


Effects of Socio-Cultural Factors on the Access of Women to Elective Leadership Positions in Kenya

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Abstract

This study sought to determine the effects of socio-cultural factors on women's access to elective leadership positions in Eldama Ravine Constituency, Baringo County. The study was guided by the radical theory, liberal feminism theory, and black feminism theory that demonstrated how patriarchal society's cultural gender constructions can constrain women from accessing leadership positions. A mixed-method design was used during the study. The target population comprised those who participated in the elective leadership position and the households as they play a crucial role in highlighting why women struggle to access leadership positions. Data was collected using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. 112 respondents participated in the study. A pilot study was conducted at Mogotio Constituency, Emiming Ward, to test the reliability of the instruments. Data were analysed using the frequency distribution, cross-tabulation and chi-square by capturing the respondents' narratives. The study established that men are seen as leaders while women as 'slaves', it is because the women that intend to contest for leadership positions are not well supported. In addition, women are overburdened by household chores that tend to limit them for political positions more than their counterparts, the men. The study recommended that policies and strategies support more women in leadership positions be implemented. Therefore, policymakers should strategise on how to implement it. Equally, Non-governmental Organisations should be involved when preparing policies and strategies.

Key terms: Culture, gender, empowerment, patriarchal.

INTRODUCTION

The absence of women in politics and leadership positions has led to women being undermined in terms of democracy and empowerment; hence women lag behind their counterparts men in education, and as compared to men, they are likely to be more (UN, 2006). Girls have lower access to education as compared to boys. Collins, (2013) noted that neglect and undermining of women's work and status as a result of the increase in the specialisation of the division of labour which is associated with development. Women continue to be under-represented in politics. Internationally women face challenges in political representation (Gipson et al., 2017).

For instance, to date, the United States has yet to elect a woman to lead in the president's highest office. However, for the time, a woman, Kamala Harris, has been elected as a Vice President. Despite the general belief that men and women are leaders in their rights, in the United States of America, there is the view that stands more chance in the leadership position in both politics and business. For instance, in a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (NW et al., 2015), it was noted that four out of ten (38%) indicated that women who are looking for elective positions need to do more to get these positions. The study also indicated that 37% of the respondents were not ready to elect women to the higher office, and 27% indicated that women usually are not supported by the party leaders despite being active in party politics. In addition, the gender leadership gap cuts across developed to developing Nations; for example, women make up 19 per cent of elected officials in the U.S Congress (Catherine, 2018). There was a rise in the number of women in national parliaments in Asia-Pacific and Africa, from 23.3 per cent in 2016 to 23.4 per cent in 2017, which amounts to 0.1 per cent; this was according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union analysis done in 2017 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2018). From the statistics, it is clear that women are disadvantaged, and they are forced to prove that they are capable of being in high positions. In addition, it is clear that women do not often get support from both political parties and the public in general.

Traditional and religious patriarchal hierarchies are more extreme in the rural and isolated areas, hence

discouraging women from participating in decision-making. This is due to the fact women have been assigned to traditional household roles such as caregivers. As a result, this has led to arranged marriages and pregnancy at a younger age making women feel trapped and have fewer rights. Furthermore, Kellow also argues that the structural barriers of poverty and cultural marginalisation of women affect their access to educational opportunities. This has further led to high illiteracy levels among women resulting in a lack of qualifications and skills that would otherwise contribute to their participation in politics (Kellow, 2010).

An example is the case of Sierra Leone, where for one to access Presidential and parliamentary seats, they must be fluent in English. Similarly, in the Liberia context, 65 per cent of women are not able to read and write. As a result of these conditions, the contribution of African women socially, economically, and politically is hampered, and this has adverse negative effects on sustainable development at all levels from households, communities, nationally, and globally (Kellow, 2010).

When women are actively involved in politics, it gives room for development and full advancement for women to take part in public life; hence there should be an increase in their participation rates as this will address the stereotypes and assumptions been made on women's ability in playing the central role in public life (Elizabeth, 2012). Participation in political leadership empowers individuals to openly participate in formal political structures, identifying and deciding how societal resources will be generated, allocated, and used. Despite the historically vibrant women's movement in Kenya, there has been little improvement in women's representation in the political arena (East Africa Research Fund, 2017). Although Kenya has been ranked 18th in Africa with 19.7 per cent compared to the 2013 elections, there has been some slight improvement in women's representation in the 2017 elections; despite all this improvement, women are facing hurdles in participation in the political area (Kamaitha, 2017). Women face many constraints in participating in political life; for instance, women face harassment during their campaign trial; hence, they do need to

hire security. Other obstacles include finances. Resources have proven to be a challenge for women this is in terms of nomination expenses, the printing of fliers, agent fees, campaign expenses, and hospitality, among others (Richard, 2017).

Most communities in Kenya do perceive men as leaders as women to be servitude; hence women are assigned to do household chores. The Constitution of Kenya has provided rules and regulations for the equal participation of women in the political arena introducing the two-thirds gender rule, which is yet to be fully realised. However, very little research has been carried out on the representation of women in Eldama Ravine Constituency to document why women are struggling to get into a leadership position. This can be seen through the 2013 and 2017 elections in all the six wards, and women had difficulty vying for the seats, particularly the MCAs seats (Information Cradle, 2012). This can be seen in the 2013 elections the total number of candidates vying for the MP position was 7, where 6 were male and 1 female, and in 2017, 3 males vied for the position and no female. In 2013, 35 candidates vied for the MCAs position where 31 were male, and 4 were female. In 2017 25 vied for the MCAs position with 22 males and 3 females (IEBC, 2013) (RoGGKenya, 2017). The statistics clearly show that few women participate in leadership positions in both the 2013 and 2017 elections, a clear sign of the struggle women face. It is for this reason, the researcher conducted an evaluation of women's constraints in accessing elective leadership positions in Eldama Ravine Constituency to find out the constraints women are having in accessing leadership positions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture has an impact on society in regards to women's participation in leadership. The attitudes towards women in terms of their roles at home have continued to deny women the opportunity to be involved in leadership. A study conducted by Inter-Parliamentary Union indicated that women face hostile attitudes as they attempt to run for leadership positions. As a result, the ranking of women in parliament is low in some countries that do have strict cultures; this can be seen in the Islamic countries (Norris & Inglehart, 2001). Despite notable changes that have been done to address the role of women in

social and economic life, they continue to face gender barriers to their successful participation in the workplace due to discriminatory employment practices (Klaa, 2020). Equally, the cultural view of women as second-class citizens affects their level of representation in politics (Kassa, 2015). Women who venture into politics are been prejudiced since society assumes leadership to be more of a masculine trait. This has contributed to them being overburdened with all kinds of different household chores.

Furthermore, societies all over the world are being dominated by the ideology of "Women's place" in this ideology, women are supposed to only play the role of "Working mother", which is usually low-paid and it is apolitical (Kassa, 2015). Therefore, cultural ideas regarding women tend to affect their levels of representation in the political process. This begins with individual women's decision to enter politics, followed by party selection of the candidates and lastly, decisions made by voters on Election Day (Kassa, 2015b).

Despite the constitution of Kenya stating that there should be a two-thirds gender rule, cultures continue to pose a barrier to women interested in elective leadership positions. For instance, in the Nyanza province, there is a discussion as to whether to elect a married woman (Rosemary, 2018). It is not unusual to find communities supporting male participation in politics but rejecting the same for women (Pankaj, 2017). Additionally, some cultures argue that engagement in politics demands a great deal of travelling, therefore enhancing the views that women are not fit to take on elective leadership positions. (Cowper-Smith et al., 2017). Cultures also entrench the view that women must submit to their husbands, and this curtails their interest in competing for elective leadership positions. In effect, this has contributed to gender disparities in politics, employment, education, and ownership of productive resources at all levels. (Ali & Fatima, 2015).

According to Kassa (2015), religion has been used to seclude women from being involved in the political, social, and religious aspects of life around the world. To explain a woman's place in the church hierarchy and in society, Kassa highlights women's leadership in the Catholic denomination and that of the other

churches, especially the Protestant. The Protestant religious practice is non-hierarchical as opposed to that of the Catholic religious practice, which is hierarchical. In the Catholic tradition, the roles of the Pope, Bishops, and Priests are always reserved for men, while women take up other roles that are not associated with top leadership positions hence serving primarily as teachers or nurses (Thompson & Hickey, 2002). This can be seen in other denominations where males dominate by taking up the roles of church elders, ministries, and deacons while women take up choir members and Sunday school teachers. According to Thompson and Hickey (2002), there were some controversies among the denominational leaders of the United Methodist, Episcopal and Anglican churches when the ordained women. This would later start to change slowly as large numbers of women started being admitted to the church seminars.

Religious leaders tend to portray how women should conduct themselves by quoting the Bible as a means to verify and justify it. For instance, in Ephesians 5:22-24, women are urged to be submissive to their husbands in everything. In verse 23, it states, “Wives submit to your husband as to the Lord,” it further states, “For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the saviour” verse 23, what this verse is trying to imply that women are to submit themselves to their husbands. Putting it in the context of access to leadership discourages women from participating in political life as the man is seen as the head of the family. The book of 1st Timothy 2:11-15, it talks of women not having authority over men, which comes out strong in verse 12, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, she must be silent.” As a result, women are silenced from participating in various activities, and they have to seek permission from their husbands. In 1st Corinthians 14:34-35, this strongly comes out in verse 35 “If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.” This has been used when women want to vie for political leadership positions most women do not get the approval and support from their husbands. These are some Bible verses that have been used to discourage women from showing interest in political leadership. Religious

leaders are meant to advocate for gender equality, but this is far from the truth. Some of the religious leaders are discouraging women by emphasising their place in society (Bible, NIV version).

It is worth noting that the pandemic resulted in the discontinuation of activities such as childcare and schooling hence increasing more tasks to women, the burden has only encouraged traditional social norms in most societies as women are still seen as the primary caregiver (Hubbard & Saskia, 2020). On an average day, women tend to spend three times as many hours on both domestic and care as compared to men. Therefore, there will be increased gender disparities as women in the sub-sectors and lockdown measures, including paid domestic work, retail trade, food, and accommodation services (UN Women, 2020). UN surveyed in South and Southeast. During the pandemic, women performed more tasks than men in terms of domestic work, childcare, and adult care, leaving them less time to participate in other activities (Hubbard & Saskia, 2020).

The researcher agrees with this since, in African communities, elders tend to dictate how resources will be allocated and tend to set rules of how women should conduct themselves. For example, in Kenya, most leaders are endorsed by elders; hence, they disapprove of a female candidate since they believe that a man should lead. In addition, religion does come in place, especially in Arabs countries, whereby women who try to venture into politics are either disowned or punished. Sometimes they tend to quote Bible or Koran verses to justify that a man is born to be a leader while a woman is to be led by a man. Also, with the outbreak of the pandemic, women are now in a more vulnerable status as they are now overburdened with more responsibility hence limiting their opportunities to participate in other activities.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Effect of Socio-Cultural Factors on the Access of Women in an Elective Leadership Position

The second objective was to determine the effect of socio-cultural factors on women’s access to elective leadership positions. Socio-cultural factors are a crucial aspect of access of women for an elective leadership position. Therefore, the respondents were asked about the socio-cultural factors that have a role

in constraining women’s access to an elective leadership position. Some of the variables were gender-role differentiation, religion, and cultural expectations.

Table 1: Relationship between Allocation of Responsibility and their Wish to Contest

		Would you wish to contest		Total
		Yes	No	
Allocation of responsibility	Yes	39.8%	60.2%	100.0%
	No	55.2%	44.8%	100.0%
Total		43.8%	56.3%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.075 ^a	1	.150		
Continuity Correction ^s	1.496	1	.221		
Likelihood Ratio	2.063	1	.151		
Fisher’s Exact Test				.193	.111
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.056	1	.152		
N of Valid Cases	112				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 12.69.
 b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table 1 above indicates that 60.2 per cent of the respondents would not contest for elective leadership positions, while 55.2 per cent of the respondents would. From the analysis above, 56.3 per cent of the respondents said they would not contest, while 43.8 per cent indicated they would wish to contest. One of the respondents who were interviewed supported this view, as shown in her narrative below:

I will contest for an elective position in the next government. I vied for one in the last general election, but I did not win. I am lucky my husband supported me. Since he is still encouraging me to try the next time, I will keep trying. I actually think that women are not

elected because they are married or not but because people know them and know that they are capable. Eventually, it is the support one gets from the electorate.”KBW5

This has been supported by the respondents interviewed, who indicated women are delegated to do more household chores, leading to more responsibilities that tend to make them not access elective leadership. From the chi-square above, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between the allocation of more responsibility and access to leadership.

Table 2: Relationship between Time to Participate in Leadership and their Wish to Contest

		Would you wish to contest		Total
		Yes	No	
Time to participate in a leadership position	Yes	45.2%	54.8%	100.0%
	No	41.0%	59.0%	100.0%
Total		43.8%	56.3%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.180 ^a	1	.671		
Continuity Correction ^b	.051	1	.822		
Likelihood Ratio	.181	1	.671		
Fisher's Exact Test				.694	.412
Linear-by-Linear Assoc.	.179	1	.672		
N of Valid Cases	112				
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 17.06.					
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table					

Table 2 above shows that 59 per cent of the respondent said they would not contest for elective leadership positions as they had no time to participate, while 45.2 per cent of the respondents

said they would. From the chi-square above, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between time and access to leadership.

Table 3: Relationship between Society Encouraging Women to Leadership Position and their Wish to Contest

			Would you wish to contest		Total
			Yes	No	
Does society encourage women in leadership?	Yes		45.2%	54.8%	100.0%
	No		42.9%	57.1%	100.0%
Total			44.1%	55.9%	100.0%
Chi-Square Tests					
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.059 ^a	1	.808		
Continuity Correction ^b	.003	1	.960		
Likelihood Ratio	.059	1	.808		
Fisher's Exact Test				.849	.480
Linear-by-Linear Assoc.	.058	1	.809		
N of Valid Cases	111				
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 21.63.					
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table					

Table 3 shows that 54.8 per cent of the respondents would not contest for leadership positions despite society encouraging women in leadership. On the other hand, 42.9 per cent of respondents said they would contest. This has been supported by the interviewed respondents, who indicated that women

going for a leadership position are not well received by society as they see a woman place is at home doing house chores. Therefore, from the chi-square above, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between society and access to leadership, as 54.8 per cent responded that they were not willing to contest.

Table 4: Relationship between Men Encouraging Women to Leadership and their Wish to Contest

		Would you wish to contest		Total	
		Yes	No		
Do men encourage women to leadership?	Yes		43.5%	56.5%	100.0%
	No		43.9%	56.1%	100.0%
Total			43.8%	56.3%	100.0%
Chi-Square Tests					
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.002 ^a	1	.961		
Continuity Correction ^s	.000	1	1.000		
Likelihood Ratio	.002	1	.961		
Fisher's Exact Test				1.000	.558
Linear-by-Linear Association	.002	1	.962		
N of Valid Cases	112				
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 20.13.					
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table					

Table 4 above portrays that 56.5 per cent of the respondents said they would not contest despite men encouraging women to leadership positions. On the other hand, 43.5 per cent of the respondents said they would contest. This is supported by respondents interviewed. They indicated that men are seen as

natural-born leaders and women as servitudes; therefore, it is hard for men to encourage women to go for a leadership position, as they are not seen fit to hold the position. From the chi-square test above, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between men encouraging women and access to leadership.

Table 5: Percentage Distribution of who Should be a Leader

Who should be a leader			
		Frequency	Per cent
	Man	21	18.8
	Woman	17	15.2
	Both	74	66.1
	Total	112	100.0

Table 5 shows that 66.1 per cent of the respondents said that both men and women should be leaders, while 18.8 per cent of the respondents said that a man should be a leader and 15.2 per cent of the

respondents said a woman should be a leader. From the findings, this tends to contradict whom they perceive as a leader. Men are natural-born leaders in most African countries while women are to be servants (Richard, 2017).

Table 6: Relationship between Religion and Would Wish to Contest

		Would you wish to contest		Total	
		Yes	No		
Religion	Christian		43.8%	56.3%	100.0%
	Muslim		46.7%	53.3%	100.0%
	Others		0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total			43.8%	56.3%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.830 ^a	2	.660
Likelihood Ratio	1.202	2	.548
Linear-by-Linear Association	.146	1	.702
N of Valid Cases	112		

a. 2 cells (33.3%) have an expected count of less than 5. Therefore, the minimum expected count is .44.

Table 6 shows that 46.7 per cent of the respondents that would contest were Muslims, while (100%) of the respondents who said they would wish not to contest were from other religions. It is also noted that both Christians and Muslims indicated that they would wish not to contest. This clearly shows that religion affects women’s access to elective leadership positions. This contradicts the views of the respondents, who indicated that religion does not affect women’s access to elective leadership positions. From the chi-square test above, it can be seen that there is a relationship between religion and access to leadership despite the contradiction between those interviewed and those who participated in the survey questionnaire.

On gender role differentiation, the following were tackled time and responsibility. On responsibilities, 60.2 per cent of the respondents said they would wish not to contest due to their responsibilities, while 55.2 per cent of the respondents said they would wish to contest. It can be noted that 56.3 per cent of the respondents said they would wish not to contest, while 43.8 per cent of the respondents said they would wish to contest. On-time 59 per cent of the respondents indicated they would wish not to contest due to limited time to participate, while 45.2 per cent of the respondents indicated they would wish to contest as they had more time. On religion, (46.7%) of the respondents who wished to contest were Muslims, while 100 per cent of the respondents who wished not to contest were from other religions. It was noted that both Muslims and Christians said they would wish not to contest. On cultural expectations, the following was tackled, on the issue of society encouraging women, 54.8 per cent of the

respondents indicated they would wish not to contest despite the society encouraging women in leadership.

In comparison, 42.9 per cent of respondents indicated they would wish to contest despite the society not encouraging women in leadership. On the issue of men encouraging women, 56.5 per cent of the respondents indicated they would wish not to contest despite men encouraging women to leadership, while 56.1 per cent of the respondents indicated they would wish not to contest since men do not encourage women to leadership. On the issue of who should be a leader, 66.1 per cent of the respondents indicated that both men and women should be leaders, while 18.8 per cent of the respondents indicated that a man should be a leader, and 15.2 per cent of the respondents indicated a woman should be a leader. It was noted that gender role differentiation and cultural expectations did affect women’s access to elective leadership positions. This is because women are assigned domestic chores, and men are expected to be the leader. It was also noted that religion does not affect women’s access to leadership as no one is elected based on their religion. This is because anyone from different religion can be a leader.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The study conclusion on socio-cultural factors shows that both gender role differentiation and cultural expectations affected women’s access to elective leadership positions. Men are viewed as leaders while women are ‘slaves’; the women who intend to contest for leadership positions are not well supported. In addition, women are overburdened by household chores that tend to limit them for political positions more than their counterparts, the men.

However, the findings were that religion does not affect women's access to leadership positions.

Recommendations: The study recommended that policies and strategies that support more women in leadership positions be implemented. Despite the Kenya Constitution of 2010, which supports a two-

third gender rule, it is evident that there is more needed to be done to ensure that it is fully implemented. Therefore, policymakers should strategise on how to implement it. Equally, Non-governmental Organisations should be involved when preparing policies and strategies.

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