

GENDER DYNAMICS IN ELECTIONS IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Gender, an important concept in African elections, has been largely ignored, yet the majority of voters tend to be women, while those who hold the authority and are elected to political positions are mostly men. This article examines the understanding of gender in the African context and analyses the underlying causes of the gender paradox. Using a multi- inter- and trans-disciplinary approach, the concept of gender is scrutinised within the election cycle. Findings about gender dynamics drawn from African nations showed that less than 30% of representatives in elected African parliaments are women. The reasons for this gender disparity appear to be deeply embedded in the historical and ideological traditions within the political, economic and social dimensions of Africa's development. The article ends with the identification of barriers to entry for women candidates in selected African countries. Strategies for transforming gender inequities in elections are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Gender, an important concept in African elections, has been largely ignored. Despite the fact that the majority of voters tend to be women, the people who hold the authority and the elected positions are men. Gouws (2012) underscores the dearth of gender-oriented research into local government elections, while Hassim & Smith (2012) record women's lack of influence as a result of the fact that men tend to be dismissive about gender issues.

Women, as the biggest users of services, are often disadvantaged by lack of delivery of basic needs such as water, electricity and sanitation (Coetzee & Naidoo 2002). This study examines the underlying causes of this gender paradox through a multi-pronged historical and contextual approach based on case study perspectives in selected countries in sub-Saharan Africa, including Rwanda,

Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Kenya and Uganda. In order to comprehend the complex nature of gender inequity in African political circles I look at the historical causes and ideological underpinnings that might have contributed to the present status as well as at Africa's development and at elections.

Gender disparity in Africa in relation to political leadership or elections has not always favoured men. Historically, the continent has many examples of women leaders who have had power, a large inheritance and ownership of servants. In the Bible, 1 Kings 10, paras 1-13 tells the story of the Queen of Sheba who went to visit King Solomon in a great train with camels bearing 'a hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices very great stores, and precious stones: there came to no more such abundance of spices and these which the Queen of Sheba gave King Solomon'. She was able to speak to the king and ask questions to verify what she had heard about his wisdom, prosperity and wealth.

This ancient Queen of Ethiopia demonstrates that, at least at that level, women's status was equal to that of men. The historical perspectives on gender relations and the factors that have had an impact on African women in positions of political leadership is a complex subject.

In pre-colonial Africa women played a significant role in society. They were wealthy, owned property and held distinguished positions (Anquandah 1982). In many ethnic groups women played the role of queen – the mother who was involved in governance and served as advisor to the chief, especially during the election of chiefs. This signifies the participation and important role of women in elections in Africa. An example of such a woman was Nana Yaa Asantewaa, queen mother of Ejisu, in Ghana (Dugbazah 2012).

The division of labour in African societies in the pre-colonial era was well defined. For example, women among the Ewes in the Volta Region of Ghana were involved in food processing, marketing and distribution, while their male counterparts harvested crops, hunted and fished.

Although labour was divided according to sex, the contributions made by each sex were complementary. There were many matriarchal kingdoms in Africa and, indeed, there still are, especially in Senegal.

From this overview it seems that women had a recognised role in society and higher status during the pre-colonial era than in the colonial and post-colonial era. However, this generalised statement is not entirely correct, as many played secondary roles, only assumed power when there was no serious contention from men and, in many case, the structures that existed prevented them from attaining their full potential.

Gender, like many other phenomena, was affected by colonialism. The imposition of colonial rule by the British brought about significant changes in gender relations within African society (Dugbazah 2012) and has caused serious

debates. Colonialism had a negative impact on gender relations, affecting the status of women and their ability to contribute to society and thereby reducing their chances of success in elections. This was mainly due to the introduction of patriarchal and capitalist ideology (Bortei-Doku 1991).

The British interfered with community values, replacing them with systems of private property, wage labour, class stratification and a culture that was basically patriarchal in nature. Eurocentric systems also changed the status of women as they adopted British culture, and the introduction of English law began to reduce the status of women.

British law, both in theory and in practice, did not recognise the rights accorded to women under the customary laws of the pre-colonial era. Marriage meant the merger of the identity of husband and wife (Manuh 1992) and an inability to own property, based on the understanding that they themselves *were* property. This meant that they could not participate in political activity, as queen mothers had done in Ghana.

African men, on the other hand, were granted more decision-making powers, as the British only engaged in business with men. Women lost their strength, power and authority during that period, which delineated rural communities that had equal access to resources, production and subsistence agriculture. Colonialism, with its demand for cash crops, ushered in a new gender pattern of production (Sarfoh 1987).

This male-dominated division of labour created a sharp distinction between men and women and the gender divisions had far-reaching consequences that continue to haunt societies in Africa, where, because of their economic status, women became even more remote from decision-making.

Another factor was the demand for urban employment, which resulted in men leaving the rural areas. The introduction of Western education appears to have favoured men and ignored many women, focusing, as it did, on economic advancement for men for the benefit of the colonialists (Agbodeka 1992). Paradoxically, some colonial systems alleviated some negative conditions like customs of widowhood, female circumcision and so on. However, this relief only applied to a small minority of the population. In subtle ways the gender inequity and under development that were slowly structured into sub-Saharan African societies continue today, making it difficult for women to participate in elections as leaders.

Many factors influence the position of women in society and in politics. Socio-economic challenges such as access to resources make them vulnerable and they lack the funds to fight elections. Other constraints include difficulties with obtaining credit, the restraints of marriage, the lack of formal employment and problems with land tenure rights.

Currently there are two women presidents in Africa – Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in Liberia and Joyce Banda in Malawi – and women constitute only 20.4% of parliamentarians, although many African governments have implemented quotas to boost these numbers.

The Rwandan Constitution of 2003 requires that women occupy at least 30% of parliamentary seats and similar quota systems have been introduced in Uganda, Burundi, Tanzania and the newest country in Africa, South Sudan. However, in the 2013 elections in Kenya no women were voted into the position of governor or senator and of the 290 parliamentary seats, only seven went to women, compared to 22 in the previous Parliament, despite the fact that the country's new Constitution provides for a more even playing field..

It is against this background that this article investigates gender parity in Africa in relation to electoral democracy.

METHODOLOGY

This study analyses the factors underlying gender disparity in African elections, based on the experiences of a sample of election officials who attended the Executive Programme on Democratic Elections in Africa, an on-going programme that was initiated in 2011 and covers at least 23 countries within Africa.

The officials, who are selected from electoral bodies, form the bulk of respondents and share their experiences through focus groups, projects and questionnaires during the four-week course. The experiences, including gender aspects, of 100 respondents were drawn from direct open-ended questions. Focus group discussions were held to probe further themes such as the underlying factors driving gender imbalances in elections. Representatives of selected countries provided information about specific experiences. Respondents were asked to address the following themes:

- The gender status in their countries;
- Experiences of gender inequality in their countries;
- The gender ratios in their countries' Parliament, electoral management bodies and parties.

Data were captured in written accounts and tabulated (see table) and emerging themes were analysed.

The countries involved in the study were Kenya, Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Zanzibar, South Sudan, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, South Africa, Angola, Mozambique, Seychelles, Mauritius, Cameroon, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

Paradoxically, the gender composition of each country was initially biased towards men, indicating the gender imbalances within the commissions and electoral bodies themselves.

Written responses were also collected, for instance on factors that influenced voting for women candidates. The data were analysed and themes such as gender-based violence, barriers to women's participation in elections and the cultural and traditional influence of women's participation, among others, were documented. Other means of collecting data included document analysis, particularly from reports on elections within Africa and lessons learnt. In addition, where possible semi-structured interviews were held with the respondents.

The major limitation of the study is that fewer than half the countries in Africa were involved, since, as a result of the political unrest in the Arab north, there were no participants from this region.

THE MEANING OF GENDER IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

In African societies, as in most others, socially constructed roles are ascribed to men and women. These roles are deeply embedded in the culturally specific set of characteristics that identifies the social behaviour of men and women and relationships between them. These roles are learnt, change over time and vary within and between cultures, tribes and ethnic groups.

Although biological sexuality is determined by anatomy, morphology and genetic features, socially learnt gender roles are acquired and deeply influence identity. It is important to note that gender refers to men and women plus the relationship between them and the way it is constructed, as often gender is dismissed as a women's issue.

Like class, race, and ethnicity, gender is an analytical tool for understanding social processes which are deeply complex in Africa. This understanding is fundamental to understanding the factors that, for instance, make women vote for men instead of for other women. The reason might be that because of the gender socialisation, attitudes and belief systems they have been brought up with they do not see other women as being capable of leading.

GENDER-BASED ANALYSIS

Gender-based analysis is a tool used to identify the status, roles and responsibilities of men and women as well as their access to and control of resources, benefits, and opportunities. This framework is used to compare disadvantages and advantages faced by men and women in family, workplace and political system; to measure the gender effects of programmes and to consider the sexual division and outputs (benefits) of their labour.

It provides us with a systematic way of looking at the different consequences of development efforts for women and men and, for instance, how factors such as class, race and ethnicity interact with gender to produce discriminatory results. What women are mainly fighting for is the policy-gender-based analysis as a tool for understanding social processes and for responding with informed and equitable options to the many gendered problems in elections.

GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Gender discrimination is the systematic, unfavourable treatment of individuals on the basis of their gender, which denies them rights, opportunities or resources. For example, in some countries it is evident in the schooling girls receive in households in which women are expected to look after the home while boys and men are provided with education and careers. These inequities are often mirrored in election management bodies (EMBs). Responses to the questionnaires revealed that women comprise less than 10% of the membership of EMBs in Africa. The implementation of quota systems is slow in many African countries.

GENDER DIVISIONS IN LABOUR AND THEIR IMPACT ON ELECTIONS

The division of labour is reflected in socially-determined ideas and practices which define what roles and activities are deemed appropriate for women. These are so engraved in the minds of people there appear to be context-specific patterns of who does what and how it is valued. This has repercussions on the way women vote. Roles that are typically designated as female are almost invariably less valued than those designated as male. It is not surprising, therefore, that women do not vote other women into leadership positions.

THE CURRENT STATUS OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

A survey among women in SADC countries revealed that these societies are generally male dominated.

One 37-year-old female respondent wrote about the gender status in her country,

people are just beginning to see the importance of gender equality. We are beginning to see women in top government posts as permanent secretaries and chief executive officers.

Asked to describe ways in which gender inequality was manifested, the same respondent wrote,

in an environment where women hold the top post of the organisations when something goes wrong people say: 'we are not surprised, a woman can never head an organisation; women are not good leaders'.

With regard to gender ratios in Parliament, she wrote,

in our country there are only five women in Parliament and this is because we use the FPTP [first-past-the-post] system and women in most cases are not the broadly accepted candidates, that is, parties would rather have men representing them than women.

The country's EMB consisted of only one woman and six men.

The experiences summarised in the table underscore the gender approach to elections in the countries surveyed. According to the responses from Zambia,

parties do not give a chance to female members to contest elections. There is no deliberate law encouraging women to contest.

Respondents cited varying degrees of gender inequity in their countries, both more generally and within the EMBs. For instance, in South Sudan, although gender inequality has been the tradition, the position seems to be changing with the introduction of affirmative action (see table). However, girl children are still taken out of school and forced into early marriages, politics not even being an option.

In their report to a South African electoral team Southall & Mattes (2002) indicated that South Africa had one of the highest proportions of women legislators (30%). However, 43% of respondents who were asked whether they felt that there was adequate gender balance in Parliament felt there were too few women, while one-quarter (28) said there were enough, 11 % said they were too many and 18% said they did not know. A total of 68% said more women should be nominated. The reason why South Africa has such a high representation of women is that the parties took a conscious decision to nominate them. The ANC, for example, decided that women should comprise one-third of its party lists.

Gender status in selected African countries and the position of women in elections and politics

Country	Statements made by respondents	
Sudan	Respondent 1	Respondent 2
South Sudan	50-year-old female	60-year-old male
Gender status in the country	Women are getting their rights fully. The gender is treated equally as they are enjoying political rights. Right of work is guaranteed by law, based on merit	The community is highly male dominated and women are supposed to play secondary roles (this is, however, changing slowly)
An example of gender inequality	The South Sudan National Assembly has got 25% of seats allocated to women.	My sister went to school up to grade 4 only because society used to believe that women would bring dishonour to the family if they studied. They might relinquish domestic chores and therefore be considered less ladylike
Gender equality in the EMB		There are nine commissioners, of which two are women
Botswana	41-year-old male	46-year-old female
Gender status in the country	Botswana is a patriarchal society dominated by males. Males have a role as head of the family.	Gender representation in Botswana is still very low. Most high positions are held by men. There is little regard for women.
An example of gender inequality	Of the 60 members of Parliament only three are females. Plus the speaker of the National Assembly. The reason is that women are reluctant to stand for political office	Gender inequity seems very rampant. The major problem is women do not support women and always try to bring them down.
Gender equality in the EMB	Gender ratios in the EMB are, 1:5. This is because in the recruitment process people are not considered on the basis of gender but on merit. Most political players in Botswana are male	

Malawi	46-year-old male	50-year-old female
Gender status in the country	Women in Malawi have a big role to play when it comes to work at home. For example, a woman carries firewood and a baby on her back and hoes for her and her husband while the husband carries nothing.	
An example of gender inequality	I heard especially in villages the girl child does the household work whilst the boy is allowed to go to school. The parents argue that girls will get married and be supported by their husband.	
Gender equality in Parliament and the EMB	There are more men than women in our Parliament because more women are not educated. There are more men than women on our IEC board.	There are 40+ women and 150+ men. Women are not interested in politics. There are more men than women in the EMB.
Sierra Leone	39-year-old male	
Gender status in the country	Male and female have access to education but in terms of employment more men hold positions in the public service than women by far.	
An example of gender inequality	In the Sierra Leone Parliament of 121 members only 15 MPs are women. Women find it very difficult to get nominated within the parties to contest elections.	
Gender equality in the EMB	The electoral commission of Sierra Leone has 5 members; 3 of them are women, including the chief electoral commissioner.	

Zambia	50-year old- male	45-year-old male
Gender status in the country	In the Cabinet there are few (3) women out of 22 Cabinet members despite women being the largest number of voters. Otherwise gender issues are prioritised; this is why there is a Ministry of Gender and Women in Development	Both male and female have equal chances to occupy senior positions.
An example of gender inequality	Girl children in rural areas are withdrawn from school and taken into early marriages.	However, when it comes to junior secondary education females are given a lower cut-off point to go into senior secondary.
Gender equality in Parliament and the EMB	There 19 women in Parliament out of 150 elected parliamentarians. And out of eight nominated members none is a woman. The reason for few elected parliamentarians is that few women were adopted by political parties. In the EMB there are two women, one being the chairperson of the commission, and three men.	We have 18 female members of Parliament out of 158. Parties do not give chances to female members to contest elections. There is no deliberate law encouraging women to contest. We have two female members of the commission out of the five.
DRC	36-year-old male	50-year-old female
Gender status in the country	In the DRC women are allowed to do what men also do except in the traditional areas.	
An example of gender inequality	Women were not able by themselves to assume different responsibilities.	
Gender equality in Parliament and the EMB	500 seats in the Parliament; 80 women parliamentarians and 420 men. We have 7 commissioners in our EMB: 4 men and 3 women.	Females are unequal because woman are a minority in the government, senate and Parliament.

Burundi	45-year-old female	54-year-old female
Gender status in the country	In Burundi male people are considered to be the head of the family. In Burundi females who are married do not inherit the land.	Traditionally, women and men didn't have the same status. They didn't have the same work.
An example of gender inequality	Despite improving, women are not equally treated with men. Women are totally responsible for domestic work. Some people, especially in the villages, believe that girls should not go to school. During the 1960 general elections only men were allowed to vote.	Young girls were not allowed to go to school. They stayed home helping mother – women were not allowed to speak in public. During recruitment women are required to demonstrate more knowledge.
Gender equality in Parliament and the EMB	Women constitute 30%. The factors are mainly their educational status and less involvement in politics. In the EMB they constitute 50%, but many of them are from the lower ranks. The Constitution provides that there should be at least 30% women in the National Assembly.	In Parliament, for the past four general elections, the percentage increased from less than 2% to 37%. The improvement is due to the constitutional provision imposing affirmative action, which parties are trying to abide by.
Namibia	43-year-old male	
Gender status in the country	There are more females than males (census 2011).	
An example of gender inequality	Many positions in the public sector are occupied by men, however, there is an affirmative action law which provides that women should be given preference in terms of employment. Men are regarded as the head of the household. There is gender-based violence. Women do not generally vote for other women.	

Gender equality in Parliament and the EMB	There are 15 women in Parliament out of 72 members. Namibia has proportional representation – parliamentarians are elected on a party list. Two of the five commissioners are women.	
Lesotho	39-year-old female	47-year-old female
Gender status in the country	There are many roles specifically known to be played by a particular sex. Earlier gender laws were patriarchal – men were the leaders and supervisors on almost everything. Now, with affirmative action, women hold similar positions to men in organisations and earn equal salaries. In terms of traditional leadership, they lead in small numbers and only when the husband dies and the son is still young.	There are very few women in the executive structures of political parties so even when the law allows an increase in women's representation in Parliament they are not found, especially as constituency representatives. Gender is only balanced in the proportional representation part of the mixed member proportional representation system, not in the FPTP part.
An example of gender inequality	Women are the weaker sex, they cannot do man's work. Women do not have a say in their own <i>lobola</i> negotiations. Women have to be beaten by their husbands.	Women wearing mourning clothes were not allowed to vote at some of the voting stations due to the traditional belief that they would bring bad luck to the chief's place, where voting was conducted.
Gender equality in Parliament and the EMB	There are very few women. Women always choose men to be their leader because they have been culturally indoctrinated to know that men are born to lead; women work in the kitchen. There are more men than women on the IEC board.	
Angola	34-year-old male	
Gender status in the country	There is discrimination against women.	
Gender equality in Parliament and the EMB	30 % of members of Parliament are women.	

Nigeria	52-year-old Male	50-year-old male
Gender status in the country	Gender mainstreaming is actively encouraged by government and public politics.	The gender status varies according to the area you come from.
An example of gender inequality	Political parties do not have a mechanism to recruit and place women candidates for elections, despite the fact that there are many who aspire to be candidates.	In the northern part of the country, which is predominantly Muslim, there is a great imbalance in the treatment of males and females. The females are seen as second-class citizens, while the males call the shots. Girls are seldom sent to school. The females play the roles of housewives, bear children and are restricted from holding public office. In the southern part of the country males and females are given equal opportunities to compete.
Gender equality in Parliament and the EMB	Gender ratio: senate, approximately 1:12; House of Representatives 1:8; EMB ratio: 1:3 females to males	There are more men in Parliament than women. The ratio for the EMB is 1:3
Cameroon	35-year-old female	
Gender status in the country	Men and women are equal with regard to school issues in particular. In general, there is no clear line between one and the other. The general performance of a child determines what he or she gets, be it education or inheritance. There is very little gender discrimination and what there is is mostly in very remote areas. All children in almost all the parts of the country have equal opportunities to go to school. The idea of male inheritance is gradually being discouraged and many parents give their children equal opportunities to inherit their wealth.	

An example of gender inequality	Particularly among older people there is no equality when it comes to appointments.	
Gender equality in Parliament and the EMB	The ratio of female to male position holders in Parliament, government and even the EMB is about 1:4. It should, however, be mentioned that the government is doing a lot to encourage gender equality. More women appointments are seen these days.	
Uganda	34-year-old female	34-year-old male
Gender status in the country	In the elite or educated society gender mainstreaming is evident. However, in the non-elite society gender mainstreaming still requires attention. In this case, the women are marginalised.	Uganda is a gender-sensitive country by policy.
An example of gender inequality	The issue of equality has been advocated by the government and civil society organisations, but inequality still exists in some cultural circles.	In Uganda girls are sold into marriage, thus exchanged for bride price and negotiations go on without the girls' input. Women are considered to be the weak sex and thus miss out on some job opportunities.
Gender equality in Parliament and the EMB	There are no gender inequalities in particular in the legislature, the ratios should be 50/50. The gender ratio in the IEC is more unequal as you go up the ladder; there are more men in high posts than women.	Of 386 seats 135 are held by women. According to legislation each district must have a woman MP. Women must be represented in all councils at all levels, from the district to the village and those who want to do so are free to contest other direct posts. More than 40% of the staff members of the IEC are women and two of seven commissioners are women.

Kenya	45-year-old female	40-year-old male
Gender status in the country		Different communities treat women differently, but generally Kenya is a male-dominated society.
An example of gender inequality		Some Kenyans believe that certain positions in leadership are meant only for men. Other than in the emerging class of urbanites, roles like cooking and fetching water belong to women, while men look after the animals and other matters in the village.
Gender equality in Parliament and the EMB	<p>There is no real parity but the position is better than it was under the previous Constitution. There are only 47 women representatives in Parliament. The 2/3 proportion requirement for women has been amended to read, 'the 2/3 majority will be attained more progressively', meaning it will take a long time for them to reach the target of 2/3 women</p> <p>Attempts to reach gender parity in the EMB are underway.</p>	<p>The governors of all 47 counties in Kenya are men. In the senate there are 47 men and 16 women.</p> <p>The IEBC is almost balanced in gender. The chair of the commission is male, the deputy is female and of the nine directors five are women. The ratio of male to female for both the commission and the secretariat is 1:1</p>
Tanzania	52-year-old female	
Gender status in the country	<p>There are efforts made by the government to observe gender equality. There is a ministry that deals with gender issues and gender desks have been established in some ministries and departments. Tanzania adheres to affirmative action by increasing the number of women MPs by 40% through a quota system. In some cases, for instance, appointments by the president, gender equality is observed</p>	

An example of gender inequality	According to tradition, male children are regarded as future heads of the clan. Male children are encouraged and given priority in most things.	
Gender equality in Parliament and the EMB	Gender ratios in the Parliament are approximately 45% women to 55% men and in the EMB approximately 40% women to 60% men.	
Zanzibar	50-year-old male	
Gender status in the country	Women are treated equally with men in education and health services and have the same status as men in political parties. They are able to stand for Parliament but most are shy about taking on big positions, like MPs and ministers. They have the same rights to education, can go to university and can become professors or lecturers or doctors or nurses. Though most women belong to the Islamic cultural situation, women are respected and not abused. Although a man can marry four wives at a time he must treat them equally.	
Gender equality in Parliament and the EMB	Legally, women are given priority, with 40% of parliamentary seats going to women. They also have local government seats. There are very few women on the EMB.	

South Africa	53-year-old female	48-year-old male
Gender status in the country	Generally, there is, in theory, an understanding of the concept of gender equality. However, in practice, South Africa is still bound by traditional beliefs in terms of gender equality. Large portions of the population are still under traditional rule in rural areas. This indicates that these communities are still under the authority of traditional leaders	Women and men enjoy the same status as per the Constitution and legislation
An example of gender inequality	Gender equality is still far off. Although the legislation is favourable to gender equity, the implementation is not encouraging	Women, traditionally, are not allowed to inherit the chieftaincy
Gender equality in Parliament and the EMB	The ratio of women to men in Parliament is in the vicinity of 1:3. The gender ratio on the IEC board is about 60% women to 40% men	
Seychelles	60-year-old female	59-year-old female
Gender status in the country	In Seychelles there are several communities – we have Asians, Chinese, Muslims, descendants of the Europeans. The status of gender in each community is different, although things are changing. For example, in the past in the Asian and Muslim communities it was the father or mother who would choose the partner of the girls	There is gender equality in law, and generally in parties. All children go to school and the majority of women work
An example of gender inequality	Although political parties talk publicly about gender equality, when it comes to elections they field very few female candidates	Boys underperform at school and people still make career choices on traditional gender lines, for example, mechanics are mostly men and primary school teachers mainly women

Gender equality in Parliament and the EMB		A total of 38% of parliamentarians are women and 62% are men. In the EMB there is one woman and four men. The positions were advertised nationally and I expect the choice depends on who applied.
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It is clear from the table that gender inequity is still a big problem in Africa generally, particularly in Parliament and electoral management bodies. However, some effort is being made to address the problem through the introduction of quota systems providing for at least 30% representation for women. Many factors seem to prevent women from participating in politics and standing for election. Among these is discrimination against girl children, who are kept at home while boys are sent to school, or are pushed into early marriages. Other factors that are drivers of gender imbalance in elections are intimidation and gender-based violence.

BARRIERS TO WOMEN ENTERING POLITICS

The following reasons were identified as barriers to women participating in elections in Africa:

- Women refuse to vote for women: The primary reason for this was found to be a lack of role models and the fact that women leaders lack the necessary political education and resources and that they are forced to confine themselves to household duties. In addition, women are viewed as the weaker sex and as having little political experience.
- Illiteracy: Many women, especially those living in rural villages, are illiterate, and voter education does not cater for them. The focus group discussions revealed that low literacy levels and lack of voter education contribute to the low participation of women in elections.
- Gender-based violence (rape): According to the respondents from East Africa, rape and intimidation are used to prevent women candidates from standing for office. In South Africa this type of intimidation is frequently coupled with domestic violence and women, fearing the reaction of their spouses or partners, are unwilling to stand as candidates.
- War and conflict (particularly in the DRC): The war in the DRC continues to be a major threat to the stability of the region and contributed to post-election violence in the country. The war also further exacerbates the vulnerability of women and children, many of whom are internally displaced in areas

such as Goma. Linked to the war are war crimes like rape, which continue to escalate, making it unsafe for women to participate in elections.

- Education: Lack of education, especially political education, is a major obstacle preventing women from participating in elections as in some countries.
- Cultural roles: Traditional African societies are largely patriarchal, demanding that women be homemakers and not become politically involved. Election meetings are frequently held at night, excluding women who have to stay home to look after children. Traditional beliefs, such as superstitions about women in mourning bringing bad luck to the chief in areas where the polling stations are in the chief's territory, also hold women back from participating in politics.
- Lack of female role models: The fact that there are few leading women in politics in Africa means that there are few women role models for the younger generation, a factor that perpetuates the problem of the limited representation of women.
- Lack of adequate finance: Few political parties fund women candidates, although they are placed on party lists. This lack of funding frequently results in the failure of women to stand for or to win elections.
- Lack of affirmative action: Of the 23 countries studied, only South Africa, South Sudan, Angola, Mozambique, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda appear to have affirmative action programmes in place.

STEPS TOWARDS MAINSTREAMING GENDER

There are many instruments that address gender equality, among them, the quota system, affirmative action and special seats for women in Parliament. When these instruments are used they tend to reduce the gender gap. However, women themselves do not appear to be properly empowered.

- The implementation of a quota system has been successful in countries like South Africa and this model is being replicated in other countries, South Sudan, for example, with some success.
- Affirmative action has also been used in South Africa with some success to bridge the economic gap and address past social imbalances. The result is that some women have reached senior positions in companies, but the numbers are not increasing fast enough.
- Ministries of women and children, which have been established in several countries, South Africa and Uganda among them, have turned the spotlight on the plight of women. The extent to which they have contributed to women's role in elections requires further research.

KEY DRIVERS OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN AFRICAN ELECTIONS

The following were identified during focus groups as the key drivers of gender inequality in the selected countries:

- Religion: Many Muslim women are not permitted to stand for election.
- Culture: Traditional African beliefs and patriarchal societies continue to prevent women from taking up political positions and standing for election.
- Economic status: The economic status of women is usually weaker than that of men.
- Fear of and respect for spouses/partners. Many men who were interviewed said they would not support their spouses/partners should they decide to stand for election.
- Intimidation: This comes in many forms, including rape, beating and shooting.

Political environment: Many political environments are not ready for women leaders.

There are only two women presidents in Africa, Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Malawian President Joyce Banda, and other countries should follow suit.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Africa, post-independence, is as diverse in terms of gender equity as it is in terms of culture, but it remains a predominantly patriarchal continent on which the achievement of gender equity continues to be elusive.

In South Africa nearly 20 years after the first democratic elections great strides have been made towards gender equity. The Constitution, the Bill of Rights, various laws and the introduction of a quota system all play a role. Currently, women constitute almost half the members of Cabinet and at least 35% of members of Parliament. Trade unions and civil society prioritise gender.

However, reports on the role of women in the anti-apartheid struggle (Lewis 2004; Ramphele 1995) that show that women were not merely passive participants but gender activists who traversed their domestic roles also indicate that their activist roles have not translated into equity gains, for example, in the acquisition of equal resources.

In Lesotho and Burundi at least 30% of representatives in local government, at district level, in the national assembly and in the senate are women. The main

reason for this has been that these countries have adopted international and regional instruments relating to the rights of women.

The article has identified several barriers – cultural, social and political – that prevent women from entering politics. Overcoming these barriers requires specific programmes and a focused endeavour to support women in politics and elections. This strategy should be embraced by structures on the continent such as the African Union, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) and individual national governments.

Instruments such as the quota system and affirmative action, as well as special seats for women, have attempted to bridge the gap. However, their implementation must be strengthened further by gender sensitive voter education.

The space has been opened up for women to enter politics despite cultural and traditionally patriarchal societies and now is the time for them to take centre stage. Further research is needed to probe the attitudes and experiences of women voters and politicians in a complex and competitive African political arena.

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