REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS OF GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT

Regional institution building is today a wide spread phenomenon as it is a major part of international relations. Regional organizations have been portrayed as complementary to international organizations, to concerts of great powers in dealing with array of issues. A process of socialization of regional institutions has been taking place since the 1990s. Equal representation of women in political life has a positive influence on the incorporation of gender into different policies. Under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the United Nations has set a dedicated target specifically dealing with women's access to leadership. Despite the undeniable strides in legal and systemic change towards more women in decision-making, widespread cultural forces continue to obstruct the full exercise of women's political rights. Women continue to be under-represented in public life in many countries worldwide, particularly in the political sphere. The wave of changes in Latin America to institute gender quotas started in 1991. The region's quotas have had a huge effect on rising both the number of women standing as candidates and the number of women being elected. Change in women's political engagement in Africa has not been uniformly spread across Africa. Despite strides made in empowering women politically, sexism against women and a lack of women's meaningful involvement in decision-making continue. This article explored the issues relating to women participation and representation in regional and international governance, a global perspective. The study concluded that the inclusion of women in political decision making had been on the rise worldwide. It also concluded that solutions to the different issues facing women in power include not only building on current methods, but also moving beyond them. The study recommended that there was a need for women interested in coming into political life to have capacity-building programmes. The research also recommended that reasonable qualitative and quantitative metrics should continue to be developed and used by regional organizations to report on progress and to conduct a regional assessment of the status of women.

Key words: Women in Politics, Political Women Empowerment, Gender Equality, Global Governance

BACKGROUND

Globalization has tightened the lines between regional and international governance in the recent decades. Regional organizations objective is constructing political consensus with regard to essential topics in international politics. Regional governance structures reflect the power relations within a region, and they create the arena for the power projection of regional powers and the counter strategies of minor powers. The existence of a powerful state within a region has an impact on the regional governance structures, because there exist more regional organizations (Karns, Mingst & Stiles, 2004). International organizations such as the United Nations have developed as fundamental players in the system of global governance. They are significant actors in the critical incidents of international politics, International organizations membership may be universal including all states in the world or limited as are many regional organizations (IDEA, 2019).

Global governance policy reflects struggles over the international systems and institutions that form the fates and life chances of players around the world over power, resources, and expertise. The sovereignty of decision-making is one of the dominant concerns in global governance policy. Power concerns and the authority and credibility of global governance systems are increasingly dependent on the integrity and accountability of multilateral institutions(Diehl & Frederking, 2001) Global governance commitments exist because states and other actors create them and instill them with authority, authority, and legitimacy and consider them valuable to perform certain tasks and serve them Both in foreign or regional governance organizations, control is closely related to authority and legitimacy (Boluk et.al, 2019).

There exists unequal opportunities and conditions for political participation and representation between men and women worldwide. In the governance frameworks which decide political and legislative priorities, women remain underrepresented (IDEA, 2019). Various authors and researchers have established that involvement of women in systems of government and decision making exceptionally significant for poverty alleviation, an even human resource development and good governance (Chaban, et.al, 2017). Women constitute of 50% of the population of the world, therefore without including them in the process of governance it is impossible for nations to reach their full human potential, thus the superior importance of women political empowerment is a matter of human development and sustainable governance (Haque, 2003).

The main advocates of institutions supporting women's political empowerment are foreign and regional organizations. Standards have been set by regional organizations like the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU), the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in their regions. Regional organizations have the ability to pull together political will, expertise, capacity for advocacy and human capacity to educate decision-making processes at all levels and to build efficient monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (Pospieszna, 2015).

The European Union (EU) consensus on development identifies women as key agents of development and change. Empowering women economically is a crucial issue for the EU. Across all member states and EU, women are substantially under-represented in positions of authority. Since 1958 the 31 presidents have presided European parliament, only 2 out of the 31 presidents are women. 10 EU member states introduced rules in support of a gender-balanced representation for the elections to the European Parliament, the 2019 elections women accounted for 40.3% elected parliamentary seats (Interparlimentary Union, 2020)

In Latin America, Organization of American States (OAS) has employed a number of resolutions on gender equality and empowering women. A specialist organization of the OAS, the inter-American Committee of women (CIM), plays an essential role in supporting the political rights of women (IDEA, 2019). Latin American region have adopted affirmative measures to favor women rights in participation in political leadership and decision making through gender quotas and parity targets. By 2017 the average numbers in legislative positions were 28.2% elected to lower chamber, which ranked 2nd in the world. Women under-

representation in public life has not been fully resolved in America despite the progress in empowering women (Interparlimentary Union, 2020).

Numerous steps have been taken by the African Union (AU) to foster good governance and democratic consolidation in Africa. One of the focus areas of the AU is to increase the representation of women in office. AU's approach to the advancement of women rights has been influenced by the United Nations system. The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance is committed to democracy and good governance of the AU Member States. The political will of African leaders has been shown to counter gender disparity and to tackle economic, social and political barriers. Despite the advancement of both formal law and customary practice, African women continue to face discrimination (African Union Survey, 2019).

Problem Statement

For the consolidation of strong democracies, the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5; to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls is essential. A number of scholars, researchers and writers have found that without policies, interventions and activities that aim to eliminate inequality between men and women in all areas of life, democracy is incomplete (El-Bushra, 2007). International and regional organization has received eminence as backers of their member states and implementers of key initiatives to enable the 2030 Agenda to be achieved. Regional organizations are able to put together political will, experience, advocacy skills and human capacity to educate decision-making processes on these important issues at all levels. This provides a unique opportunity for regional organizations to help improve democratic structures in their regions that are sustainable and sensitive. Regional organizations may contribute significantly to the achievement of the SDGs (Nolte, 2011)

In many ways, despite movements towards gender equality, obstacles to women's entry into political life remain. While more efforts have been made by international and regional organizations to eradicate discrimination against women and encourage women's empowerment, there are still low levels of women's political participation. Women currently hold 23.6 percent of the world's parliamentary seats, which is substantially underrepresented, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2019). Different barriers impact women's political and economic representation and participation, including: lack of social security, unequal wages, gender stereotypes, lack of opportunities for women with disabilities and lack of decent jobs and empowerment provisions for migrants. These barriers have negative long-term social, economic and political ramifications and have triggered major changes in the worldwide enjoyment of human rights (UN Women, 2017).

Objectives of the Study

This article explored the issues relating to women participation and representation in regional and international governance, a global perspective. More specifically, it addresses the following objectives:
- Significance and trends of women in politics
- The role of women activism
- The Impact of legal reform and institutional changes on women political empowerment
- Obstacles restricting women to fully participate in political leadership

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the Gender and Development Theory. The Gender and development (GAD) was developed in the 1980s. The theory explains why women are systematically placed in inferior roles. The GAD theory tries to explore whether nations should develop and grow in the same way. Scott (1995) pointed out that historical colonialism has a strong and significant influence on the present world economic system. Further, Connelly and Barriteau (2000) explained that the role of a country's world system is a significant

determinant of the degree of economic disparity in a country as well as a predictor of cross-national gender inequality. Many core-sponsored development initiatives have often concentrated on men as economic actors who disregard women's productive role in society.

Scott (1995) highlighted that women are often doubly disadvantaged in world's system as a result of their gender and location in periphery. According the theory, when changes such as wars were introduced by foreign powers, colonial official's men in periphery gained control over resources. Edwards and Jones (2009) acknowledged that women are affected differently by policies depending on their class, ethnic position and racial within poor countries. Often men and women of elite classes and dominant races benefit from policies that are harmful to poor minority women and men. Connelly and Barriteau (2000) however pointed out that The GAD theory portrays and analyzes women not only as victims but also as agents in the process of development. According to the study, even though women have frequently been framed as victims, women actively often resist exploitation by capitalism and patriarchy.

Significance and Trends of Women in Politics
Women have both a right and a responsibility to engage effectively in political leadership. The importance of fair participation by women in political leadership has been persistently emphasized by international agreements and conventions. The Convention on the Abolition of All Kinds of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) stresses the complete elimination in political and public life of discrimination against women. In addition, the Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security of the UN Security Council reaffirmed the importance of fair representation and full participation of women in all efforts to preserve and promote peace and security and the need to increase the role of women in decision-making (UN Women, 2017).

The trend has been one of incremental but steady change in terms of women's participation in public life. The Interparlimentary Union Report (2019) showed that women accounted for 10.9% of MPs worldwide in year 1975. In 2005 the number of women in parliaments had increased to 16.2% in lower houses and 14.8% in upper house. By 2019, new global high was reached, as 24.6% of the members of the lower or single legislative houses were women, and 24.3% in upper houses, bringing an overall total average of 24% in all parliaments. While steady, the progress has been slow. Further, the report established that an average of 30% women representation in political position will be attained in year 2025 and gender parity will not be attained until 2040 if current incremental rates continue.

In terms of the ascendancy of women into the public political arena, Africa remains highly contested, but voices are being heard with full support from international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU) women advocates in Africa. Women are becoming more active in a number of local government agencies, legislatures, and even the executive branch. The AU ideal of 50/50 inclusion of women in all political and leadership roles has not been reached by most African countries in Africa, but the continent has several countries with the highest representation rates in the world. In regional bodies, women are equally visible, occupying 50 percent of parliamentary seats in the African Union (African Union Report, 2019).

In Kenya, women have pursued participation and representation in governance and decision-making in all facets of public life since independence in 1963, but women's access to formal political leadership roles has been sluggish. Kenya 's 2010 Constitution allows women to hold 1/3 of all designated political roles, but women in the area of leadership and decision-making continue to be marginalized (UN Women, 2017). The Kenyan Parliament currently has just around 10 percent female representation, well below the global average of 18.8 percent female parliamentary representation. The overall representation of women in the Kenyan bicameral parliament is 26%. 19.7 percent of the National Assembly and 26.5 percent of the Senate are all made possible by affirmative action using both party quotas and women's seats. The Kenya Judiciary has made considerable strides at an institutional level in promoting gender equality. The ratio of males to females is about 53 percent versus 47 percent. In the public and private sectors, the number of women serving on boards is still very limited.

Nations cannot reach their full potential if they exclude women that constitute 50% of the world population in the process of governance and decision making. Researchers have shown that without women's empowerment and gender equality sustainable development cannot be achieved (Chaban et.al, 2017). Dahlerup (2013) postulated that country's development will be retarded if gender equality is not maintained. The global importance of women participation and representation in political positions is due to efforts by numerous international organizations and donors including; the world Bank, WTO, IMF, United Nations, DFID, CIDA and AFDB

The Role of women activism

Regional and international networks are institutions that facilitate exchanges among activists and organizations. Regional networks operate mainly within a restricted geography setting. According to Sandell (2011), regional women networks are increasingly playing a significant role in diffusing standards and strategies on a series of women and gender issues. They are actively promoting women's human right, women political empowerment, representation of women in domestic and foreign policy decision making and gender mainstreaming. Regional and international developments play a critical role to the rise of autonomous women activism. UN world conferences specifically, spurred national and regional activism across the globe (Piper, 2003).

Internationalist women's activism has succeeded in finding and opening spaces for women inside political sphere. International organizations like OAS, European union, United Nations and League of nations responded to women activist demand for participation and representation inside their political structures (El-Bushra, 2007). Diplomatic spaces for women in multilateral institutions are bureaucratic, however women have been able to develop bureaucratic machinery and technical expertise to track mainstream women issues inside those institutions. UN Women Report (2017) showed that internationalist women do not just restrain themselves to creating spaces inside international organizations but they also explore new political terrain outside multilateral organizations to carry out feminist politics.

A study by Adam (2006) explained that women social and political mobilization is a key factor in reshaping gender relations, progressive legal policy change, and pressure to ensure implementation and to cooperate with the government. In America, women activist pressured their government into improving the rights and status women at the public life. The creation of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) opened an important space for feminist politics in America. The CIM played a key role in integrating women's right into the charter and organizational framework of the United nations.

Policies that advance the rights of women and potentially challenge gender inequality are invariably the result of women activists' sustained activism. Male elites may, however, use the law more frequently to defend their interests and avoid reforms to the patriarchal status quo. For example, in Africa, activists have drawn on gender equity standards embedded in a number of regional and international documents to legitimate their claims. African women's networks have helped to realize gender parity within the AU. After a successful lobbying of gender parity provision by women organizations in 2002 several AU representatives sought to decrease the number of women commissioners. Women however held their ground and were able to preserve parity in the commission (Sandell, 2011).

The Impact of legal reform and institutional changes on women political empowerment

Constitutions and laws are key determinants of women access to power as they establish the formal rules on allocation of resources and power in a society. According to Krook (2008), new constitutions upholding civil rights, including equality and women's rights are the most tangible markers of peaceful or violent democratic transformations. Legal reform has been a vehicle for women empowerment since the earliest modern feminist movements. Incremental legal changes have made considerable progress in widening the constitutional recognition of women's rights in Europe and North America since the 1970s (UN Women, 2017).

The willingness of women to participate and benefit from political life will promote progress by creating opportunities for women and allowing women to renegotiate the balance of power. A research by Barnett and Duvall (2004) pointed out that women participation in public life is not adequate for legislation and policies that affirm women's rights and women's empowerment. Policy follow-up and legislative changes are helping to bring legal change to the fore and expand women's access to new economic, social and political rights. Longer-term socialization and transition mechanisms ensure that women are able to access and use new legal rights, but women need clear strategies to negotiate and facilitate improvements to informal rules that reinforce gender inequality (Pospieszna, 2015).

Obstacles restricting women to fully participate in political leadership

A number of challenges are impacting women's political engagement and representation. According to United Nations Report (2019), political systems, including democracy and international treaties, limit women from involvement in political roles. The report explains that democracy is relatively new in some parts of the world and the key components needed for sound democratic governance are still missing in some countries. In particular, in most developing countries, corruption can make it difficult for new groups of participants to enter politics. Ferree and Tripp (2006) postulated that, unless translated into specific country-level acts, implementation of international treaties with the force of international law which limit women's participation in political and decision-making positions.

A gender stereotype is another group of challenges hindering women political participation. Societal perceptions and behaviors, despite the presence of greater numbers of women in political office, lead to a societal mindset that politics is the work of a man. Women are associated with household and family responsibilities; this pattern decreases political participation opportunities. A study by Dahlerup (2013) noted that one of the major challenges for women who aspire to political positions could be the threat of political violence, mostly during political campaigns. The study highlighted that men who claim to campaign against women in engaging into political and decision making processes frequently use the threat of violence insidiously.

There is shortage of support, specifically political funding and media attention, for women running for political roles. Women are less likely to have private monetary capital to invest on election campaigns as compared to men (Dufour & Giraud, 2007). It can also be difficult for women to receive support from outside donors due to inequality and sexism in society. The media also plays a vital role in influencing the electoral chances of women, as the majority of political attention in most countries is dedicated to male politicians. In terms of its substance, coverage is often highly gendered, frequently underplaying the qualifications and performance of women relative to men (Karns, Mingst & Stiles, 2004).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The inclusion of women in political decision making has been on the rise worldwide. The rise, however, has been consistently slow. The number of women in parliamentary seats worldwide hit a 24 percent all-time high in 2019. Despite gender equality commitments, sexism against women and the lack of effective involvement of women in decision-making continue to occur internationally. However, in the midst of the significant improvements in women's political representation over the past two decades, there has been an increasing number of laws, conferences, agreements and declarations supporting gender-balanced decision-making.

For many years, success in electing and promoting women in politics has taken a great deal of work, but change has not been simple or automatic. Complete equality has not yet been achieved in international and regional consultations, women are still a minority of political office holders worldwide, and their success in these roles is also undermined by persistent opposition to women's political participation.

Solutions to the different issues facing women in power include not only building on current methods, but also moving beyond them. Ensuring that gender quotas are completely respected as well as enforcing the gender equality recommendations are forms of deepening democracy. By offering both technical and financial support, more coalitions between local organizations and international actors will promote knowledge exchanges. There is a need for women interested in coming into political life to have capacity-building programmes. Furthermore, once women have entered political roles, further training and support should be given to ensure that they are successful.

Governments will need to aim to integrate gender diversity into constitutions and legal systems as countries strive to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 5. They need to comply entirely with the law, eradicate all types of violence against women and ensure that girls receive a quality education.

Regional-level work does not replace national-level work, but it can supplement it and strengthen it by using both top-down and bottom-up approaches. Strategic guidance on the operationalization of gender issues should be provided by international and regional organizations, their lobbying, follow-up and tracking functions should be stepped up, and the influence of gender instruments should be adequately measured and assessed in order to improve the frameworks in place and to track progress. Reasonable qualitative and quantitative metrics should continue to be developed and used by regional organizations to report on progress and to conduct a regional assessment of the status of women.

An effective mechanism for collaboration and cooperation is required in order to permit synergies between organizations. By minimizing duplication of effort and services, this will increase productivity and ensure complementary preparation and program delivery that will speed up the incorporation of a gender approach into policies, planning, programming, tracking and assessment. It would also help balance competition for scarce resources and put in place groundbreaking resource mobilization strategies.

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