

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND DECISION MAKING: HARGEISA AS A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

This study determined women's political participation and decision making in Hargeisa Somaliland. The study was guided by the following objectives; the first was to assess women's political participation and decision making in Hargeisa, Somaliland; the other objective was to determine the level of challenges of women's political participation and decision making under the lights of the Somaliland political landscape.

Keywords: *Political Participation, Decision making, renowned.*

INTRODUCTION

Political participation is a mainly thought of as any activity under taken by the majority of the people with the aim of shaping, involving the political culture. Some people try to equate political participation system to the electoral process and thus fail to capture other mainly equally significant activities like leading protests and participation in volunteerism related activities and local board meetings. According to Conway political participation refers to citizen's activities which seek to influence government's structure, selection of government authorities or government's policies. Rosenstone sees political participation as entailing actions that in one way or the other effect dissemination of social goods and values.

In rural areas of Third World countries such as Somalia and Kenya, women provide 60-80% of agricultural labor. Yet women receive less than 10% of the world's salaries and own less than 1% of the world's real estate. In Somalia, in fact, only 14% of elected members of parliament (both upper and lower houses) in the world are women (Carolyne 2013). This indicates that women contribute much of the economic wealth but when it comes to political influence, they are marginalized. After civil wars in Somalia in 1988 and after, the society focused on gaining stability and peace. Somali Women are the back bone of Somalia's peace building activities and socio-economic reconstruction of the country. Somali Women played an active role in this reconstruction process but they were soon marginalized by negative traditions, dogma and customs that perceived national development as a male guardian and domain. This perception stemmed from the patriarchal lineage of the clan-based system, which recognizes male dominance and perpetrated gender inequality through customary laws (Nagaad women organizations network report on women's human right in Somalia, Customary law makes women to be non-clan or don't have any identity toward society. In a bid to make inclusion a priority of policy making, it was felt there was a strong need for Somalia women to advocate gender equality, equity, gender mainstreaming in all the sectors and highlighting the increased women's participation in the Somali political context. Also this research highlighted the current role of women in political participation and decision making with the three state organs (parliament, judiciary and executive), as well as the situation and challenges in the last local government election (2012), society reaction and how men and women are in that election, how political parties support women in political participation and active campaign all of these issue

were discussed in the research.

Somali women do not have sufficient seats in local governments, bicameral parliamentary houses, Somaliland judiciary and the cabinet ministries as well. For instance if you look in to the result of 2005 parliamentary (House of Representatives) elections, you will see that women won only two seats out of 82, which currently one of them was missing her membership of the house due to her failure to attended the required number of sessions of the house. In the House of Elders, which composes 82 seats, women have no seats today although there was a one woman in this house but later she resigned in 2012. Somali Women are also politically underrepresented in the previous local elections. In the recently 2012 Somaliland local council elections women have won only 10 seats out of 375 local council seats of the whole country. Somaliland government has not give in any attention to the women’s political challenges though, certain women associations and international community addressed the absence of women’s active role in the political process and despite of suggested quota to be reserved for women in the house of represent, there is no sign of improvement. In this research study I would like to suggest with possible solutions to the existing theoretical and empirical challenges.

Objective of the study

- To determine the level of challenges of women’s political participation under the lights of the Somaliland political landscape.
- To assess women’s political participation and decision making in Hargeisa, Somaliland

METHODOLOGY

This study was used descriptive research. Descriptive research which is apt for providing valid and exact representation of dynamics pertinent to research question.⁷²It aims to describe social happenings accurately, to give detailed picture of phenomena.

This study targets the general public, renowned academicians, policy makers and leaders and key informants in government and political parties and relevant NGOs and think tank personnel. The population is thus drawn from people who are in one way or the other involved in study problem. The population will be drawn from the Somaliland capital, Hargeisa which well represents all social stratum. Hargeisa has a population of approximately 1.6 million.

Stratified random sampling technique was used to select sample from the target population. This sampling technique involves the categorization of a study population into smaller groupings referred to as strata. But the target population was 80 participants which was classified into 50 women from the organizations, 20 women from the recent candidate elections and lastly 10 traditional elders as a key informants. Then after sloven’s formula the sample size became 66 individuals.

Results and discussions

Table 4.1: Demographic information

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	8	12%
Female	58	88%
Age		
25-34	10	15%

35-44	36	55%
45-above	20	30%
Qualifications		
Basic education	5	8%
Secondary	20	30%
Degree	34	52%
Masters	6	9%
PhD	1	1%

Source: Own survey

Table 4.1 revealed that majority, 88% of the respondents were female while their male counterparts were represented by 12%. The dominance of the women in this study was attributed to the fact that the researcher was specifically having a larger composition of women in the study because they are the ones most affected by culture and political participation hence considered more knowledgeable of the research topic.

Furthermore, table 4.1 revealed that majority, 15% of the respondents were within the age group of 25-34 years, followed by 55% who were within the age group of 35-44 years. In addition to that, respondents within the age group of 45-above years were represented by 30%. This implies that the respondents within 35-44 years were dominant in the study. This could be because the researcher was interested in the composition of mature participants who were more knowledgeable of the influence of culture on women's rights to political participation in Hargeisa throughout the course of time.

Lastly, table 4.1 revealed that, 8% of the respondents were educated up to basic education level, followed by 30% who were educated up to secondary level. Similarly, respondents with degree, master's degree and PhD were represented by 52%, 9% and 1% respectively. The dominance of respondents who were educated up to university level shows there is an increase in higher education in Somaliland.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For those respondents who maintained women's political participation is not very relevant had this to say: the influential factors are: Factors related to Policy and gender gaps in politics, Cultural Factor, religious factor, Economic or Financial factor, Social factor, Personal initiative and commitment, Community factor, Lack of unity among the women as a gender, Historical-structural factors To some respondents, when asked on level of education on women political participation: they observed to the contrary that, women's educational level to have no significant impact on political participation and decision making process. This was so because of the perception and attitude of the community towards women. Factors related to Policy and gender gaps in politics: the existing policy and gender gaps have created a rift between men and women in as far as their participation in politics are concerned. This is reflected in the constitution by the fact that, there are too few seats in which women compete with the men in politically elective positions in the house of parliament and in the local council in Hargeisa Somaliland. However, it was made known that, in some of the few seats which exist; women still meet a lot of resistance from the men, and community as well as their fellow women in due

course of pursuit of their political career. These findings are in line with the thoughts of Abdi, who made it known that; the gender gaps in politics cannot be redressed simply by bringing more women in to the system, (Abdi, 2007).

Somali Clan leaders often try to tell women wanting to become MP that the number of seats designated to each clan are too few to allocate and give seats to women since she married a husband from different clan. Women with cross-clan marriages in Somalia face more challenges when aspiring and wishing to become members of parliament. These women are told to get the support and nomination from the clan in which they have married into which is a deliberate strategy to marginalize and deny women access to seats in the next Parliament (Shukria, 2012). The study revealed that there was a significant and positive relationship between culture and women's rights to political participation in Hargeisa, Somaliland. This implied that culture affects women's rights to political participation either positively or negatively. This study agrees with that of Matlaid (2014) who also found a significant relationship between culture and women's political participation in parliamentary seats. The traditional or clan leaders are a barrier to women's equal participation in politics in a sense that they use clan system to advance the idea that women cannot be leaders. In Somalia Women are supposed to be always submissive to their male counterpart. That means the husband can mobilize and lobby for his wife to participate and win the elections of a given seat

Lastly, the study revealed that political parties also hinder women's rights to political participation. This is because women often do not have the appropriate funding to management their political activities and do not have support even from fellow women. The women who decide to venture into politics often risk losing their jobs in case they lose elections and as well cannot risk using their family resources since they are not directly entitled to them. It is clear that women face specific and diverse economic and financial challenge. Women's unequal access to political parties restricts the management of their political activities. Adamu and Mekmmen (2014) argue that women's lack of capital has caused their exclusion from the leadership because they are neither head of political parties, communities, tribes (traditional clan leaders) nor kinship groups and social organizations.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that political representation as an attribute of women's political participation was found to be low. This was due to the fact that majority of the respondents strongly disagreed that Women have formal decision making process in their political presentation, women are accepted as a clan representative in political and traditional aspects and also disagreed that clan elders support women in political participation. This implies that the nature of culture in Somalia does not allow women to freely participate in politics. Abdi (2012) explains that in order to understand the challenges women face in Somalia, one have to understand the clan system which is inimical to political inclusivity and women's participation in politics. The clan system in Somalia people is a system that promotes and encourages the interests of male clan members. Women are regarded as second-class members or citizens within their own clans.

So these are the common challenges that hinder the decisions of women's political participation in special emphasis of Somaliland politics:

1. Tribalism is a major factor that affects Somaliland women's political participation and it becomes a part of our life;

2. Women's intellectual capacity is not mature enough to participate in the politics
3. Women have no common ground to view themselves as separate status that is not dependent on their counterpart in attaining their goals.
4. The natural responsibility of women; the women's household and child care responsibilities.
5. The lack of economic power.
6. Women consider themselves as the sexual property of their husbands.
7. Women themselves are politically incapacitated and not supported to each other
8. The absence of women's linkages and co-operations
9. The lack of women's political will
10. The lack of support right from the family, clan, community and at national levels

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Women need to win the support of their fellow women, families, clans and friends in the political race
- The men need to realize the women's need for political power and change the way they look at the women and they should start supporting the women
- Human right activist should work as checks and balances to Condon the social stigma against women
- The elders need to start showing the concern for women and respect their decision
- The lack of acceptance by men for women to be involved in politics of the country and belief that women do not deserve political positions and the irony that the women do not themselves have the political will much as they are not supported by fellow women and their counter party males.

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