

Factors Affecting Women Political Participation in Parliamentary Elections in Uganda

Peter Asiiimwe Awuyo¹, Peter Anthony Kopoka²

¹JomoKenya University of Agriculture and Technology, School of Entrepreneurship, Procurement and Management P.O. Box 62000-00200 Nairobi-Kenya

²Supervisor and Professor, JomoKenya University of Agriculture and Technology, School of Entrepreneurship, Procurement and Management P.O. Box 62000-00200 Nairobi-Kenya

Abstract: *The purpose of this study was to assess factors affecting women political participation in Ugandan Parliamentary elections. The last three decades of the National Resistance Movement government switched their language and strategies to the new empowerment chant where they wanted to empower key marginalized groups including women, youth and people with disabilities. Uganda has made tremendous progress towards gender equality over the last 20 years. The country has one of the most gender-sensitive constitutions in the world and has many laws and policies in place to address gender imbalances and women's empowerment. The challenge remains at the implementation level. This specific project was laid out to investigate how women's attitudes affect their participation in parliamentary elections, establish the impact of women's economic status on their participation in parliamentary elections in Greater Mukono Region and lastly, to explore the opportunities available to enhance women's participation in parliamentary elections in Greater Mukono Region. The research project used a mixed research design which employed quantitative and qualitative approaches. A sample of 98 respondents was selected from 15 parliamentary constituencies. Simple random and stratified random sampling was used to identify the respondents. Data was collected using self-administered questionnaires and individual interviews as a tool of data collection with both primary and secondary data. This data was then analyzed using descriptive statistics by applying the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) for better interpretation. The study findings for objective one revealed that women leaders hold a positive attitude about women participation in Parliamentary Elections. The study findings revealed that economic deprivation for women is affecting their participation in parliamentary elections. This was the case because the study established that the cost of political campaigns hindered women participation in the 2016 and 2011 parliamentary elections. According to the study findings presented in chapter four for objective three, findings suggest that women being educated and sensitized on their rights, with Family Support; Party Support and presence of good laws and policies are opportunities that enhanced women political participation in the 2016 and 2011 parliamentary elections. The role of the political parties and NGOs was instrumental too. The study concluded that women leaders hold a positive attitude about women participation in Parliamentary Elections, the study too established that women actively participated in Parliamentary Elections and general elections either as candidates or voters during the 2016 and 2011 general elections. Further the study concluded that economic deprivation for women affected their participation in the 2016 and 2011 parliamentary elections. Lastly the study concluded that there existed opportunities that enhanced women participation in parliamentary elections at the national and party levels. Non-governmental organizations were found to be instrumental in helping to improve women participation in parliamentary elections. The good laws and policies like the affirmative action, equal opportunities act was instrumental in aiding women participation in parliamentary elections; at the party level, these offered a general plate form and some parties like NRM offered campaign funds for their candidates including women. For NGOs, these were found to be instrumental in civic education and election monitoring which helps to report and deter illegalities.*

Keywords: Women Political Participation, Ugandan Parliamentary Election

1. Introduction

Despite laudable efforts at the international and national levels, especially in the past 20 years, achieving equal political participation of women and men remains a challenge globally. A multitude of complex factors impede women's participation and leadership on an equal basis with their male counterparts. One such factor is access to the financial resources needed to effectively participate in electoral processes as candidates, the other major challenge is the negative attitude held by women and the public regarding women participation in parliamentary elections.

Elections, is one of the pillars towards democracy, which exhibits practically the capacities to usher in good, responsible and accountable leadership. They have also demonstrated equality between men and women through political participation on the basis of one adult citizen, one vote (Hussein, 1995). (Apollo, 1998) observed that women participation in electoral activities is important in decision-

making and in developing a nation. More so, (Kelly, 2001) emphasises that democracy cannot succeed unless space is granted to civil societies to operate effectively through people empowerment. To this, (Clark, 1995) argues that empowerment and democracy should not only be measured by the right to vote but is about a whole range of rights which citizens must be accorded if governments are to be open, accountable and participatory.

Elections for women can be traced back to the establishment of the National Resistance Council (NRC) in 1989. Affirmative action measures for women were introduced in this election and 34 women were elected to 'women's seats' (Goetz, 2002). Effective women participation in parliamentary elections is on the agenda globally and in Africa, including Uganda. This is because effective public participation in parliamentary election can help to enhance development and service delivery, make governance more effective, accountable and deepen democracy particularly in a diverse and plural society in the World Uganda inclusive (Nabacwa, 2012). However, women participation in

parliamentary election in most African nations are mostly mere consultation rather than formal empowerment and to many this means only going for voting on the voting day yet, this attitude is affecting women political participation in parliamentary elections (Tamale, 1999)(Sylvia, 1999). Lubega (2016) argues that efforts have been prepared to intensify the women participation in politics and decision-making process but their low self-confidence together with negative attitudes towards work away from home like participation in political practices has hindered the women participation in parliamentary election in Uganda and other third world countries. This is coupled with the low economic status of women in the community, these two factors have greatly affected women participation in electoral participation and taking part in key decision-making processes.

A report on gender and women's participation in the 2016 general elections in Uganda revealed that women's participation is still low. The report was released by the Women's Democracy Group (WDG) on 2nd February 2016 at Hotel Africana in Kampala. The report notes that while the legal framework on campaigns does not discriminate against women and men during the elections, women are facing some peculiar challenges, due to the social, economic and cultural construction of Ugandan society. These include: less access to resources than their male counterparts; gender roles which at times prevent them from participating in politics; religious and cultural obstacles to their participation; and domestic violence among others. The cultural constructions of the Uganda society has made women to look onto themselves as inferior and not worth to compete with their male counterparts in electoral politics including parliamentary elections.

The report further notes that despite the fact that women comprise 52% of the population of Uganda, their participation as candidates in the 2016 elections is minimal especially those running for the open seats. In 2016, out of the eight presidential candidates, only one was female representing 12.5 %, while out of the 1,306 candidates contesting for the open Member of Parliament seats, only 83 (6.8%) are women of which 58% are running as independents. The situation at the level of Local Council V Chairperson is even worse with only 7 women (1.9%) compared to 376 men (98.1%).

Women representation in Uganda's parliament is to a large extent secured through the separate women's elections. The tenth Parliament of Uganda (2016 to 2020) has 154 members out of the 449 members who are women (34 per cent), most of the women are elected through separate women's elections. The Ugandan way of including women, by introducing reserved seats, is very much an 'add-on' procedure as women are elected in addition to the constituency MPs who are elected on a 'first past-the-post' basis. Each of the districts in Uganda elects one district woman representative to parliament (Tripp, 2000).

Each district consists of an average of three to four counties. Statistics since 1986, when the NRM government came to power, indicate a steady rise in women political participation in elective offices. This can be attributed to the improved

economic standing of women during the NRM regime and the affirmative action measures.

Some women were elected on the 'regular' seats and in total women constituted 17 per cent of the NRC with 41 seats (Tripp, 2000). During the sixth parliament (1996–2001) Uganda had 39 districts which reflected representation of 39 women elected as female district MPs. While the seventh parliament (2001–2006) was elected, Uganda had introduced new 17 districts, securing at least 56 seats in parliament for women. The eighth parliament of Uganda comprised of 217 constituency representatives, ten Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) representatives, five representatives of the youth, five representatives of persons with disabilities, five representatives of workers and 13 ex-officio members (Onyango, 2000). Out of the total number of members of parliament, 99 were women 79 of these were district women representatives, 14 directly elected women parliamentarians and six special interest representatives. This constituted 31 per cent of female representation in the eighth parliament. The ninth parliament which comprised of 375 members with 129 thus 34.4 per cent women MPs had increased from the 31 per cent in the eighth parliament, but still lower than the equivalence target set by the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. However, the numbers of women MPs who competed with men fell from 16 in 2006 to 11 in 2011; and of the 129 women MPs, 112 represent districts as a result of affirmative action (Sylvia, 1998). This shows that women have not yet broken through the barriers of competing with men for a political position. Despite the affirmative action by government, the economic status of women and their negative attitudes continue to inhibit women from participating in parliamentary elections.

Poverty levels in Uganda have hit hardest the women; this means majority of the women cannot afford money to finance their campaigns for parliamentary election no wonder few women are engaging in Ugandan politics. Due to the cultural background in Uganda, the majority of women hold negative attitudes towards women participating in politics and this has held them against participating in parliamentary elections.

The attitudes held by women affect their participation in parliamentary elections, key among these attitudes are that; women believe that they are inferior to men thus thinking that political parties are more probable to have men nominate than women, women believe they have to give priority to family duties which ends up not permitting them with time to run for office, women believe that politics does not suit them, women's thought that they are economically deprived thus thinking they have less access to resources to campaigns and women also think are not qualified for elected office, these attitudes affect women directly and indirectly to participate in parliamentary elections. The other enormous matter that affects women's participation in parliamentary election is their economic status; Poverty coupled with lack of economic security are often regarded as some of the major barriers to women's political participation. For example, in northern Uganda, the inferiority complex among women has increased the poverty levels among women hence affecting their position in

political decision making and participation at the political elections (Clark, 1995).

Women's strong numerical presence in parliament has had some positive effects in Uganda. First, it has led to one of the most gender sensitive constitutions in the world in the sense that it contains articles directly affecting women in particular. Second, together with civil society, women in parliament have been important in passing legislation important for women. For the presentation, it is revealed that women political participation in parliamentary elections is still low and under a challenge, this research will assess the factors affecting women political participation in Ugandan parliamentary elections, particularly the study will look at how attitudes held by women towards politics and election and women economic status affect their participation in parliamentary elections, taking Greater Mukono Districts as a case study.

Greater Mukono is made up of four districts of Kayunga, Mukono, Buikwe and Buvuma, the area has 15 slots/constituencies for parliamentary elections. In terms of women's political participation, they actively participate through the reserved seats at the national level, the area has four constituencies reserved for women and eleven other constituencies have to be battled with men. Probably due to negative attitudes held by women on their participation in parliamentary elections and their low economic status; women participation in parliamentary elections is very low in Greater Mukono Region, the area has only 5 women representatives and four of these occupy constituencies reserved for women (Electoral Commission District Status Report, 2006).

For the directly elected parliamentary seats women are usually out competed by their male counterparts. Most of the seats are not even competed for by women meaning there is a lot yet to be done to enhance women's active involvement as candidates (Electoral Commission District Status Report, 2006). Though numerous studies have been carried out to explain the trend of occasions in several districts regarding women's participation in elections (Mulyampiti, 1999; Ahikire, 2004; Lubanga, 2002; Muhumuza, 2003; UWONET, 2007), none of them expound on women's participation in parliamentary elections in Great Mukono Region, hence the challenges that limit women from active participation in parliamentary elections.

2. Problem Statement

Over the last two decades, the rate of women's representation in national parliament's world over has increased from 11.3 per cent in 1995 to 22.1 per cent in 2015 (IPU, 2011) which is much less than the 30 per cent international minimum standard set for women's participation in politics (UDHR, 1948), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for action 1995 and the African Charter on election). Sub-Saharan African experiences much less representation of women in political leadership with a range of 13.7 to 19.8 per cent from 2002 to 2012 (IPU, 2015).

Uganda is signatory to a number of regional and international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the (CEDAW, 1979), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for action (1995), African Charter on Election, Democracy and Governance and Uganda has fairly concrete domestic laws and policies including the constitution of 1995, Political Party and Organizations Act 2005, Local Government Act 1997 and the Gender Policy 2007, are all supposed to provide a frame work to advocate and create space for women to actively participate in political leadership. However, a lot is still wanted to operationalize these laws to enable women to effectively participate in politics (NDP 2015/16- 2019/20).

In Uganda apart from the failure to implement the existing legal framework, women represent just over half of the total population (UBOS, 2018) and form a critical part of promoting democratization of the political system in the country. However, available data indicate that they are insufficiently represented in political positions in government due to challenges faced in participating in elections.

The possible explanation for this scenario may be due to the low economic status of women in Uganda and the wild-spread poverty which has hit hardest the women. The gender issues in the electoral politics have not received proper attention and correction too; women are denied party tickets because they are economically poor. This gives their male counterparts a lead because for them are perceived to be economically stable thus thinking they can fund campaign as against the women. Women are always ignored to the verge of political leadership asserts Karl (2001), this makes women get worried and guilt and at the end develop negative attitudes towards participating in parliamentary elections and other general elections. Women are said to have fear to participate in elections because they are marginalized first because they are women and secondly because they are politicians, these fears, negative attitude and low self-esteem inhabit women to freely compete with men in parliamentary elections. A study by Lubanga, (2002) pointed out the negative attitudes held by women affect their participation in election, these included women feel they are inferior, weak, not educated, and poor and they are made for house work, these negative feeling and attitudes greatly affect women participation in political elections.

In their public and private life, women must struggle to express their desires and find their own voices. For a long time, women are seen as extensions of men; as people who cannot stand politically on their own but by men. While some researchers such as Mugabi (2014), CEEWA-U (2015) recently commenced documenting women's participation in management positions in Uganda, such documentation has not concentrated on factors affecting women's political participation in Ugandan parliamentary elections. The research therefore examined factors affecting women political participation in parliamentary elections in greater Mukono. The study focused on the factors that are affecting women's political participation within Ugandan electoral process such as low income, campaign expenses, property ownership, attitudes and socio-cultural beliefs.

3. Research Purpose

The aim of the study was to examine the factors affecting women political participation in parliamentary elections in Uganda. Specifically, the study will investigate how women's attitude affects their participation in parliamentary elections; establish the impact of women's economic status on their participation in parliamentary elections and to find out the opportunities available to enhance women participation in parliamentary elections.

4. Research Methods

The study adopted a case study model which focused on women covering a sample of 98 respondents drawn from a target population of 131 comprising Women Members of Parliament, the second frame were Electoral Officials, the third frame were District Women leaders. Primary data was collected by using questionnaire and interviews within the four districts of greater Mukono and Secondary data from reviewing various government documents, the laws and policies that promote women's participation in Parliamentary Election, Inter Parliamentary Union Reports, Civil Society Organization reports, Electoral Commission and literature from internet and other researchers/ studies. Data was analysed using descriptive statistical tool included frequency tables, graphs, and analyses of variances, compared means and figures as well as percentages whereas Qualitative data from the field was arranged according to main themes developed by the researcher. Correctness of transcription was conducted; minor corrections, particularly grammatical errors and incomplete responses to the questions were corrected and triangulated with quantitative data based on the study objectives.

5. Results and Analysis

5.1 Attitudes of women towards participation in parliamentary elections

The study results for objective one showed that women leaders embrace a positive attitude about participation of women in Parliamentary Elections. The bulk of the respondents establish positive opinions which is explained by 65.3% of the respondents that retorted in affirmative.

The positive attitude of women participating in Parliamentary Elections was proven by the fact that all respondents either participated in the 2016 and 2011 general elections as candidates or voters. Majority knew their polling stations, identified the female candidates that stood for election for member of parliament and majority indicated that they had selected one of the female candidates giving reasons that these can lobby service that help to better the life of fellow women in communities. Even though women participated in the 2016 and 2011 as candidates and voters, the study discovered that women are no more proficient and stronger enough to dare men in parliamentary elections. Reasons given included bad cultures that do not allow women to speak in public thus keeping them behind and fail to challenge men in parliamentary elections.

5.2 The Economic Status of women and their participation in Parliamentary Elections

The study verdicts exposed that deprivation of women economically is affecting their participation in parliamentary elections. This was the incident because the study recognized that the cost of political campaigns hindered women participation in the 2016 and 2011 parliamentary elections (93.3%); the ever increasing fees required to register as candidates at national and party levels hindered women participation in 2016 and 2011 parliamentary elections (94.7%); the low income levels among women is the reason why they do not participate in elections (74.7%); the too much/heavy workload given to women at the family and community level hindered women participation in 2016 and 2011 parliamentary elections (50.7%); property ownership together with family economic status affect women participation in parliamentary elections (42.6%); the act of political parties favoring candidates with a sound economic stand generally worked against women participation in 2016 and 2011 parliamentary election.

5.3 Opportunities available to improve political participation of women in Parliamentary Election

According to the study findings presented in chapter four for objective three, findings suggest that women being educated and sensitized on their rights (45.3%); Family Support (20.0%); Party Support (17.3%) and presence of good laws and policies (17.3%) are opportunities that heightened political participation of women in the 2016 and 2011 parliamentary elections. The still established that at party level, parties emphasize women participation (policy) 36.6% and parties support candidates with campaigning fund (61.2%). Those are the opportunities that existed at party levels in the 2016 and 2011 parliamentary elections to enhance women participation. Lastly, the study discovered that NGOs presented some opportunities for women participation in the 2016 and 2011 parliamentary elections. These were found to be key in sensitizing about importance of participating in election (civic education), funding campaigns, offering legal support and observing the processes and conduct of these elections.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Attitudes of women participation towards in parliamentary elections

The study established that women leaders hold an attitude which is positive about participation in Elections which reflected their active participation in Parliamentary Elections and general elections either as candidates or voters during the 2016 and 2011 general elections.

6.2 The Economic Status of women and Women participation in Parliamentary Elections

In objective two, the study concludes that economic deprivation for women affected their participation in the 2016 and 2011 parliamentary elections. Key among the economic factors that affected women participation in the 2016 and 2011 parliamentary elections included; the cost of

political campaigns, fees levied at party and registration levels as candidates by election commission, the general low income among women, the too much work load at family and community level, property ownership (family property is in the hands of male) and the favors political parties grant the rich against the poor.

6.3 Opportunities available to enhance political participation of women in Parliamentary Election

In third objective, the study established that there are opportunities to enrich participation of women in parliamentary elections at the national and party levels. Non-governmental organizations were found to be instrumental in helping to develop participation of women during parliamentary elections. The noble policies and laws such as affirmative action and equal opportunities act were contributory in aiding participation of women during parliamentary elections; at the party level, these offered a general platform and some parties like NRM offered campaign funds for their candidates including women. For NGOs, these were found to be instrumental in civic education and election monitoring which helps to report and deter illegalities.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Attitudes of women towards participation in Parliamentary Elections

Capacity building and development program on the Right to participate in parliamentary elections for women should be designed and implemented using the district registration official and local NGOs as a fulcrum of those activities and extending the capacity training to all women and all populations in the communities. The electoral commission at the district level and women council committees should be assisted to create proper institutional set ups with efficacious frameworks of participatory planning involving key actors and stakeholders for effective women participation in parliamentary elections. There is need to work on measures supporting women's political participation across the electoral cycle, including through coordinated efforts with National system partners. One major focus is the adoption and implementation of temporary special measures or quotas, a proven mechanism for accumulation of women in politics. There is a necessity to advocacy for and provide evidence to inform national electoral regulations. These should ensure that women have fair opportunities to campaign and register to vote, and are protected from election-related violence. Other activities comprise training women as effective political candidates and leaders. Engagement with political parties encourages greater gender sensitivity, such as through internal regulations and practices to promote women's leadership.

7.2 The Economic Status of women and their participation in parliamentary Elections

The government should develop policies that cap the amounts of money spent on financing a campaign so that women cannot be out competed by male competitors who usually pour a lot of money in parliamentary elections. This

will lead to creation of transparency in campaign due to limits of finances one can use as well as leading to limit the use of black money, illegal networks and companies. Strengthen the obligation of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) so as to monitor campaign spending and hold political parties and individuals to account as regards to their financial reports. Ensure sufficient financial and human resources for the INEC to be able to effectively implement their task. Search for opportunities towards financial incentives so as to escalation political participation of women. Offer financial incentives to political parties who identify women candidates and put them on the list of which Gender Electoral Financing and Gender Quota can reinforce them.

7.3 Opportunities available to improve political participation of women in Parliamentary Election

Teachers should partner with existing CSOs, NGOs in order to encourage participation of women in parliamentary election. Affirmative actions should be placed well so as to shelter inclusion and selection of women, positive insight in allocation of fund should be put in mind since socially and political women face more dares than men in assuming offices. Collective actions such as Affirmative action and political parties' genuine commitment are needed. Responsive electoral laws for both men and women are needed which will include women taking into consideration the social barriers women face, Positive discrimination in the process promoting more women and to dare the societal structure of patriarchy, and to have women be part of the inquiry by bringing in aspect of their cognitive structure which will then place them equal to men, Obtaining full promise of the political parties to the efforts towards boosting participation of women. All in all, I believe that having a fund basket for women needs to be simultaneously followed by commitment from all as well affirmative action's well in place and inclusive electoral rules that takes in to attention the social cultural and economic set-up as well as positions of women in the society.

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