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## **Constraints Hindering Somali Women's Advancement to Higher Political and Leadership Positions**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The purposes of this study were to identify constraints and challenges facing Somali women's advancement to higher political and leadership positions. A cross sectional survey was used where qualitative data were collected utilizing a self-administered questionnaire. A convenience sample of 221 Somali women was selected from female member of federal parliament, women working in political and leadership positions in government and educational and academic institutions.*

**Keywords:** Cultural Barriers, Economic Barriers, Legal and Regulation

### **INTRODUCTION**

Women constitute more than half of the world population. Their role to the social and economic development is greater than that of men. However, the involvement and representation of women in formal political offices, especially top political offices that are responsible in decision making regarding the use of those resources is very low (Bari, 2005).

Globally, the political participation of women in political leadership is increasingly low. As of 2011, the global average representation of women legislatures was 19.5 percent. This is after a modest increase in women representation from 19% to 19.8% between 2010 and 2011 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2012). The Inter-Parliamentary Union (2012) observes that this minimal progress was due to the attempts made, world over, to gender parity in parliamentary representation. There is increased sensitization on the need for equal representation of both genders in political offices and a number of industrialized democracies have seen an increase in women representation. However, despite these substantial gains by women in wielding political power (Paxton et al. 2007); women participation in formal politics is still low in the developed democracies (Norris, 2002)

The international community through the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform of Action has shown commitment to gender equality in formal political representation, which has led to the increase in women representation in top political positions, albeit low. There is effort to increase women representation to at least 33 percent of elective positions (Bari, 2005). However, this has yielded little in increasing the rise of women into top political offices. The constitution of Somalia requires or allows the representation of women by 30% of the parliamentary seats and other political positions. (Somali constitution draft 2010) This action in Somali constitution implies that it is difficult for women to get to power in contests between women and men.

## **FACTORS HINDERING WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER POLITICAL POSITIONS**

A number of factors hinder the participation of women in politics. This paper will look at three major constraints that women face in their quest to political leadership. The factors are political constraints,

### **Political Constraints**

Politics affects the survival and success of women in politics. The nature of politics determines whether women are included or excluded in politics. Traditionally, politics is considered a male affair and women tend to be excluded from the political sphere. Political activity is restricted to the public arena and highly discouraged against the private sphere of family life. Politics, culture of formal political structures, and political parties dominated by male hinders the participation of women in politics (Bari, 2005). Often, such male dominated parties have a masculine approach to issues of national importance while ignoring the perspective of women in the parties.

Due to the gender biases of the male leadership in political, women are rarely elected to positions of power within the party structures. This minimizes the chances of women getting to power in top political positions. It is also observed (Bari, 2005) that the degree of democratization and democratic framework affect the participation and success of women in politics. Secular democracies offer more space for women to succeed in politics than countries whereby religion shapes the politics and democracy (Paxton et al., 2007; and Reynolds, 1999).

Politics is generally considered dirty and masculine. Women who aspire for political office are strongly advised against this by family and friend as the people fear that the manipulation, propaganda and other activities involving politics may adversely affect their reputation. The political responsibility of taking care of the society and solving the problems of the community are generally masculine. People have low expectations that women will offer solution to the society through the use of a political office. They are not adequately tough to speak before men and force a response. This is because management has generally been considered as a male occupation (White and Cox, 1991). McGregor (1967) identifies the qualities of a successful manager to be competitive, aggressive, firm and just, which characteristics the society relates to the male gender. This makes it difficult for women leaders to be elected to top and important political positions.

### **Cultural Constraints**

Fu et al., (2004) notes the advancement of women into leadership positions is affected by culture. Paxton et al., (2007) contend that a country's culture affects the demand for women political leaders and the supply of willing female candidates hence affecting the level of women political participation. Blomgren (2010) observes that the negative opinions of people about women's participation in politics, hampers their political participation. A woman's place is being at home and should avoid political activity, thus adversely affecting the success of women in politics (Lovenduski, 2000).

Universally, men are considered superior to women. However, the nature and extent of subordination of women varies across cultures. The gender roles ideology places women and men in a hierarch whereby female sex is considered of less value to the male sex due to the socially ascribed roles of the genders (Bari 2005). For many communities, it is normal and expected for men to desire power and to aspire for top political positions due to the cultural values but strange to find women looking for positions of power. Women are expected to be submissive before men, thus any desire to get more powerful than men is unwelcome to the

world, (Iloh and Ikena 2009). This is why there are cases of strong opposition to women getting into elective positions. Women have been disowned by their families and others cursed by the community due to their persistent political aspirations

Due to the cultural preferences, relatively low resources are allocated by the community to the human development of women. This leads to the gender disparities in politics, employment, education, health and ownership of productive resources in the world. One's gender determines the ease with which they can access resources and development, It is observed that most cultures view women as dependent, adversely affecting their political participation. These challenges bedevil the female gender since infancy till adult life. In case there are inadequate resources to educate children, most families prefer to use more resources in educating male children and less on females (Agbalajobi 2009).

Education is important in one's development, as it empowers and gives authority to people and enables them to be looked up to by the community. This enables them to succeed in politics. With little or poor education, most women find it difficult to survive in politics that are denominated by men. Duke (2010) suggests that in most countries, men remain at the helm and make decisions on almost all issues in the society. Women are given rare opportunities to contribute in the decision making and most of their input is disregarded.

Women have limited time to participate in politics due to the roles of the female gender in production and reproduction they are expected to fulfill their primary roles as mothers and wives and the resultant domestic duties of caring for the home before doing anything else. These leaves them limited time to politic and rise in the political arena and take top political positions. Shvedova (2007) suggests that women carry a disproportionate share of domestic work making it difficult to participate in politics. Huang et al., (2004) concurs that women the household demands and family responsibility is immense on women which interfere with their political ambition. According to Jennings & McDougald (2000), unlike women, men take sacrifices at home to maintain their work responsibilities persistently face more household demands and family responsibility.

Political activities at the top level require a flexible time schedule, some political meetings and functions run till late in the night making it unfavorable for women to survive in politics. Additionally, some cultures set constraints on the mobility of women, making it difficult to succeed in politics as political officers require exposure and interaction with constituents and public meeting addresses. Failure to move and interact with the voters disadvantages women to their male opponents for the same positions.

### **Economic Constraints**

Financial resources are becoming important in politics due to the commercialization of politics. Politicians need more and more money to participate and succeed in politics. This limits the scope of the political work of the less wealthy members of the community and disadvantages them. For one to succeed in politics, one should use economic resources to get the support of the people: voters and other politicians. In developing countries, politicians spend huge amounts of cash to campaign for the elective posts. A lot of money is required to gather electorates and communicate to them. Some politicians offer cash to attendants of their political campaigns to influence their voting come the Election Day. Therefore, wealth persons take advantage and use their resources to get support from the voters and other politicians. Most women lack access to and ownership of productive resource that can enable them survive in a political arena. Kamau (2010) interjects that most aspiring women politicians face an uphill task of financing the campaign process. It is therefore difficult for women to rise and succeed in the political arena.

Inglehart and Norris (2003) comment that it is difficult for women to be elected into office when they are economically disadvantaged. Additionally, Matland and Ballington (2005) note that women fail to have access to essential development resources and consequently tend to have less power and few resources than men in general. Shvedova (2007) states that the social and economic status of women directly influences their participation in politics and elected positions and since most women are socially and economically disadvantaged; their political success is at stake. This literature cements the observation that economic resources hinder the ascension of women to higher political positions.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study was used the descriptive design to find out the role of constraints of Somali women on advancement to higher political leadership. This research strategy will help to obtain pertinent and precise information concerning the status of the phenomena and draw valid conclusions from the facts discovered from the population of the study about the implementation of performance management program and public service

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**Demographic Profile of Respondents**

The respondents of this research include 147 of them are male respondents and 74 are female respondents in terms of the marital status of the respondents, The 127 respondents are single and 93 respondents are married, according to this result 57.2% are single and 41.9 % are marriage, and shows the results of student’s age, this result indicate that the 170 respondents, 40 respondents are 20 years, 107 respondents are between 21-25years,50 respondents are between 26-30years,10 respondents are between 31-35years,14 respondents are 36 years. According to this number 48.2% respondents are between 21-25years, 22.5% respondents are between 26-30years, 4.5% respondents are between 30-35years, 6.3% respondents are 36 years in terms of the experience of the respondents, the 138 respondents are less than 1 year, the 79 respondents are more than 2 years, According to this table 62.2% are less than 1 year, 35.6 % are more than 2 years.

**Table 1 (Part-I). Demographic characteristics of the respondents**

	<i>Demographic Profile</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent %</i>
Gender	Male	147	66.2
	Female	74	33.3
	Total	221	100
Age	20	40	18
	20-25	107	48.2
	26-30	50	22.5
	31-35	10	4.5
	36+	14	6.3
	Total	221	100

**Table 1 (Part-II). Demographic characteristics of the respondents**

<i>Demographic Profile</i>		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent %</i>
Marital Status	Married	93	41.9
	Single	127	57.2
	Other	1	1
	Total	121	100
Experience	Less than 1 years	138	62.2
	More than 2 years	79	35.6
	Total	221	100

Primary Data, 2013

## **DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

In this section the researcher’s present data collected from the women's political participation and decision making in Mogadishu by using a questionnaire and then they analyze the data.

### ***Descriptive Analysis on Legal and Regulation Constraints Faced By Somali Women***

The first factors in this study was constitutional and legal regulations categorized into five items, Each of these five items was measured using quantitative questions in the questionnaire and each of the questionnaire item was Likert scaled using five points "one to five"; where 1 = Agree; 2 = strong agree ; 3= neutral; 4 = Disagree; 5= strongly Disagree.

Favoritism and bias against women :According to the below table presented was scored average mean 2.93 overall and standard deviation of 1.323 these result indicates that Favoritism and bias against women exist when selecting for higher positions as the main political difficulties to participate higher positions and decision making.

Below table 2 shows that Legal and constitution of Somalia encourages discrimination against the female and got with average mean 2.33 and standard deviation was 1.260 this indicates that there are legal and constitution constraints that facing women to participate political position and decision making over the country, respondents strongly agree for this point.

Respondents were also asked if the current government gives sufficient support for women to participate the decision making, respondents disagreed this point because they feel that the support is not enough. (Mean 2.61, standard deviation 1.259).

Respondents were also asked if Political quotas of 30% for parliamentary are challenging on Somali women political participation .they strongly agreed that quotas of women to enter into federal parliament is kind of discrimination.

And finally asked the respondents how they see the quotas that constitution gives to women 25% opportunity for employment that constraining women participation even in public jobs, the respondents agreed strongly with mean 2.99, standard deviation 2.312.

**Table 2. Legal and regulation constraints**

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Favoritism and bias against women exist when selecting for higher positions as the main political difficulties	2.93	1.323	Agree
Legal and constitution of Somalia encourages discrimination against the female.	2.33	1.260	Strongly agree
Government did support women but this support was still not sufficient it comes for pathetic reasons	2.61	1.259	Dis-agree
Political quotas of 30% are challenging on Somali women political participating.	2.87	1.356	Strongly Agree
The operational constitution gives women 25% opportunity for employment	2.99	2.312	Strongly agree
Overall Mean and Std. Deviation	2.746	1.502	Agree

Primary Source, 2013

***Socio-Economic and Cultural Factors That Constraints Political Participation of Somali Women***

In this section, the researchers will present descriptive result of Socio-Economic and cultural factors that constraints political participation of Somali women. In the table 3, the mean 2.87 shows that Women politicians are suffering from inadequate financial resources to win political campaign. The mean value of 2.62 specifies that Women lack access to and ownership of productive resource, limiting the scope of their political work. The scored mean of 2.72 shows that Women's family obligations also bar them participating political life.

**Table 3. Social economic and cultural factor**

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Women politicians are suffering from inadequate financial resources to win political campaign	2.87	1.456	Strongly Agree
Women lack access to and ownership of productive resource, limiting the scope of their political work.	2.62	1.372	Agree
Women's family obligations also bar them participating political life	2.72	1.332	strongly agree
it is generally believed that Somali women give more emphasis to their motherly role and family / home responsibilities rather than political career . If they have to plan & settle for a career, they would at best prefer a safe risk free job than setting up political campaign	2.94	1.340	Strongly Agree
Politics is increasingly becoming commercialized. More and more money is needed to participate in politics	2.56	1.402	Agree
Overall Mean and Std. Deviation	2.742	1.3804	Agree

Primary source, 2013

Also in the above table 3, the mean 2.94 shows that it is generally believed that Somali women give more emphasis to their motherly role and family / home responsibilities rather than political career . If they have to plan & settle for a career, they would at best prefer a safe risk free job than setting up political campaign. The mean value of 2.56 indicates that Political campaigns are increasingly becoming commercialized. More and more money is needed to participate in politics.

***Discrimination against Women to Participate Public Positions***

In this section, the researcher will present descriptive result of discrimination against Somali women to participate the decision making in country. Table 4 illustrates that the overall mean of discriminations are 2.746 which means strong agree. It demonstrates discrimination of women participation by decision making in Somali government in Mogadishu, Somalia. The mean value of 2.93 states that Somali Women face discrimination for enrolling education, these will constraint participation in politics in future. The mean value of 2.33 shows that male domination in the entire public & political area also works as a hurdle for women politicians and public servants.

The mean value of 2.87 demonstrates that the respondents strongly agree that existing discrimination in workplace and family decision making against women and this defiantly will bar from participation in public decision. The mean value of 2.61 reveal that Low-level risk taking attitude is another factor affecting women’s to win into politics because in Somali politics currently needs more risk taking for survival, in fact there are allot of assassination happens to the politicians and government officials. Also respondents agreed that Somali women face lack of Proper campaign Management skills and this will constraint to succeed the political position.

Primary Data, 2013

**Major Findings**

The first objective was to determine legal and regulations constraints on the Somalia woman in the political participation and decision making. We found that the respondent’s perception toward legal and regulations constraints in Somalia rated agreed with the items and overall mean index was (2.746, St. Deviation 1.502) which means agreed.

**Table 4. Discrimination against Women**

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Somali Women face discrimination for enrolling education, this will constraint participation in politics in future.	2.93	1.323	Disagree
The overall male domination in the entire public & political area also works as a hurdle for women politicians and public servants.	2.33	1.260	Agree
Low-level risk taking attitude is another factor affecting women’s decision to get into politics	2.61	1.259	strongly agree
Discrimination in workplace and family decision making against women.	2.87	1.356	Strongly Agree
Many of Somali women face lack of Proper campaign Management skills.	2.99	2.312	Agree
Overall Mean and Std. Deviation	2.746	1.702	Strongly Agree



The second objective to investigate Socio-Economic factors that constraints political participation of Somali women. We also realized that the respondent's perception towards Socio-Economic factors constraints is highly rated as the mean index was (2.742, St. Deviation 1.3804). This means agreed.

The third objective to examine discriminations that constraints on Somali women political participating and decision making we found that the respondent's perception towards discrimination constraints is highly rated as the mean index was (2.746, St. Deviation 1.702). This means strong agreed.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

The aim of this research was to strengthen the relationship and develop a dialogue with members of the federal parliament, government and society regarding empowerment issues regarding policies and legislation within the priorities of the National Strategy for Somali women to enhance women status in Somalia, the study established number of actors that constraints women participation in decision making in public service and politics.

The study tried to investigate three factors which were our research objectives that constraints women participation in politics and leadership positions, first objectives was to determine the legal and regulations constraints on the Somalia woman in the political participation and decision making. The respondents agreed (mean 2.746, stand. Deviation 1.502 ) that there is legal and regulations in Somalia are constraining women participation in public service and take political position, the professional constitution declare 25% of public offices must be in women leaders this is very improvement according to past practices but still the respondents and public sees discrimination against women.

The second objective was Socio-Economic and cultural factors that constraints political participation of Somali women, we found that Somali women are suffering cultural and economic constraints, in Somalia women are less income then men's generally , majority of women are very poor and they work least jobs in country beside that they face cultural constraints, women in Somalia sees that she is less capacity , there is famous quotation which concludes our discussion cultural constraints « *Talonaagedreerkumatanaado*» (No family will prosper if it relies on women's decisions).

Women traditionally have had relative autonomy over household decisions about child rearing and other «womanly» duties. Occasionally women would make their views known to the men in their lives on important issues outside of the domestic sphere. Men, on the other hand, were expected to act as the public economic and political face of the household, serving as breadwinner and representative to clan decision-making structures.

Cultural factors usually intervene in elections of women candidates to parliaments. Furthermore, women's access to positions of decision-making and leadership, in the executive branches or others outside the legislature structure, is affected by the political will and its confidence in women's efficiency. Many Somali women have succeeded in proving their capabilities in these positions such as the current deputy prime minister and public service minister; however, some women have reached top leadership positions because of their kinship ties and connections with the regime not their political power.

The third objective was Discrimination against women to participate public positions, discrimination on enrolling education because Education fosters women's economic, social and political empowerment., discrimination on workplace, discrimination on family decision making all these will contribute less participation on Somali women to enter into politics, the respondent overall respondents strong agreed the discriminations items we asked them, the score of mean was 2.746 which indicates that Somali women face different discriminations

attitudes from the society and that were constrained the participation of politics and win. Many literature in global are same to our finding such as Arab Women and Political Development (Rowaida et al, 2010) they found different challenges that impede Arab women participation in politics and decision making. Challenges include: cultural factors, the stereotyped image of women, women's low self-confidence, lack of coordination among women's organizations, effectiveness/efficiency of women empowerment programs, shortcomings in the institutional and legal frameworks, practices of political parties and election process, skepticism about the Agenda for Women empowerment, the process of development of Women empowerment strategies.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study was investigated the factors that constraints women to participate political position and leadership in country, from early 1960s and now Somali women participation in Public position is one of the least in the world, from the early governmental democracy from 1960-1969 the participation of top position in country was zero, the current government was the first time that women give high position such minster of foreign affairs and deputy prime minister, these come after a long fight from Somali women supporting international support. But the Parliament is a male-dominated body and this situation disadvantages the women's agenda. To address this, quota seats that road map mentioned which was 30% must be re-give for women representatives in the leadership structure of the legislature.

The first objective was to determine legal and regulations constraints on the Somalia woman in the political participation and decision making. We found that the respondent's perception toward legal and regulations constraints in Somalia rated agreed with the items and overall mean index was (2.746, St. Deviation 1.502) which means agreed.

The second objective to investigate Socio-Economic factors that constraints political participation of Somali women. We also realized that the respondent's perception towards Socio-Economic factors constraints is highly rated as the mean index was (2.742, St. Deviation 1.3804). This means agreed.

The third objective to examine discriminations that constraints on Somali women political participating and decision making we found that the respondent's perception towards discrimination constraints is highly rated as the mean index was (2.746, St. Deviation 1.702). This means strong agreed.

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