps (Norris & Inglehart, 2001). The increasing awareness of the need to change the status-quo has resulted in domestic laws and policies aimed at mainstreaming gender issues (Milligan, 2014; Odhiambo, 2011; Sahabaya & Konadu-Agyemang, 2004). The literature in Kenya is not exhaustive and yet to add the voices of women leaders and advocates on their perspective on affirmative action and its foregrounding in contemporary Kenyan politics. Hence, this study analysed the political commitment to implement the two-thirds gender policy and factors contributing to the limited participation of women in the politics of Kenya.

Materials and Methods

Study participants

This qualitative study recruited key informants to contribute to the discussions on women and political participation in Kenya. The widely used sampling technique in recruiting key informants for a study is purposive sampling (Tongco, 2007). In such studies, the researchers are interested in recruiting informants who are knowledgeable about the subject and likely to make useful submissions which could enrich the study (Marshall, 1996). In order to maximise the richness of the data, the participants were closely recruited from a homogeneous groups who shared similar ideas on gender and critically analyse the concept. We were interested in knowledge and information and thus, decided to sample key informants who could make useful contribution in this study. This enabled us to recruit reliable

participants who were competent enough to share experiences. The key informants were recruited from political parties, law firms, governmental and non-governmental organizations in the country. Our interest was to elicit information from individuals who were experts and had experience in gender and resorted to this technique of recruitment. Due to the role played by the participants in the community, we deemed them as credible source of information on gender in Kenya.

Thirty participants were recruited individually to take part in this study. We had a priori target of 50 participants which fell within Baker, Edwards and Doidge (2012) ideal sample of size of 12 to 60 for a qualitative study. After 30 interviews, we realised that no new information was emerging, so we decided to stop and use the information we had collected for analysis. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), regardless of a number of participants, it is ideal for researchers not to continue interviewing when they reach data saturation. Therefore, we decided to report the study findings using 30 participants. Table 1 summarises the demographic characteristics of participants who took part in the study. On profession, 12 participants were politicians, and four were lawyers. Specifically, 19 were females, and 11 were males. Regarding age, ten were between 41-60 years while only four were between 61-80 years. On qualification, 14 had bachelor's degrees while three had doctoral qualifications.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of participants

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	11	37
Female	19	63
Age		
20-40	16	53
41-60	10	32
61-80	4	15

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Education qualification		
Diploma holders	6	20
Bachelor's degree	14	47
Master's degree	7	23
Doctoral	3	10
Employment		
Politicians	12	40
Lawyers	4	13
Civil servants	9	30
NGO staff	5	17

Procedures of data collection

The study and its protocols were approved by Pan African University, Institute of Governance, Humanities and Social Sciences. After approval, an introductory letter was given to the researchers who moved to Kenya for the data collection. The study and its protocols were further submitted to National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation in Kenya for their scrutiny and subsequent approval, before data collection in Kenya. Copies of the introductory letters were sent to key institutions, law firms and parliament inviting women to participate in this study. In sending the letters, the researchers developed rapport with potential participants which helped build trust as they freely shared their experiences (DiCioo-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Those who accepted to be part of the study responded through an email indicating their available time and place of convenience. The interviews were conducted in the offices of participants in Nairobi since most of them had relocated from their regions to work from the capital.

The interviews were conducted between June and September 2016 using a semi-structured interview which was developed from the literature (Boulanger, 2008; Conway, 2001; Norris & Inglehart, 2001; Paxten & Hughes, 2007). Semi-structured interview guide involved the use of pre-determined questions developed by the researchers to gather perspectives from participants (DiCioo-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The use of semi-

structured interview guides helped us to delve deep into the social and personal experiences of participants on participation of women in the Kenyan political landscape. The interview questions covered the following broad themes: extent of women's involvement in Kenyan politics, involvement in decision-making and barriers to women's effective participation in politics. The interviews were conducted by the first author who recorded the interactions with permission from participants. The duration of each session was between one (1hr) and one hour thirty minutes (1hr 30). All participants spoke English which is the official language spoken in the Kenya.

Data analysis

We performed inductive content analysis following the preparation-organizing-reporting procedures described by Elo and Kyngäs (2008). The two authors transcribed the audio-recorded interviews verbatim and separately. We met and shared our transcriptions and condensed the two documents as one. Afterwards, the interview transcriptions were sent to some participants to read through and confirm whether their perspectives had been written accurately. Since the researchers conducted the study from a constructivist perspective where we relied on the opinions of participants, as mentioned by Creswell and Miller (2000), it is essential that some participants are given the opportunity to go through the interview transcriptions in order not to distort their opinions. We read the interview transcripts several times and assigned codes individually. We met again and discussed the codes individually assigned and retained those we agreed on them. Broader themes based on the research questions were developed from the codes which were further grouped into categories. Identical categories were grouped together to write the study report.

Results

Responses from the participants revealed a number of themes relating to the level of participation of women in politics and barriers hindering their participation. The themes relating to the extent of participation of women in politics were as follows: involvement in decision-making, effectiveness of

the framework, involvement in decision-making and the barriers to participation.

Contribution of women

Participants highlighted the roles women have played in Kenyan political landscape. Most of them mentioned the contribution of women during and after independence. In the struggle for independence, discussions revealed that the contribution of women has not been given attention in the history literature of Kenya. A situation they attributed to the lack of women historians in Kenya who could document the contribution of women in the independence. On attaining independence, women were sidelined from mainstream political activities until few educated women succeeded in breaking the male dominance which paved the way for others to show interest in political activities in Kenya. The interviews revealed that women have been contributing to Kenyan politics regardless of their underrepresentation.

Women have been involved in the political development of Kenya right from the struggle for independence and even formed part of the mau-mau movement (a revolution) in 1952 where they played roles such as relaying messages from one place to the other one and ensuring enough food for men during the war period. The fight for independence was, therefore, a collective effort from both men and women since each of them had a role to play in that process (Deputy party leader).

There are number of women who have played vital roles in shaping the Kenyan politics. For instance, Phoebe Asiyu (former parliamentarians) is one of the renowned Kenyan political pioneers and a committed advocate for women's rights for more than two decades. She has been fighting for women to be respected and protected from oppression, violence and even forced marriages (A member of parliament).

Some participants indicated that the involvement of women in the national assembly has helped in the development of policy aimed at enhancing the lives of people and making Kenya a better place for all.

As numbers of women in parliament began to rise, especially in the 9th and current 10th Parliaments, some key policy and legislative changes were made in favour of women, and sponsored by female MPs have been enacted during this period. These include tax exemptions on sanitary towels and diapers, sexual offence bill, acts on children's right and employment. Not forgetting about parental leave which was increased to four months (Civil Servant).

Regardless of the challenges faced by women in attempt to access the political arena, the few who have managed to get there some have succeeded in having the women representation enshrined in the constitution is a good indicator of the successes the women had to have them be heard in policy making level within the legislative assembly. It's also notable that through that, the women have had a chance to control a development kits within the counties under the office of the women representative targeting the youth and women and other county development activities (A member of Parliament).

Despite the underrepresentation of women in public politics, there are enormous contribution women has played in the political development of Kenya. Not only that the literature on historical accounts seemed to have overlooked the contribution of women in the run-up to independence in 1963.

Involvement in decision-making

Participants were led to discuss the extent of involvement of women in national decision-making. Participants had negative responses stressing on the fact that top political decision makings are still male dominated. It was found that only few women were able to get their voices heard at the national level. They discussed that women were limited when it comes to decision-making process at the national level as male dominated national assembly made binding decisions. Women have been granted access to decision making at the grassroots level but denied equal access to participation at national level where resource allocations and policies on the general well-being of society is formulated. Some responses are summarised below;

Based on their limited number especially at the national level, more women seem to be more influential on grass root decision-makings especially on matters affecting specific communities as they are often consulted on a number of issues ranging from youth to women issues (NGO staff).

Women are only seen to be involved in grass root decision making as opposed to top national decision making which is very unfortunate. The involvement of women in political decision-making is very low, they are not given top seats in the party machinery in order to make decision and when they do, they are hardly given a chance to speak. There are still some cultural barriers where women are to be seen and not heard. Parties are kind of owned by individuals and select the leaders to pay for the positions (Civil servant).

The partial involvement of women in politics is due to the patriarchal nature of the Kenya's political arena. The country is yet to fully appreciate women's leadership as their political participation is not valued equally as that of men (A member of county assembly).

There seems to be deliberate attempt to limit the influence of women in national decision-making process despite women constituting higher percentage of the national population.

Effectiveness of the framework

Discussions were focused on legislation aimed at achieving gender parity in Kenya. It was affirmed that the 2010 Kenyan constitution has made provision for gender parity in to address the under-representation of women in Kenyan politics at national and county levels. This is evident in the two-third gender rule enshrined in Article 81 of the national Constitution which states that one gender should not be more than two-third at both the national and local legislative assemblies. Despite this constitutional provision, there seems to be problem with implementation as participants discussed that there still exist male dominance in elected offices across the country. Participants reiterated that there is lack of political commitment towards enforcing this constitutional provision. Some participants discussed as follows;

After the passage of the two-third gender parity law, the number of women increased significantly. It was a victory for women advocates, but we are not supposed to end there as we have to keep fighting. This still fall short of the total number of women who are supposed to be in the national assembly (A civil servant).

The constitution has tried to bring more women into the political arena through the introduction of women representative seats at the county levels. However, the low implementation of this constitutional requirement is coming from the government side and other policy makers denying Kenyan women to fully exercise their leadership abilities for the betterment of their beloved country (A members of the county assembly).

So far the two third gender rule which is a very important measure is only effective at few levels more specifically at the county level and at the judiciary. Women have fared better in the judiciary with 40% High Court Judges and 33.7% Lower Court Senior Magistrates. However, the government and all the stakeholders have to fasten the full implementation of this measure for it be effective in all the areas as a way of achieving the constitutional requirement (Civil Servant).

The promulgation of laws did not guarantee equal participation at the national legislative assembly as the total number of women elected was below the required quota required. It has probably become hard for the monopolised legislative body to grant more women space to take part in national deliberation and decision-making.

Barriers to participation

Participants discussed gave the major hindrances to women's political participation in Kenya.

Almost all participants believed that the inability of government to enforce the two-third rule is because of several factors hindering equal participation of women in politics. Participants recounted several challenges but common among them were discrimination based and lack of support from fellow women, violence and lack of finances.

Lack of support from fellow women

Several women participants were of the view that their limited participation in elected public offices is because of lack of support from their fellow women. They recounted that their fellow women discouraged them or even fail to vote for them when contesting national office. Participants were of the view that despite women constituting more than half of the Kenyan national population, most women participants lost elections. They have blamed this situation on lack of unity among women as they discourage the effort of others. Instead of women uniting for a common course, they were rather divided and do not want to see their fellow rise the political ladder. The following quotations summarise response from participants:

Women are more than half of the total population of the country and that if all women can speak one language of supporting their fellow women in politics, then we could be now talking other things other than low representation of women in the political arena (A member of parliament).

During the last general elections in 2013, Hon Martha Karua was the only female candidate who contested for the presidency and lost. The news going around during the political period was, is Kenya ready for a woman president? That was already a negative connotation on this aspirant as she was being judged based on gender and not her manifesto as a presidential aspirant (Civil Servant).

Women are not supporting their fellow women in politics because of the cultural barriers that always gives the men an upper hand in family decisions. The interviewee later added that in some communities, the men dictates which candidate the wife should support and this limits some women in carrying out political campaigns for their fellow women. To some extreme ends, they even keep the national identity cards of their wives and insist on accompanying them to voting polls (A member of Parliament).

Perhaps, women are uninterested in politics as a result of years of marginalisation and unfair representations.

Political violence and propaganda

Some participants discussed guidelines on Electoral and political parties' Codes of Conduct provided which state how various actors should conduct themselves in the electoral process. It also mentioned that apart from the legal framework, some institutions, both governmental and non-governmental, were involved in conflict prevention activities, such as early warning and response, and in the provision of technical support to women candidates in various forms. Despite the existence of code which governs electoral processes, participants contended that the challenge laid in the enforcement of these laws, particularly related to electoral offences. This has resulted in the continuous subjection of women candidates to threats and intimidation by opponents, as well as smear campaigns. Due to this, women are discouraged to take part in national politics due to these occurrences as perpetrators went unpunished.

Campaigning is not an easy task as the male opponents bribe voters during elections, some threatens your life, and this has seriously discouraged some aspiring female politicians thereby losing interest in politics (NGO staff).

I heard that somebody was going to attack me and they came to my home when I was not there. I wrote to my main opponent through my lawyer asking him to stop his intimidating actions, and also reported to police. My lawyer served him but then we didn't go to court, because he came to apologise. They are all games to get women out of the race (A Member of Parliament).

The intimidation is always there. Some of the candidates show up just to frustrate you (women). They specifically come up to ensure that they would tarnish your image and take some of the vote so that you don't win. Not every woman can withstand some of these games. I know this because in campaigns I'm expected to go and present my agenda to the people but others resort to personal attacks without telling the people what they will do (A Member of Parliament).

Some male candidates use violent tactics to intimidate women and get them out of the political race. Women were unable to withstand such threat

and decide to stay away from politics out of fear despite their strong desire to serve and improve the lives of their people.

Financial constraints

Almost all participants discussed that the absence of finance affects the equal participation of women. Political campaigns, media coverage and even printing posters and paraphernalia to market candidates were found to cost much money which most women could not afford it. The absence of funds of women candidates meant that the media would not cover the campaigns and grant for airtime as well as coverage of their campaign activities. Most participants discussed that the number of men higher offices was more than women because only a few women were able to have a successful career that enables them to have funds to support their political activities. Since most men were accomplished entrepreneurs and corporate men, they continued to dominate the political scene. The following narrations summarise experience of participants;

Finance is still a significant challenge to women aspirants as they have to cater for the logistics of their campaigns alone in most cases which is very expensive. This makes them not to even hire some of the vital personnel such as security personnel during their campaigns (A member of County Assembly).

My biggest challenge was financial. The logistics of running for a political office are very costly. I couldn't afford to hire a campaign manager or security personnel. I was basically doing everything on my own (A Member of Parliament).

I spent a lot doing damages. People will purposely come to spread falsehood which require money to repair these kind of damages. Dealing with the propaganda also leads to increased costs. I had to increase caravans to counter the propaganda that had been spread. Not every woman can afford to do this (A Member of Parliament).

The few number of women running businesses or having successful careers are likely to compete with male candidates for elected public offices.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to document women's participation and contribution to the political development in Kenya. The study analysed the contribution of women using the sociological approach as framework of analysis. The study found that the participation of women in political development has not been given much prominence in Kenya as there exist inequality between men and women. This systematic subjugation has persisted in the face of legal and legislative frameworks promulgated to achieve parity in the national and grassroots decision-making bodies. The male dominated society was found to be a real phenomenon in Kenya as women were found to contribute less in national discourses and decision-making. The study findings were consistent with other studies which found that myriad reasons accounted for the limited participation of women in political activities in Kenya (Biegon, 2016; Lawless & Fox, 1999; Mwangi, 1996; Owuor, 2016; Sivi-Njonjo, 2016).

Culturally, women are assigned the role of homemakers while their male counterparts are supported to learn the art of ruling and even leading at the early stage (Kabeer, 2005; 2015; Malik & Courtney, 2011). Thus, in typical traditional African society, women are not invited to partake in public decision-making (Barton, 2005; Foulds, 2014; Yiapan, 2002). This phenomenon has continued in contemporary society as participants mentioned that even their fellow women do not support their efforts to venture into an area dominated by men. Rather, as discussed by participants, they prefer to play second fiddle to their male counterparts who are likely to make decisions which might not be in the interests of women. This finding is consistent with studies by Biegen (2016), Milligan (2014), Odhiambo (2011) and Musandu (2008) who reported the limited participation of women in political and leadership positions in Kenya. Apparently, they might have suffered suppression for long and accept men's leadership as the norm.

The involvement of women may foster equality, as reasonable considerations would be given to all persons when deliberating over important national issues. Women are highly sensitive to the plight of the ordinary people in the society that is why participants reported that their increased number in the national assembly has helped in passing laws such as tax waivers, employment tax and children's act which participants

discussed were aimed towards making life bearable to all persons in society. Women are likely to support of poor friendly laws and policies in the country (Hughes & Mwiria, 1989; Musandu, 2008; Yiapan, 2002). Nevertheless, the limited participants of women as discussed by participants may mean that the interest of vulnerable and poor in the society might not be taken care of by the political system. This finding corroborate with a study by Lawless and Fox (1999) who suggested that without enough women participating in politics, it will be hard to alleviate poverty in Kenya. Probably, the male dominant political leadership are likely to continue to suppress the masses and not interested in passing laws which might ease the burden of the poor. As suggested by Biegen (2016) and Kameri-Mbote (2016), women in Kenya should be seen as partners in development and not limited to domestic tasks. Probably, they are likely to support the passage of laws and policies which would inure to the benefit of the violence in the society.

Participants discussed the violation of the constitutional provisions guaranteeing women one-third members of the national assembly. Although there was an acknowledgement of increased number of women in the national assembly, it was still less than the required one-third quota. This violation of the highest laws of the land could be attributed to cultural undertone which does not encourage equal participation of women in decision-making (Foulds, 2014; Conway, 2001; Norris & Inglehart, 2001). This finding validates previous studies by Kameri-Mbote (2016), Omondi (2016) and Sivi-Njonjo (2016) who reported lack of political commitment in enforcing the laws of the land as a factor in imbalance in political. The experts who formulated the Constitution may be of the opinion that equal participation is relevant for national development and national cohesion. In this situation, the increased participation of women could to some extent help in conflict prevention as happened in 2007 where over 1,000 people died because of post-elections violence. However, the political system controlled by men have probably ensured that this quota system never worked as they refused to give women their right representation. This could be explained by the intolerance of the male politicians who may be reluctant to open the political space for more women.

Interestingly, education did not come up as a barrier to the participation of women in politics. Although low education may be prevalent among

women in Kenya, it suggests that many women may be educated but may be discouraged to enter into politics. This finding is consistent with studies by Hughes (1989), Kameri-Mbote (2016), Mbarika et al., (2007), Odhiambo (2011) and Yiapan (2002) who reported that education may not be a major reason for low participation of women in politics in Kenya because most women now have access to education. It is exigent to mention here that previous studies elsewhere have found education as a major barrier to participation of women (Barton, 2005; Kabeer, 2005; Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang, 2004). Probably, the political landscape which is characterised by violent, might discourage more women from participating. As reported by Conway (2011) and Norris and Inglehart (2001), most women are not violent and cannot withstand constant threats, bloodshed and intimidation tactics used by politicians to cow their opponents into submission. Thence, to avert this kind of situation, women would prefer to stay in their comfort zone without endangering their lives and other persons in the societies. It is unsurprising that participants mentioned that some women decided to discontinue their political career due to violence tactics, machinations and smear campaigns directed towards political opponents. Probably, the male politicians have resources at their disposal to carry out their intimidations and machination tactics.

The relationship between poverty and limited participation of women seem to be the case in Kenya. According to the participants, they faced financial barriers which served as a obstacle to their political participation. On top of that, they were unable to match their male counterparts who were able to pay the media to support or cover their political activities. Previous studies conducted in Kenya has reported that women have inadequate financial resoruces to compete with their male counterparts (Biegon, 2016; Hughes, 1989; Milligan, 2014; Omondi, 2016). However, Norris and Inglehart (2001) postulated that despite seemingly income equality between women and men in Western countries such as the USA, there still exist huge inequalities between men and women when it comes to elected positions. Financial resources could be an impediment to the participation of women in politics in Kenya because women and children dominate population who lives below the poverty line (Barton, 2005; Kabeer, 2005, 2015). Apparently, as women are mainly limited to motherhood and carers, they might not have the financial power to compete for elective offices.

Limitation and recommendation for future research

The finding of the study should be interpreted with caution because participants of the study were key informants who were members of women's advocacy groups or women who had succeeded in their field of endeavour. It is possible that their accounts might not pertain or representative of the views of ordinary women in Kenyan societies as the latter might have different perspectives about the participation of women in politics. Therefore, there is the need for future studies to involve women who do not occupy any influential position in Kenya to document their views on the subject.

Conclusion

The study found a connection between sociological perspectives about women and its impact on their participation in politics. This study adds to the literature on women and political participation in the global south where men mainly dominate political leaderships. This research has revealed that pertinent issues affect women as they pursue a political career in Kenya. Their contributions to the political development of the country have been highlighted, and at the same time, the obstacles that impede women's political participation have been analysed. Despite the increase in number of women in decision-making through affirmative action ([Association of Media Women in Kenya, 2014](#)), the State remains gendered and does not automatically alter the masculinity of governance structures or the distribution of political power between men and women. Participants acknowledged the role of women in the formulation of policies but indicated that women do not only always act in unison as they refused to support women candidates. The emerging trend in the implementation process has been uninspiring and calls for feminist groups and civil society to engage the political leadership to give women equal representation and opportunity in politics.

Kenya is a country that is currently undergoing a major political transition, which is likely to shape and determine the nature and culture of governance institutions and processes. Hence, the provisions of the new constitution cannot resolve these challenges without continuous dialogue

and legal action to enhance its effectiveness in the future parliaments. The current legislative require the concerted effort and close collaboration between advocacy groups and lawmakers to safeguard the spirit of the constitution and give women their due representation in elected offices.

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