

Issues which are Prejudicing Active Political Participation of Women in City Administration Council: The Case of Woldia City Administration Council, North Wollo Zone, Ethiopia

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Abstract: This paper investigated issues which are prejudicing active political participation of women in city administration council. A qualitative research method utilized in the study to gain a profound understanding of the phenomenon. The researcher used case study research design which helps to intensely explore a phenomenon. The researcher subsequently employed thematic analysis to come up with findings and discussion. Purposive sampling technique also employed in the study. The finding of the study was based on semi-structured-interviews and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The research findings indicated some issues that prejudiced political participation of women in city administration council. These issues were nature, custom of society, men councilors, see-sawing political issues of the country, lack of social capital, constructed patriarchal weltanschauung, being unjust beneficiary and lack of confidence among women. The study recommends the creation of an enabling environment to strength political participation of women.

Key words: Challenges, Endangering, Political Participation, Women,

1. INTRODUCTION

Women are contributing a vital role on social and political development. Albeit, most of the time, in the world, women are marginalized from the political sphere (vissandjee et al., 2005). They encounter significant barriers to participate in political issues and shape the decisions and policies that influence their lives (Booke, 1972; National Democratic Institute, 2010).

The position of women in the society, culture, illiteracy, economical weakness and patriarchy are challenges for women's political participation (Olayode, 2016). In society, it is observed that women are not capable of handling administrative issues since women are considered as weak to run administration. Women are discriminated in the cultures which mostly reflect patriarchal or masculine view. Lack of education makes women ignorant to secure their rights. Men oppressions toward women's political participation become norm order. Lack of adequate finance weakened women political participation. In addition to this, marriage, birth, religion and blind faith play significant role by marginalized women from political participation (Ama and Ekundayo, 2014; Shmelis, 2015).

Accordingly, in the world, country, region and local level, political participation of women is very low. The world women are under-represented in political positions and other high level decision making bodies (Ama and Ekundayo, 2014). In African countries women access to political participation is extremely low (ibid).

In Ethiopia, even though there are legal recognitions and institutions which promote women's empowerment, women participation in the political arena is still weak. The political sphere of the country is, by and large, reserved for men alone (Endalcachew, 2016). The culture, the patriarchal structure and the community have played role on the suppression of women's political activities. The culture never appreciates women political participation equally with man. The patriarchal structure consistently sees man as superior (Shimels, 2015). In community issues women's participation is insignificant. Further for women concerned, the decision makers in community issues are men. In governance and parliament position, the numbers of women actively engaged are few in number. In local level women have been neglected from political participation for long time and lose their rightful place (Richa, n.d).

In Ethiopia, since 2000, the government has been working to increase the political participation of women at federal, regional, city council (Meseret, 2010). At the federal and regional level, the government has been working to balance the political participation of men and women. Further, *Woredas*, cities and *Kebeles* councils attempt to compromise 50% women as members of the councils. However, women in the councils are challenged to do active political participation. Holding political position alone by itself does not necessarily lead to influence, acceptance and recognition in political arena (Meseret, 2010; Jones et al., 2015).

Anyhow, women's active political participation is critical for prioritizing women's need. Women should be active political participant because that will help them to solve many problems associated with poverty, inequality, representation and decision making (Burchard, 2014). Parallel to this, the process of improving women's political participation at local level is essential to achieve economic and political development of the society. The research by focusing on Woldia City Administration Council examined the issues that prejudice active women's political participation.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Description of the Study Area

The Woldia City is found in Amhara regional state and it is serving as a capital of North Wollo zone. Woldia City is located around 520km from Addis Ababa and 360km from the Amhara Regional State capital- Bahar Dar city and 260km from Mekele city. Woldia city is situated east of Guba Lafto wereda, north-west of Habiru wereda, and south of Kobo town. Astronomically, the city lies between 11°48'56" N and 11°50'39" N, and 39°34'30" E and 39°36'56" E (North Wollo Administration Office, 2011). The aggregate population in Woldia city is 83,806 of whom 42,976 are men and 40,830 are women.

2.2. Research Approach

The research approach of this study was qualitative. Qualitative research uses to interpret social reality from people's beliefs and practices (Berg, 2001). It is consistent with constructivist paradigm. It explores meaning, purpose and realities which are subjective, multiple and socially constructed by its participants. As far of this, particularly, it investigates local knowledge and understanding of a given program, people's experiences and meanings (Mohajan, 2018). Through qualitative research it is possible to discover the experiences, perspectives and thought of the participants (Bryman, 1998; Creswell, 2003).

This study explored the truth, beliefs, experiences and realities from the participants. It understood issues which are endangering active political participation of women in City Administration Council from the participants' perspectives. Thus, the research approach was principally a qualitative research. This approach involves the gathering of qualitative information which is non- numerical and detailed and in-depth understanding about the research topic.

2.3. Research Design

The research design employed the case study. Robson (2002) and Mohajan (2018) refer to a case as the situation, individual, group, issue or phenomenon. Through case study, a researcher can explore in-depth a program, an event, an activity and a process (Merriam, 1998; Creswell, 2009). Thus, this design is preferable to understand the cases that endanger women's political participation in city administration council.

2.4. Sampling Procedure

In this study non-probability sampling, namely, purposive sampling employed to select the participants of the study. The researcher selects non- probability purposive sampling design which is reliable and appropriate for this study. Since the research is qualitative and its goal is seeking to examine what is and more concerned with deeper understanding of the research problem rather than generalization, purposive sampling is used. Researchers select participants purposively when they believe that those participants are key informants and especially important to articulate a view (Nosrat, 2010). Accordingly, purposive sampling, which is considered as the most appropriate for this study, provides space for City Council Speaker; Previous Women Councilors of the city and Current Women Councilors of City.

Purposive sampling also applied to identify participants for FGD. The FGD had eight members. The FGD encompassed participants who were selected purposively from active members of Women Association at city administration. The researcher selected those participants since they were active members in Women Association, they draw from different backgrounds and they had first-hand information on the issues that were hazarding political participation of women in city council.

2.5.Sources of Data

Primary sources: Primary data were collected from interviews and FGD. This research used semi-structured interviews where the interviewer prepared to be flexible in terms of the order in which the topics considered and allowed an interviewee develops idea and speaks more widely on the issues raised by the researcher. In case of semi-structured interviews, the possibilities of updated and controlling interview tools based on the emerging data will enable the researcher to access the needed data and avoid bulky information (Denscombe, 2007).

Through FGD, it is possible to explore attitude, perception, feelings and ideas about a specific topic (*ibid*). The rationale of the researcher to use FGD was that participants were organized collectively and homogeneously from different backgrounds for the same purpose. Homogeneity of participants for the same purpose enabled the researcher to explore issues which directly or indirectly related with them.

Secondary sources: The study collected secondary sources of data from published and unpublished documents, journals, books, magazines and newspapers which have direct relations to the study.

2.6.Method of Data Analysis

Data collection and data analysis must be a coincident process in qualitative research and data analysis is taking place throughout the data collection process (Cresswell, 2003). Data collected from the interviews of participants were recorded and transcribed. Every interview was recorded before the end of conversation to ensure the recording was done. Dealing with the focus group, core concepts of the discussion recorded before the end of the meeting. The data which were collected from interview and FGD were compiled based on the objective of the study and analyzed through thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a type of qualitative analysis used to analyze classification and present themes (patterns) that relate to the data (Zagreb, 2012).

2.7.Ethical Issues

Ethical clearance considered in the process of the study. Informed consent gained from participants before conducting interviews. Key informants and Focus groups informed to discuss and utter the truth about what they know issues related with the women's political participation. The researcher secured identity and confidentiality of the participants. Researcher used code to report the finding from the study. Information of the participants and their identity related to the information they gave are kept. Data collected have been utilized exclusively for the purpose of this study.

2.8.Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the way of being sure the accuracy of finding from researchers and participants. To insure the trustworthiness of the research, the researcher employed triangulation method after which the findings were correlated. The interview guide, discussion guide, participants and the type recorder used during the protest. This process helped the researcher to identify the ambiguities, unrealistic and improper questions before the main interview. The researcher used straightforward language and description to convey the findings. The researcher also used peer examination. Teachers and friends served as a peer examiner. Above all, the researcher also employed multiple sources of data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Challenges of Women's Political Participation in City Administration Council

Some diverse issues prejudiced women's political participation in the city council. Issues which were taken as challenges of active political participation in City Council mentioned by the participants as the following:

3.1.1. Nature

Nature was one challenge on women's active political participation at the City Council. The participants explained that during maternity and menstruation time women never locate at the required time for political participation. Thus health conditions which naturally inherited blocked women to participate on periodical political issues. This finding agreed with United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (1994) which asserted that natural health problems protect women on periodical political participation.

3.1.2. Custom of society

Custom of society was the other challenge which endangered women's political participation at the city council. Since ancient time in Ethiopia the custom has never appreciated women to handle tasks out of home and equally participate with men in economic, political and social issues. This problem still affected on women's political participation at city administration council.

The experiences of the participants told us the custom of society had done the task classification. Rearing children and work at home were given to women. In this task classification, women lived and have lived, even some of them took it as normal. Further, in the custom, women took as a weak hot-headed mind and physically feeble creature. These had negative impact on the process of women's political participation since it developed psychology of "Me Can Not and This Alone for Me" in women's mind.

The finding agreed with Meskerem (2007) and Shmelis (2015) who reported there is a traditional belief that women are weak, made to take care of children, to give pleasure for men and do kitchen works than participating outside homes. This put direct and indirect impact on women's political participation. Thus, it is possible to induce that the custom, which until now see women as susceptible and domestic take care, endangers women's political participation.

3.1.3. Men councillors

According to the participants' experience, men councillors challenged women's political participation at the City Council. In the City Council, men councillors were barriers for women's political participation. In political decision, they did not consider voices of women. They took women as voiceless individuals who simply had seats in the council as makeweight. They perceive women as creature who cannot manage complex issues, i.e., politics. Even, if woman actively engaged in political issues, men councillors would not appreciate her and did not give recognition for her idea. Since for them, women are namby pamby in political decision. So much so, sexual harassment from men councillors was untold challenge which enervated women councillors' participation on political issues. The harassed women were feel discomfort to come in the council and discuss about the political issues with the harasser.

This finding agreed with Lawless and Fox (2008) who reported that women are underrepresented in political participations, institutions and offices because men officers and leaders adopted the masculine view which see women as incapable and weak to do something. In addition to this, this finding is in line with Rebecca (2008) who explained that sexual harassment as a challenge of women's political participation.

Accordingly, I can say that men councillors, who were not confidential on women's ability, seized women as toys, never gave attention for women's active involvement on political issues and political decision.

3.1.4. See-sawing political issues of the country

The over-changing political issues of the country were the other things which endanger women's political participation. Participants explained that before 2018, the political issue was about revolutionary and developmental democracy. Since 2018, the political issue had been about integration and unity. Women's agenda had been at loss at the mildest. They were unactive in their agenda. They were not interested to actively engage in in the city council political issues since their affairs were forgotten.

In addition to this, the political chaos and crisis in Ethiopia did not merely affect the federal government and regional governments but also the grass root politics. The crisis of politics in the country caused a direct effect on women's political participation. The more political crisis in the country would result in weak political participation and influence of women because supervision, protection, appreciation and support from the government had been minimized. I mean, no more guardian for women in the tremendous zone. Thus, see-sawing political issues of the country were the other challenges which endanger women's political participation in City Council.

3.1.5. Lack of social capital

Social capital refers to social treasures (getting kindness, help and so on from society, easily) and recognitions which are find from active engagement in social relations, networks and institutions. Social capital is matter for the political wellbeing of women (Mercy, 2017). Lacking social capital can minimize women's influence in politics. In Ethiopia it is uncommon to note women who are active participants and facilitators in society concern issues. Women have shallow social relations and networks (personal communication, Woldia, Woldia City Council, Woman Councillor, and 22 January 2020). This caused lack of social capital for women. In turn, this minimizing women's influence or acceptance on political issues and decisions.

Participants argued women frequently lacked social capital. Lack of social capital abated women's voice or influence in political participation and it eliminated women's confidence to give constructive idea in political and decision issues. Every so often, women thought of that as if they forwarded their idea, it might cause social punishment either morally or physically because previously they lack social capital or recognition. After all, this condition obligated women to acquiesce men's political decision whatever it is. In Ethiopia it is uncommon to note women who are active participants and facilitators in society concern issues. Lack of social capital was weakening women's vibrant political participation.

3.1.6. Constructed patriarchal weltanschauung

This constructed patriarchal weltanschauung at the end determines what women is and is not (Bari, 2005). According to this weltanschauung, men is more prima than women in any sphere of life. That mean men are leaders and the only decision givers in politicking, decision making, economy and so on. Related with this, when are pointedly come to the specific issue, patriarchal nature of men, deliberately, marginalises women from active political participation (Olayode, 2016).

Participants explained that in Ethiopia, structure of society, the linguistic discourse and the tradition were dominated by men order. The structure of society had patriarchal order. Language possessed masculine nature. Most Ethiopian cultures neglected the essence of the feminine. These pushed women to consider themselves as weak and to consider men as smart, intellectual, gifted, lucky, perfect and strong. According to the participant explanation, some city councillors accepted this constructed patriarchal system as natural and they never wanted to defend and reshape it. One participant had memorabilia to strength the impact of patriarchal system on women's political participation, as follow:

In city council, the political arena was organized according to masculine norms, values and life styles. This had seen in practice. Sometimes, the foolish idea of old aged men councillors got acceptance during our political participation because the culture told that man (masculine) is always right.

Moreover, the participants reflected that some decision makers and leaders developed masculine view. Women are challenged by those decision makers and leaders during their political participation. Men decision makers and leaders did not appreciate women's idea during political participation. They considered women's idea as trash and the ideas of men were always victories over women's idea.

This finding is supported by Meseret (2010) who states that the earthly described patriarchal weltanschauung in culture and society affect the political participation of women. In this manner, from the participants, I can conclude that constructed political weltanschauung was one critical barrier in the political participation of women.

3.1.7. Being the unjust beneficiary

Sometimes in the local governance, from the political leadership and participation, through equality and justice means women are unbeneficial. This problem has seen in government organs and opponent political parties. This makes women uninterested to politics (Zende, 2011).

The participants informed me that getting certificate awards, financial supports and chance of scholarships were undetermined by woman's contribution in political participation rather it was determined by few individuals who came to power through personal relationships and informal networks. This caused women to be unhappy in the active involvement of political participation and because of this they terminated their political participation. Therefore, being an unjust beneficiary hindered women journey of politics.

3.1.8. Lack of confidence among women

Lack confidence influences women participation in political domains. Lack of confidence remains the key barriers for advancing women's political participation (Mahat, 2003). Participants argued that some conditions hindered women's active political participation. This problem started from women themselves. Some women were not confidential in active engagement of political participation because they developed psychology of impossible. They were afraid of criticism and insult of men to control arena of politics. Significantly, they think of that society had not trust on them.

From the above stated findings one infer that women are not confidential to come on the political arena because they believe that when they come to the political space they face criticism and the society degrades them and does not believe what they state.

4. Conclusion

Women, significantly, contribute to the development of social and economic value in the World. Despite this, women all over the world have encountered numerous constraints while venturing into political participation. The study geared towards investigating challenges which are endangering political participation of women in City Administration Council: The Case of Woldia City Administration, North Wollo Zone, Ethiopia. Two instruments namely, interview and FGD were used for the collection of data. Participants were selected through purposive sampling system. The case study research design was adopted for the study and data were analyzed thematically. The collected data showed some issues endangered women's political participation.

The research findings stated that nature, custom of society, men councilors, see-sawing political issues of the country, lack of social capital, constructed patriarchal weltanschauung, being unjust beneficiary and lack of confidence among women are issues which endanger women's political participation at city administration council.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following specific recommendations are provided to the concerned bodies to deal with. The local government shall give attention for the more existence of women in the city council because this produces apt advantage for women's influence on political issues.

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