Impact of religious and intra-cultural communication dynamics on women's participation in competitive politics: A study of Wajir County, Kenya

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Abstract

Although the Kenyan Constitution 2010 created opportunities for more women to participate in competitive politics, such participation in Wajir County continues to be confined to political positions reserved for women, particularly women representatives' seats. In fact, since Kenya's independence in 1963, Wajir County has had only two competitively elected female legislators. Low women participation in politics in Wajir could be an indication that there are communication, cultural and religious dynamics that make it difficult for women from Wajir to participate in politics. The purpose of this study was to understand the role intra-cultural and religious beliefs communicated affected the performance of women politicians in Wajir County, Kenya. This study interrogated the experiences of women participating in elective politics in Wajir with a view of understanding the intracultural communication dynamics that undermined women participation in competitive politics. The study adopted a qualitative research approach in which 27 participants were selected through a purposive sampling approach from among women politicians and political aspirants, campaign team members, religious leaders and members of the councils of elders. Data was generated through in-depth interviews and analysed thematically. The study established a prevalent religious and cultural belief that women cannot represent the people of Wajir country in parliament. Additionally, the study found many cultural proverbs and folklores that are insensitive

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towards women, and which were used by male politicians to prove that men are better than women in leadership. The study concluded that there is need for a change of cultural and religious beliefs in order to pave way for enhanced women political representation in Wajir. Further, religious and cultural leaders need to spearhead civic education that calls for the elimination of the patriarchal culture in Wajir County to address hindrances to women empowerment because of religion and culture.

Introduction

Culture, religion and gender considerations affect women in competitive politics (Kenworthy & Malami, 1999). Further, women face many obstacles in communicating their agenda in competitive politics. Globally, marginalized communities find themselves isolated and excluded from many of the national activities taking place.

This isolation and exclusion leads to political marginalization including exclusion from political decision-making processes. Jenssen and Aalberg (2007) note that "any politician trying to cross the line within the realm of male and female politicians will stand out as misplaced and risk becoming a laughing stock among both women and men." Consequently, very few women are involved in political leadership for fear of cultural backlash. Therefore, almost all political positions are taken by their male counterparts (Kaimenyi et al. 2013). Yet, gender equality is a basic human right and closing the gender gap is key to achieving many development goals. It is a common view that empowering women is key to economic, political and social development (Naomi & Andrew, 2008).

In Wajir County in Kenya, political discourses that involve cultural and religious perceptions, and general political communication have created negative perceptions about women, promoting discrimination of women in politics. Gender stereotyping of women in politics is particularly strong in societies with a traditional division of labour, such as is the case in Wajir County. These stereotypes are shared by men and women and have a profound influence on behaviour.

Additionally, religious beliefs seem to contain language that may discriminate against women, portraying them as incapable of leading men. The Islamic religion in particular, of which a large percentage of the population in Wajir subscribes to, marginalises women who are not to address public gatherings. This goes against Kenya's legislative system is encouraging political empowerment of women by providing slots for women in the government through the one third gender rule enshrined in the Kenya Constitution of 2010 (EUEOMK, 2013).

Considering that Wajir County is largely homogeneous both in terms of religion and ethnicity, any form of communication, and particularly political communication, is received and interpreted within a largely homogeneous cultural environment. To be elected, therefore, women politicians must not only communicate effectively, also take into consideration a cultural context that is characterized by patriarchal norms and values in a County that espouses communication patterns that have male-centric overtones, rules and regulations. In Wajir County, most political discourses use cultural proverbs, poems and folklores. The use of folklore, poems and proverbs used to pass cultural messages from one generation to the next are mainly the preserve of male elders who are clan spokesmen. Such cultural discourses, when used in political communication or campaigns, have the ability to discourage the electorate, from voting for women (Kaimenyi et al. 2013).

Religion and Communication

Religiosity is usually tied to doctrinal or dogmatic beliefs. Religion, as Hill et al. (2000) describe it, is the same search for truth but with an added dimension of rituals or beliefs that are used as means and categorized by specific religious groups. A report on "*Religion, Politics and Gender Equality*" published by UNRISD concluded that religion provides a strong sense of identity which creates a sense of community; hence,   marginalization of religious minorities (UNRISD, 2011).

In particular, religion contains myths that have augmented marginalization of women. For example, in explaining the human origin and the origin of evil in the mainstream religions, the female is linked with the origin of evil. Women are seen as evil and can easily draw men into sin but according to the Islamic Holy Scriptures, In Adam's story, Divine Orders were made to him and his wife, both and equally: "O Adam! Dwell you and your wife in the Paradise and eat both of you freely with pleasure and delight of things therein as wherever you will, but come not near this tree or you both will be of the Dhalimun (wrongdoers). (Qur'an Al Baqarah 2:35) What is new, however, about this story as given by the Qur'an is that the temptation is blamed not on Eve but on Satan: "Then the Satan made them slip therefrom (the Paradise), and got them out from that in which they were. (Qur'an Al Baqarah 2:36] - the reverse of The Old Testament versions. Thus Eve was neither the sole eater from the tree, nor the one who initiated the act. Rather, the mistake was theirs both, and both of them repented and asked for forgiveness: "They said, "Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If You forgive us not, and bestow not upon us Your Mercy, we shall be losers". (Qur'an Al A'raf 7:23).

Further still, some verses ascribe the trespass to Adam: "And indeed We made a covenant with Adam before, but he forgot, and We found on his part no firm will-power." (Qur'an Ta-ha 20:115) And "Then Satan whispered to him saying, "O Adam! Shall I lead you to the Tree of Eternity and to a kingdom that will never waste away?" (Qur'an Ta-ha 20:120) and till "Thus did Adam disobey his Lord, so he went astray." (Qur'an Ta-ha 20:121)
This implies that Adam was the one who trespassed first and was followed by his woman. Whatever the case may be, even accepting that Eve did commit a trespass, she, alone, would be responsible without any transmission of accountability to her daughters.

On the question of equality of punishment and reward and eligibility for Paradise, The Almighty says: "That was a nation who has passed away. They shall receive the reward of what they earned and you of what you earn. And you will not be asked of what they used to do. (Qur'an Al Imran 2:134 and 2:141) Concerning the equality of men and women in receiving rewards and the entry of paradise, God says: " So their Lord accepted of them (their supplication and answered them), "Never will I allow to be lost the work of any of you, be he male or female." (Qur'an Al Imran 3:195] and Whoever works righteousness, whether male or female, while he (or she) is a true believer (of Islamic monotheism) verily, to him We will give a good life (in this world with respect, contentment and lawful provision), and We shall pay them certainly a reward in proportion to the best of what they used to do (i.e. Paradise in the Hereafter). Qur'an An Nahl 16:97)

The interpretation of Islamic Holy Scriptures by religious leaders has devalued the position of women in society. Narratives attributed to the holy books (the Bible and the Quran) have displayed women as evil and lesser beings than man. Such religious myths that rationalized and legitimized the subordination of women were augmented by colonial and missionary policies that reinforced gender biases. Some verses in the Qur'an that are misinterpreted include, "And stay in your houses. Bedizen not yourselves with the bedizenment of the Time of ignorance (Qur'an Al-Ahzab 33) which some scholars believe means that women need to stay at home and not participate in political activities. This is because to participate in political activities, one must leave the house. Allah assigns guardianship to the man by virtue of the Qur'anic verse: "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has made the one of them to excel the other and because they spend (to support them) from their

means" (Qur'an, An Nisaa 4:34). International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Vol. 2 No. 17; September 2012 261 - Fazilta verse (wisdom verse) "And (Women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them in kindness, and men are a degree above them. Allah is Mighty, Wise." (Qu'ran, Al-Baqara 2:228) It is therefore understood to mean that the men are above in governance issues and judgment and that they are the only sex that should have leadership roles with existential superiority and perfection.

However, the mis-representation of women based on religion is actually a creation of religious interpretation of scripture. About 1400 years after Christ, the Islamic Law was the first to equate men and women. Islam announced women's freedom and independence at the time when most women on earth were still marginalised. Some western women did not have these advantages until the beginning of the twentieth century (Qassim Amin, 1899).

Islam has certainly equated men and women in terms of rights and duties. The distinction (if at all) between a man and a woman is not due to any preference by Allah, The Almighty, of the man or the woman on any account of being nobler or closer to the Lord. As a rule, it is piety and only piety that is the measure of ascendancy, nobility and closeness to Allah: "Verily, the most honorable of you in the Sight of Allah is that (believer) who has At-Taqwa (pious and righteous persons who fear Allah much), abstain from all kinds of sins and evil deeds which He has forbidden, and love Allah much (perform all kinds of good deeds which He has ordained)". (Qur'an, Al Hujurat 49:13) The distinctions, however, are merely conditioned by the different tasks assigned to each of the two sexes by virtue of their natural disposition. The fundamental rule of equality is obvious in the verse, '*So their Lord accepted their prayer: That I will not waste the work of a worker among you, whether male or female, the one of you being from the other* (Qur'an, Al-Imran 3:195), and the verse, '*Whoever does good whether male or female and he is a believer, We will most certainly make him live a happy life, and We will most certainly give them their reward for the best of what they did* (Qur'an, Al Nahl 16:97).'

Islam gives women all human rights and equates them to men in all civil rights, but the majority of Islamic religious leaders still teach that women must remain under the control of their fathers or husbands. Islam supports femininity in view of its relative weakness, placing it in the hands of a supporting man, securing the costs of living and the provision for her needs. Whether under the guardian care of her father, her husband, her son or her brother, she will be provided for by them as an obligation under the shariah (Islamic jurisprudence.) No basic need should compel her then to wade in the unexplored stretches of life with its conflicts, within the hustle of competitive men to win her bread.

Despite these Islamic scriptures, religious traditions have degraded the intellectual and social status of Muslim women. Quotes used to perpetuate such stereotypes are misquotes from the Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) who says, "Three (kinds of people) do not enter Paradise and do not enjoy Allah's gaze upon them on Judgement Day: a son who is disobedient to his parents, a mannish woman and an adulterer. [Transmitted by Ahmad lbn Umar and approved by Sheikh Shaker as Sahih (1680); and Al-Nisa'i 5/80; and Al-Hakim 1/72 and others.] Further, Islamic teachings have been made to support men superiority in leadership matters. In essence, among the Muslim Community, it is considered undesirable for women to speak in public. Additionally, Islamic religious practices that bar women from praying in mosques requiring them to pray at home deny women the chance to communicate freely, given that mosques are not only places of worship but also places of discourse.

Religion affects communication. Indeed, religion is a symbol that people use to understand the world around them (Bellah, 2000). Therefore, a religious symbol can be a powerful force in communication. Religious symbols can manifest in many forms. Sometimes a sacred text or story is used as a guiding symbol for understanding difficult

concepts. Other times, the religious belief system as a whole is a symbolic model through which people lead their lives.

To express the effect of religion on communication, the Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication explains how symbols are perceived in the media. In the Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication Bandura (2001) asserts that people often use symbols to process and understand experiences that require judgment and action. These symbols often come in the form of media messages from a variety of sources. Media then has the ability to stand in for traditional communication messages normally reserved for social actors such as family, friends, and other human beings.

Cultural Beliefs and Politics
Cultural practices have for a long time discriminated women in many Kenyan communities The Somali community in Wajir has its culture tied very closely to the Islamic faith they profess; the two are intertwined. Based on religious beliefs, women are not allowed to communicate in public in the presence of men. Information from women is not given any priority by men and even to extension other women; hence they should not own any representative opinion. Therefore, cultural beliefs hinder women from communicating their political agenda. They can therefore not be political leaders. Moreover, women are denied religious knowledge that is available to men, and they are still not ordained or given positions of leadership in Islam and as also in most religions, including among the majority of Christian churches.

Cultural practices portray women as lesser beings whose place is in bearing children and taking care of the man. This is normally communicated by use of language aimed at diminishing the value of women in the society including political leadership. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2003) argue that language and culture are intertwined, so that languages can be conceptualized as 'culture soaked', incorporating different concepts and usage, even though culture and language are not reducible to each other. Cultural practices also confine women to household duties and do not allow them to join or contribute in decision making. Consequently, involvement of women in politics is limited as they cannot, in any case, attend public meetings and any kind of public gatherings. As a result, they have limited right to voice their concern or express their views, opinions, wishes and desires.

Egalitarianism and Women Participation in Politics
The concept of egalitarianism was developed by a movement started in the 1970s. It emphasised the need for full equality between men and women. Gordon (2008), one of the proponents of egalitarianism, postulates that equality is central to justice and that individuals should be equal to achieve justice. Brighouse (2008, p. 360) further argues that being "unaffected by gender" means there are no specific activities thought of as men's work or women's work; nor would any activities be seen as more appropriate for men or for women. This study held the view that strong gender egalitarianism would result in all people, male and female, participating in politics or positions of leadership, even if currently this is not the case. While the egalitarian debate rages on, women still find that the political playing ground is not even. The cartoon below best captures this inequality scenario:
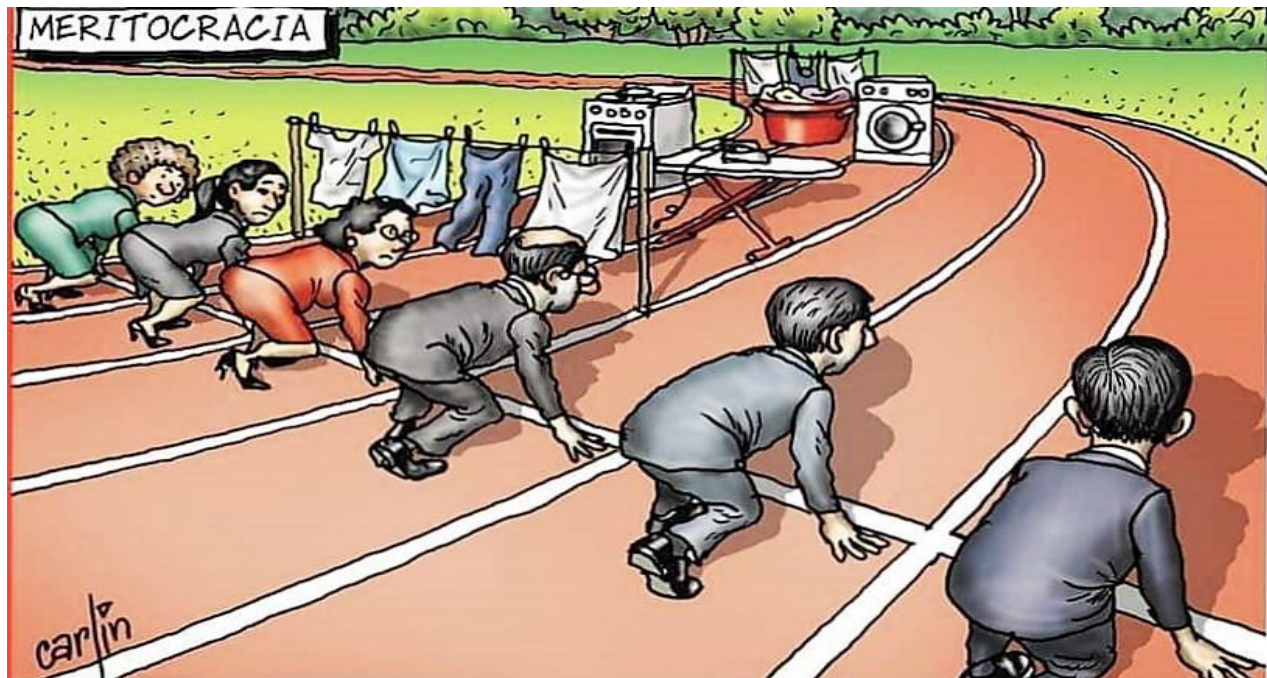
Muted Group Theory and Women Participation in Politics

One of the theories that has attempted to address the disenfranchisement of women due to language is the muted group theory. This feminist rhetorical theory posits that "the language of a particular culture does not serve all its speakers equally, for not all speakers contribute in an equal fashion to its formulation" (Kramarae, 1981, p.1). The muted group theory specifically examines the Western culture and the English language as it is used in England and the United States and is outlined in the work of theorist Cheris Kramarae. Historically, Kramarae argues, men have been the "dominant group" in Western civilization and therefore, are responsible for the creation of the English language. She states that this has had a "muting" effect on women because the "words and norms for their use have been formulated by the dominant group, men." Therefore, women "cannot as easily or as directly articulate their experiences" due to the fact that the words have been created by a population who has never actually been female (1981, p.1). In muted group theory, the term "muted" does not always mean "silent"; it might result in silence, but in the larger sense, it simply refers to whether women are able to say all they would wish to say, where and when they wish to say it (Wall, 1999). Kramarae (1989) considered muted group theory as a framework for looking at the ways a language, and the accepted methods of using language, present images of what women are 'supposed' to be, and of what is 'natural' and 'unnatural'.

The muted group theory has been used as a framework for examining language and communication for more than 30 years. There are three basic assumptions that are the foundation for the theory: a) women and men perceive the world differently; b) men are politically dominant and their ideas are considered "normal"; and, c) women need to conform to the male "norm" if they are to be heard (Foss, 2004, p.21). Thus this study focussed on how communication and language used in the male-dominated Islamic Wajir County, supported or hindered women involvement in politics. Cultural practices and religious teachings encourage women not to speak publicly in the presence of men. This in turn has the direct effect of creating a populace of muted women, according to Kramarae's (1981) where she argues that since women are unable to express their views in a dominant masculine discourse. In addition, women are neither understood nor heeded, becoming inarticulate, 'muted', or silent. Even

if they talk a lot, they may not freely express their own social reality or influence decisions (Wall, 1999). Further, the voices of women politicians are muted due to, among other factors, a language barrier. Language is the means of classifying and ordering the world and manipulating reality (Spender 1980). It is in the structure and use of language that people bring the world into reality.

Materials and Methods

Research Paradigm and Approach

The study employed interpretive-constructivist qualitative research approach based on the view that there exists multiple viewpoints on any subject under inquiry. Jwan and Ong'ondo (2011, p.3) define qualitative research as an "approach to inquiry that emphasizes a naturalistic search for relativity in meaning, a multiplicity of interpretations, particularity, detail and flexibility in studying a phenomenon or the aspect(s) of it that a researcher chooses to focus in at a given time." There are several common characteristics of qualitative research, which include: the data is collected in the field at the natural setting; the researcher is a key instrument, the use of multiple forms of data sources such as interviews, observations, and documents rather than relying on a single data source; use of inductive-deductive logic process; the participants' meanings provide multiple perspectives on the topic under inquiry (Creswell, 2013).

The choice of the interpretive-constructivist paradigm was guided by two major reasons. First, women political empowerment is a social phenomenon that is controlled by social actors and their perceptions of it. This study, therefore, recognized that each; women politicians and women political aspirants, elders and imams had varied backgrounds, assumptions and experiences which would be best captured through qualitative research. The study sought multiple perspectives realizing that there was no single reality and hence the use of multiple data sources in the study. Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011) argue that perceptions and experiences that affect cultural discourses on women political empowerment are subjective to each individual. Secondly, the interpretive-constructivism paradigm that guided this study allowed the experiences and values of the researcher to inform the collection of data and its analysis.

The study sought to answer three research questions: How does intra-cultural communication dynamics support or undermine the performance of women politicians in Wajir County? What communication challenges do women in Wajir County experience while campaigning for elective positions? And, what strategies do women in Wajir County employ to overcome intra-cultural communication challenges while campaigning for elective positions? Through a purposive sampling approach, the researcher selected respondents from among women political aspirants, women campaign team members, religious leaders and members of the councils of elders. The study design and methodological choices conformed to the interpretivism-constructivist research philosophical paradigm. Denzin & Lincoln (2005) define a paradigm as a basic set of beliefs that guide action. Acknowledging that both the researcher and study participants not only co-construct reality but also interpret reality in their specific ways, the study generated data from people themselves, aiming to get knowledge about how people perceive, interpret and understand issues that affect them in their contexts (Jwan and Ong'ondo, 2011, citing Mason, 2002).

The study adopted a qualitative case study design found suitable in generating an in-depth understanding of one case (see Creswell, 2013, Jwan & Ong'ondo, 2011; Yin, 2009; Berg, 2009). Yin (2003) postulates that case studies arise out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena and allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events. Case studies involve an in-depth study of an individual unit, a family, an institution or organization in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants (Creswell, 2013). The value of a case study is in its specificity and in-depth understanding. To this end, Jwan and

Ong'ondo (2011) postulate that "the real business of case study is particularization and not a statistical generalization. In the same vein, Creswell (2013) points out that the qualitative researcher hardly generalizes from one case to another since the context of cases differs. Women politicians and political aspirants, campaign staff, elders and Imams from Wajir County constituted the units of analysis for the study.

The phases of the research plan were not static but were adaptable to the reality in the field. Through reflexivity, the researcher's experiences informed the interpretation of the information in a study. Flexibility and reflexivity made it possible for the researcher to understand the perceptions of women politicians on the effects of religion, language and culture, on their ability to communicate their political ideas in order to get elected. It was not possible to measure these aspects of the study in terms of quantity, amount or frequency, making the qualitative approach most appropriate.

Data Collection Methods
Multiple data collection methods were employed in line with the qualitative research tradition. These included in-depth interviews and observations to get an in-depth information on communication in the political empowerment of women in Wajir County. In addition to interviews and focus group discussions, and in line with the qualitative research tradition of using various data sources, this study adopted discourse analysis as an additional data collection method allowing for the review of documents and audio-visual materials. Creswell (2013) argued that relying on one source of data is not enough to develop an in-depth understanding of the study. Discourse analysis focuses on a particular text or set of closely related texts which may have been produced orally or in written form (Jwan & Ongo'ndo, 2011). Discourse analysis helps a researcher understand the use of particular combinations of words or juxtapositions of words and images and how they function within the text and/or what their effect was likely to be on audiences (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). This study employed discourse analysis which focused on communicative features that played a role in the production of dominance by one group over another. Van Dijk, (2001) postulated that critical discourse analysis focuses on the ways social and political domination are reproduced by text and talk. This study adopted Van Dijk's (1998) narrow definition of discourse as 'text and talk.' The fact theta almost all the politicians in Wajir County were men, with the exception of two, at the time of the study, it was important to establish in what way communicative features played a role in the male political dominance over women politicians. The researcher analysed the language used in religious, cultural and political contexts to establish if both male and female politicians got a fairly equal opportunity to articulate their political ideas.

Study Sample
The most common sampling methods in qualitative research include purposive sampling, quota sampling, and snowball sampling. In purposive sampling, groups participate according to pre-selected criteria relevant to a particular research question, while in quota sampling, the number of people to be studied with which characteristics is decided at the stage of designing the study. On the other hand purposive sampling allows a researcher to make a conscious decision about which individuals would best provide the desired information to answer the research questions (Burns and Grove, 2007). Snowball sampling, which is considered as a type of purposive sampling, uses social networks of the selected participants (Ibid, 2007).

Typically, qualitative investigations involve the use of small samples because large samples make it difficult for the researcher to extract thick descriptions of the phenomena (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). However, the sample size should not be too small that it is difficult to achieve data saturation. The sample for this study comprised of a small sample of 27 respondents drawn from a cross-section of the Wajir County population. They

included among women politicians and political aspirants, campaign team members, religious leaders (Imams) and members of the councils of elders. To select the 27 respondents, this study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method chosen in order to provide the researcher with the most useful data to describe the nature of women politics in Wajir. Three factors made purposive sampling most suitable for this study; (1) the researcher needed the views of specific women politicians who participated in the 2013 and 2017 general elections who would be able to describe their experiences in communicating their political ideas; (2) the need to obtain the views of key community influencers such as Imams, and members in the council of elders particularly because politics in Wajir are clan-based and are heavily influenced by Islamic religious beliefs; and (3) the need to obtain views from female politicians and aspirants and campaign team members who would share their experiences during campaigns.

To select women politicians and political aspirants, the researcher contacted the political parties in Wajir and the Wajir County Assembly Clerk. It was from this information that the researcher purposively selected the participants of the study. A total of 6 information-rich women politicians and aspirants were selected to participate in the study. Additionally, 15 campaign team members from Wajir County were selected to participate in the study. They were political campaigners, advisors and activists. In selecting Imams and members of the Councils of Elders, the researcher visited the Wajir County Main Mosque and the Council of Elders Offices in Wajir County. These two offices assisted in identifying three representatives from the Council of Imams and three representatives from the Council of Elders in Wajir County.

Data Collection

Data generation techniques included interviews with the 27 respondents and critical discourse analysis of documents and radio/TV recording. To obtain secondary data, the researcher reviewed documents on women's involvement in politics, the political empowerment of women in Kenya, communications in politics, statistics on involvement of women in politics and several case studies. Primary data was gathered by use of interview guides to conduct 27 face-to-face which allowed the researcher an opportunity to explore the meaning participants attached to their experiences on how women politicians and women political aspirants in Wajir communicated their political ideas. The in-depth interviews encouraged capturing of respondents' perceptions in their own words; a very desirable strategy in qualitative data collection (Kumar, 2005). The face-to-face interviews additionally allowed the researcher to observe non-verbal cues and appropriately react or modify the inquiry in response to participants' non-verbal cues of particularly when they elicit confusion, uncertainty, or waning motivation (see Yin, 2003). In this regard, the researcher was able to constructively react to those cues by reducing task difficulty. The researcher also reinforced interest by skipping questions which had been adequately answered earlier on.

The process of personally conducting the face-to-face interviews was crucial as it enabled the researcher to probe into unanticipated, interesting or unique participant responses and thus modify the line of inquiry as need arose. For instance, although the interview guides were designed as a set of open-ended questions, they were modified and the sequence of the questions altered according to the manner, appropriateness and context in which conversation flowed (see Fontana & Frey, 2005). The researcher encouraged free and open responses, balancing between the comprehensive coverage of issues and in-depth exploration of a more limited set of questions. Nevertheless, having a designed interview protocol ensured effective and focused use of the limited interview time available and made it possible for the researcher to interview multiple participants in the same systematic and comprehensive manner (Cohen et al., 2007).

Results, Analysis and Discussion

The qualitative data obtained included information gathered from interviews, focus group discussions, and written documents. The researcher used the data preparation and transcription method explicated by Clarke and Braun (2006), particularly on how to prepare a transcript, track and store the data. Prior to data analysis, the data gathered from the in-depth interviews was processed through typing, editing and transcription to transform it into a textual format. The researcher personally transcribed each interview, making it possible to reflect on each interview and to make contextual notes in the transcription. The notes allowed the researcher to place text emphasis on the experiences of the participant as was necessary (see Fontana & Frey, 2005). All the data was coded and analysed through a process that followed six distinct steps: transcribing the data, re-familiarizing with the data, first phase coding, second phase coding, third phase coding and producing a report. Upon completion of data preparation, the next step entailed the reduction of the data from both document review and in-depth interviews into specific groups or themes.

The findings suggest that cultural communication practices and religious beliefs, to a large extent, accounted for the low participation of women in politics. The findings further show that the existing political system in Wajir is male dominated and this shapes women's participation in politics. The patriarchal nature of the community means that men are more privileged. The study concluded that the cultural practices make election of a woman leader possible only if there is approval of her candidature from male leaders or for positions reserved for women. A key recommendation of this study is that there is a cultural shift focusing on the communication of the successes women have achieved; with the presence of women leaders including the successful women in the cabinet, parliament and the senate. Speaking to the young women and men would be a starting point of developing a critical mass of women to participate in politics

Religious Challenges

The results of the study indicate that religion was a major impediment for women involvement in leadership during the 2013 general election. The residents of Wajir County are majorly Muslims. The results of the study indicated that Islam does not support women leadership. According to the respondents, "Islam does not allow a woman to go and work, mingle with men, be in a public place and talk in front of men." Religion permits women to sit and listen and allow their men to make the decisions. This is also supported by the community's cultural practices. The respondents generally argued that, "the Somali culture does not allow women to give opinions on matters affecting the community. Opinions and decisions are only entitled to men. Women are not involved in any way in decision making. Additionally, the culture discourages women from sitting where men are, let alone talking to men in a meeting." On the other hand, however, the study indicated that there were instances where Muslim leaders (Imams and Sheikhs) supported women leadership. With the new constitutional dispensation that created the position for women representatives, the Imams and Sheikhs were charged with the responsibility of educating the community of these new positions and rallying them to support the women. The Imams and Sheikhs also supported women in positions where there was no competition from men. However, in instances where women dared to challenge men in political positions, the Imams and Sheikhs were categorical in discouraging such practices. One of the women political contenders argued that, "the Imams and the Sheikhs were preaching in the mosque against women leadership, especially in instances where women were competing against men. However, in a situation where women were competing against women it was better because the position was only for women. Women who were competing against men in political positions were considered as individuals who do not respect their religion or their families."

Discriminatory Cultural Beliefs

Generally, the study found out that cultural practices and underpinnings of the communities living in Wajir County, do not support women involvement in politics. According to the respondents, Wajir Country is largely a patriarchal society in their religion and cultural practices. For example, respondents in the study who were Imams postulated that the "Islamic religion does not permit women an opportunity to speak in public. This therefore follows that women should not hold political rallies." Clearly women face a lot of challenges from religion in getting into political leadership. The study also found out that, in Wajir County, women are seen as lesser beings in the community and even if they are elected among communities to represent them as their leaders, that does not hold much significance. A respondent, a community leader, remarked that, "I have seen in other areas where part of the distribution of positions in Community Development Fund (CDF) committees were awarded to women from specific communities to ensure equal distribution of leadership posts among Wajir South Constituency communities, but the communities are still complaining that they have not been represented in the committees which is a very serious decision-making committee in terms of dispensing CDF funds in Wajir South. The argument is that the community which gets a lady into the committee has not had anything." Rising from the cultural practices in Wajir County, an election of a woman leader will only be possible if there are no male contestants in similar posts or positions. The study found out that women only become leaders in position where there is no opposition from a male candidate or are positions reserved for women.

A community leader interviewed during the study mentioned that, "in Wajir County, in cases where women were elected, it is definite that they were elected simply because the position was reserved for women. Additionally, going with the records, in Wajir, a County with six constituencies a woman has not been elected as an MP and I do not see that happening soon and that is entirely as a result of ignorance and cultural practices and that inherent belief that the women cannot represent the people. So it is a major impediment to women. Right now we have women in parliament but they are coming in from reserved positions for women where men were not participating, or they are nominated at a party level. Those are the two major sources of women in Parliament and the Senate."

Use of Cultural Discourses in Political Campaigns

According to Yang and Stone (2003), politics in its nature is talk and when women are not able to talk they cannot be politicians. The respondents argued that the language they use in public rallies during their campaigns is largely informed by their cultural practices especially religion. Politics demands for the employment of words or language that is appealing to the electorate. This therefore includes the poems, proverbs and folklore that make messages clearer and in the context of the targeted audience. Community leaders argued that "women did not understand these languages because they are rarely involved in cultural practices that communicate the culture of the community. Women are not involved in the creation of the poems, proverbs and folklore that largely shapes the language designed for politics in the community".

Consequently, women fail to communicate to the electorate in a language that can easily convince them to vote in their favour. It is due to this reason that the community leaders argued that "women have a hard task compared to men in communicating with the electorate. Despite being denied audience compared to the male, they are not able to communicate effectively in the political language that is largely understood by the electorate. This is because the language in itself is a product of men and women do not understand it clearly". In support of this finding Hay (2007) opined that politics is inherently dependent on language; hence the notion that "language is (an instrument of) power". Edwards, (2009) supported this finding by arguing that communication in politics is also affected by

the language the politicians use in their campaigns. As long as women are trying to communicate their experience in a language system not designed for their use, they will not be able to fully articulate what it is to be a woman.

Communication in the political arena in Wajir County is enhanced when one uses language that depicts the tradition of the community. The folklore, poems and proverbs depict the values and the way of life of the local community members. The respondents generally agreed that to get maximum support, policies during the campaign must be in touch with the values and beliefs of the community. Therefore "in expressing yourself as a politician, there is need to use language, stories, poems, folklore and proverbs as these depict what the community has lived with for a long period of time. Mentioning what you plan to achieve as a politician with relevance to the history of the community can come a long way to convince that voters that you understand or are in touch with their problems."

Community leaders interviewed during the study stressed on the importance of folklore, poems and proverbs during political campaigns. One of the community leaders interviewed remarked that, "folklore and poems are products used both as tools of encouragement or discouragement depending on the circumstances. When it fits the bill, the communities use them well to show reason why such should happen. When it is against, it is used to discourage and to divide votes to make sure that the person is not elected. There are a lot of proverbs that are insensitive towards women since they prove that men are better than women in leadership."

The poems mostly relied on the weaknesses of women, especially in juggling between meeting their household duties and leading the people as well. The supporters against women leadership used these poems to discourage the electorate from voting women into leadership. The poems focused on depicting women as individuals who lack the abilities to lead. An elder in the community who participated in the study argued that, "poems were actually used during the 2013 general election to rally votes. The poems enabled the supporters as well as those who are opposing create a niche over their competitors. For example, a community in support of women leadership was mocked on the excuses they would give on the absence of their women leaders. They would give an excuse that their leader is in a maternity giving birth or in the labour ward."

Another participant in the study, who was a contender, argued that she faced a lot of rebellion from those who were not supporting her because she was pregnant. She commented that, "the main challenge was the fact that I was a woman. Further exacerbating my problems was the fact that I was pregnant. Those who were not supporting me argued that if I was elected I will spend a lot of time in the maternity and therefore will not be around to serve the community."

Women political contenders during the 2013 general election actually confirmed that these poems acted against them and eventually made them loose votes. One of the women who vied for a political post during the last election commented that, "the poems that were used to discourage election of women had a great effect since if you look at the results, there was over 2000 votes difference between the governors and the women representatives' votes. This means that 2000 people decided not to vote for a woman. Considering the population of voters in Wajir County, 2000 is a big difference."

On the other hand, the study also found out that poems and songs did not entirely work negatively towards women campaigns. There are instances where women were able to create milestones by using poems and songs during campaigns. One of the women who participated in the 2013 general election argued that, "During my campaigns we used "dhikri" and people were able to come in large numbers. In some places the residents had already been advised by their local MP to vote for a different candidate but the voted me because I used "dhikri" in my campaigns. However, I think it is important to understand your audience before you use certain community

songs, poems or proverbs. There are places in Wajir where I could not use "dhikri"; like for example using "dhikri' in Habaswein, a district in Wajir South, is not appropriate. In Habaswein you need to use "dhantoo." In Wajir Town I would use modern songs and attract people. In Western Wajir I would use "balaqlay." In North Wajir I would use a dance called "salbaloni" which is a song sang for the cows. They would love it and this attracted them to my campaigns."

Creating an enabling environment for Women Politicians in Wajir

The respondents in the study argued that a lot still needs to be done to achieve complete political empowerment of women. While all the respondents agreed that there is hardly a one fits all solution to ensuring women empowerment, commitment to certain measures can help improve the current situation:

i) Policies to encourage positive perception of the ability of women to lead and eliminate the patriarchal culture in Kenya and specifically in Wajir County

The respondents argued that the existing system is male dominated and this shapes women relation in politics. In Wajir the patriarchy has transformed male and female into man and women and has constructed the hierarchy of gender relation where men are more privileged. Within the families, social environment and the political system, men by force, direct pressure or through rituals, tradition, law, language, custom etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play. It is common to find out that within the political system, women in Wajir County are subsumed under the male.

Dealing with Patriarchy requires exercise of policies, procedures and regulations that gives women equal right to men in participating in social, economic and political interactions and involvement. This specifically should support women in taking up initiates in political activities or in power politics. Additionally, the system should allow women to participate or make decisions relating to their carrier, selection of life partner, vote casting, political affiliation and contesting of elections as well as political demonstration. According to one of the respondents, "it should not seem as if women are second class citizens even on decisions that affect them directly. To motivate women into politics and any other leadership positions or positions of power, it is important that they feel equal to men and enjoy the same status as like men in power politics."

ii) Sensitization on Politics and Political Career to avert negative perception

The respondents argued that politics is perceived by women and even the public in general to be a 'dirty' game and this perception has generally affected the confidence of women in participation of political processes. This is not just peculiar to Kenya, or Wajir County, but it is argued to be prevalent worldwide. Unfortunately, this perception reflects the reality in many parts of the Country and although the reasons for this differ, there are some common trends. Politics is seen as the root of all evil in the society because politicians are tagged with criminal activities, corruption, hunger, discrimination, tribalism, unequal distribution of resources, manipulation of the general public and the general suffering or poor living conditions of the citizens. This makes politics an ill in the society hence keeping women from participating in politics. According to a political aspirant during the 2013 general elections "*although I contested for the women representative, somehow I had a feeling that I was getting into a dirty game where at one point in time I will be forced to soil my hands by doing wrong things. Somehow it contributed to my failure in politics because it traumatized me that politics in Kenya sometimes involves wrong decisions or actions that are detrimental to the society at large*"

While sensitization aims at painting glamour in an already tainted image, it is important to help clear the doubts about politics and politicians. The ills in the society should be clearly pointed out to their real cause. Politicians need to create awareness on their roles as the leaders, their powers and their involvement in societal issues. Politicians are leaders who should be working towards solving societal problems and not being part of the problem. However, this is not the perception with the general public and hence sensitization of politics and its role in the society should be encouraged.

Another perception that has limited women involvement in politics and political activities is that, politics involves corruption and extortion as politicians tend to get back the money they spent during election. One of the members of the women campaign team argued that, "*elections in Kenya generally involve spending a lot of money, sometimes of bribing the voters or for expenditures during the campaign. While it is true that there is money spent in campaigns since there are even registration fees to be a candidate, the perception that politics is about money discourages women involvement in politics, especially those who are not empowered financially.*"

Sensitization should focus on letting women understand that campaigns are not about bribing people but rather involves ideologies where the voters would prefer a candidate over the other based on the direction or the political agenda presented to them. In such a scenario it is not necessarily those who have money that get elected.

It is however important to note that while sensitization is a remedy towards encouraging women involvement into politics, corruption and poor behavior of politicians is rooted in the system and therefore this measure will require a lot of commitment from the leaders, which is not an easy task. It is pertinent to note that corruption and the ills by politicians combine to scare women and provoke their fears of losing members of their families, all of which militates against their political involvement or their running for elected bodies.

iii) Communicate the ability of women to lead
Wajir being patriarchal society consider men as the best leaders and those who are capable of bringing change to the residents of the county. However as rightly put by an elder who participated in the study, "*Wajir County has elected men leaders for the past 50 years and has nothing to show of it. I think women should be elected on the basis that bringing a change in leadership can bring some changes in development. If you look at Wajir County in 1900 and Wajir County now, it is retarded and the leadership over the past 50 years are men. I think with a half a century of trial, it is good enough to try other people. We all know that in rural Africa it has been proven that the mother is reliable than the father. This is an indication that women can be better leaders and we should communicate this to the community to accept them*"

iv) Support from community and religious leaders
Political leaders are charged with shifting the negative perception of women involvement into politics and encouraging political participation. The participants of the study proposed that, to begin with a little cultural shift focusing on the communication of the successes women have achieved, with the presence of women leaders and the successful women in the cabinet, parliament and the senate speaking to the young women and men. This will act as the starting point of developing a critical mass of women to participate in politics. "*This is because ultimately you need to bring up a significant critical mass of women who are able to challenge men on big jobs.*"

Conclusion

There is a prevalent religious and cultural belief that women cannot represent the people of Wajir country in parliament. Many cultural proverbs and folklore in Wajir County are insensitive towards women, and are used by male politicians to prove that men are better than women in leadership. Consequently, women got votes only in positions reserved for women because for such seats there was no opposition from male candidates. Additionally, many women politicians in Wajir County rarely communicate their political agenda using poems and folklore which are the commonly accepted forms of political discourse in Wajir County, because in this County, such discourse is cultural preserve of men. To overcome this challenge, the only woman in Wajir County who won a parliamentary seat in the 2017 general elections adopted the cultural discourse commonly used by male politicians and customised her own poems, songs and slogans, a strategy that endeared her to the Wajir electorate.

Recommendations

There is need for a change of cultural and religious beliefs in order to pave way for enhanced women political representation in Wajir. Further, religious and cultural leaders need to spearhead civic education that calls for the elimination of the patriarchal culture in Wajir County and that addresses hindrances to women empowerment on account of religion and culture. Additionally, in order for women politicians to effectively engage the electorate, there is need to build their communication capacity to enable them package and deliver their messages through culturally cherished discourses such as poems, folklore and proverbs, as is expected of all political discourse in Wajir County. Overall, women politicians need to engage in sustained community-wide communication campaigns as a way of developing a critical mass of people who support their quest for political leadership.

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