

Gender Inequality in Politics (Lesotho)

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ABSTRACT

In developing countries, women's involvement with the governance of a country is marginal primarily because of the traditional place of women in societal hierarchies. In Lesotho population statistics show that women are more than men. This research article sought to expose why few numbers of women especially at parliamentary and cabinet level and recommend some solutions for policy makers. The study sought to establish the Lesotho government's policy of gender inclusivity in political participation to see how the situation is being rectified. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed for data gathering and analysis.

KEYWORDS: *Developing countries, Parliamentary, Cabinet, Culture, Tradition, Gender inclusivity*

INTRODUCTION

"Parliament is the place where a country's policy direction is set and a democratic parliament reflects the views and interests of the society from which it is drawn and allows those perspectives to shape the society's social, political and economic future", (Inter- Parliamentary Union, 2008). The "Inter- Parliamentary Union (2008)" findings established that "when women are involved in all aspects of political life, including as members of parliament, societies are more equitable and democracy is both strengthened and enhanced".

Statistically, women are more in number than men in Lesotho and historically, it is women who have suffered the most oppression in society due to tradition and cultural beliefs and therefore need to be liberated socially, politically and economically. With the introduction of black majority rule which was ushered into Lesotho with the country's independence from Britain on 4 October 1966, one would expect the lot of women to be empowered. Independence for women did not materialize at the same level as their male counterparts considering how the politics of the country has been dominated by men for the past fifty years. Despite the fact of the country having been independent since 1966, the country has never had a female prime minister. This plays out in a scenario where the economic production is carried out by women mostly as they are the ones who toil in the factories and on the land eking out a subsistence livelihood with their men away working in the South African mines and on the farms. The greater population of Lesotho is made up of women at any given time and these are the human species that is most active in political participation and therefore responsible for voting for parliamentarians who in turn will vote for the prime minister. "In politics women are the colour, a permanent feature and driving force behind political campaigning in Lesotho. They drive the singing, dancing and lately decorating to ensure that their parties present the best force and image", (Nthakoana, 2016). It therefore is surprising to see that women, instead of advocating and militating for women political power continually vote males into power at the expense of their own species. This is evident if one is to look at how poorly the only robust female political party president, Keketso Rantso of the Reformed Congress of Lesotho, fares in

elections. It is evident females do not pay attention to the clarion call for female empowerment by voting female colleagues into positions of power. It therefore is in the interest of this study to establish what the government of Lesotho is doing to empower women in the political field so as to try and inculcate women into positions of power for gender inclusivity.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

After the Beijing Conference on gender of 1995, one would expect that politics would strive for gender inclusivity so that it's fair for previously marginalized women to actively engage in politics, but in Lesotho it is not the case as men continue to dominate the political space with very little consideration for their female counterparts.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

This study sought to establish the steps being taken by the government of Lesotho to level out the political field in order to include women in politics at national level and also how political parties are trying to empower women in positions of influence.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory informing this study is the feminist political theory. This theory is perceived from the angle of its advocacy for political inclusivity beyond gender neutrality, but for the redistribution of power and elimination of the traditional reinforcements that have entrenched men in positions of power for generations (Zelleke, 2011). This is the most relevant theory for this study whose intention is to sensitise the authorities in Lesotho in order for them to consider the elimination of women's perennial dependency on men by including women in positions of authority so that there is parity between men and women.

In defending "feminist political theory", Bryson (2003) writes that "for most of its history, western political theory has ignored women and that women seldom appear in western political analyses of who has or should have power". Bryson (2003) continues to say that "when it has designed to notice women, western political theory has usually defended the exclusion of women from public affairs and therefore

confining women to the home and that women have rarely been considered to be political animals worthy of serious consideration". Bryson (2003) also notes "that this exclusion of half the human race is frequently either perpetuated or dismissed as a trivial oversight, while the inequalities that may exist between men and women are seen as of little practical importance or theoretical interest". This critique of western political theory by Bryson relates closely with the situation prevailing in Lesotho, hence the use of feminist political theory to guide this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Kenworthy and Malami (2014) write "that electoral system structure left party government, the timing of women's suffrage, the share of women in professional occupations, and cultural attitudes toward the role of women in politics each play a role in accounting for variation in the degree of gender inequality in political representation around the world".

Paxton, Kunovich and Hughes (2007) write that "in some countries such as Sweden, Argentina and Rwanda, women have made remarkable progress in participation and representation, but in other countries, women either continue to lack the right to vote (Saudi Arabia) or are entirely represented by male legislators (e.g. Kyrgyzstan, Micronesia, St. Kitts, Solomon Islands, United Arab Emirates)".

Writing about the women in China's lot in the political field, Su (2006) says "that since its foundation, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has rhetorically promoted gender inequality despite some progress in their social and economic lives". Su (2006) continues to say this is a reality still in existence despite the fact that one of the major goals of the socialist revolution in China was to liberate women.

"In the 1980s and 1990s, the concept of gender emerged as a theoretical and practical tool for analyzing the disparities in welfare between women and men in Botswana", (Mookodi and Fuh, 2004). "Studies of the manifestations of culturally-based patriarchal practices exposed male dominance and female subordination in the social, economic and political arenas", (Mookodi and Fuh, 2004). However, one of the key problems emanating from the gender discourse in Botswana is that there is a tendency to identify gender with women and the result is now the marginalization of men (Mookodi and Fuh, 2004).

Tsododo (2014) writes that "despite major efforts over the past two decades to create equal opportunities for women to participate in politics and to increase female representation in government leadership in sub-Saharan Africa, women's inclusion continues to be a major challenge. Swaziland continues to fall well short of targets for women's representation in public affairs", (Tsododo, 2014). "In 2013 elections, only 18% (55 of 309) of nominated candidates were women, and only one was elected to parliament", (Tsododo, 2014). Tsododo (2014) goes on to say that "with the king appointing three additional women, four of the 65 members of the House of Assembly (6%) are women. In the upper house of parliament, the senate, 33% of members are women, but still falling short of the SADC protocol targets", (Tsododo, 2014). "Data compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) as of April 2014 ranks Swaziland at 132 out of

189 countries with regard to women's representation in parliament", (Tsododo, 2014).

Dube (2013) writes that "Zimbabwe is a signatory to various regional and international protocols on gender equality in the area of political representation such as; the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Gender and Development Declaration which stipulates that states must ensure at least 30% women in political decision-making by 2005, and 50% by 2015, and further guided by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as a member of the United Nations which has MDG3 targeting to increase the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments" (UNDP, 2010). Zimbabwe is also signatory to "the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR), the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action (BDPA)", (MWAGCD, 2004) in Dube (2013). Dube (2013) says that Zimbabwe, despite being a signatory to all these protocols and declarations, the "levels of participation by women in politics and decision making positions remain a major concern" as they fall within same category of those countries in the world with a low level of gender inclusivity in politics.

South Africa has got a positive story to tell concerning the empowerment of women in politics. The "establishment of appropriate governance structures was necessary for the representation of women in decision making and the policy space", (Background paper: Women's empowerment and gender equality, 2014). Document goes on to say "as a country, much was achieved in raising the voice of women through the creation of participatory spaces and structures to promote agency. In the context of these policy interventions, an increase in the representation of women in positions of influence has been acknowledged nationally and internationally", (Background paper: Women's empowerment and gender equality, 2014). As signatory to "the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development, which requires a 50/50 representation of women in political leadership, South Africa has developed a policy that props up women and this has raised the ranking of South Africa on various development indices", (Background paper: Women's empowerment and gender equality, 2014). According to "the Background paper: Women's empowerment and gender equality" (2014) document, 1994, South Africa's women in parliament's percentage was 27.8, but rose to 43.3 % by 2009. The percentage female cabinet positions stood at 11% in 1994, but rose to 42% by 2012. The percentage for women deputy cabinet ministers stood at 25% in 1994 and rose to 47% by 2012. The percentage for women provincial legislators was 23.5 in 1994 and rose to 41.5% by 2009. Proportional representation for women stood at 38% in 2000 and rose to 43.3% by 2011. Ward female representation was 17% in 2000 and rose to 32.9% by 2011. This is quite significant in terms of women political empowerment. The same cannot be said about Lesotho, as Makoa observes below.

Makoa (1997) writes about the reality of gender inequality in Lesotho today saying political modernization "in Lesotho has brought little or no significant improvement to the social status of Basotho women". Makoa (1997) writes that "Basotho women's freedom continues to be either denied or

constrained by a battery of national laws, societal norms, taboos, traditions, customs, institutions and the ideology of patriarchy". Makoa (1997) goes on to say that "despite a relatively high degree of social mobilization in Lesotho resulting from nearly two hundred years of exposure to Western culture- particularly education and consumption habits- women's status has barely changed. Women are by law minors with limited independence as they are perpetually subordinated to their husbands, parents and relatives, depending on their marital status", (Makoa, 1997).

METHODOLOGY

To add more to the analyses performed by the research, empirical material depended heavily on in - depth interviews with randomly selected female students, intellectuals, female sociologists, and women in positions of authority and gender scholars. Male political analysts were also interviewed to establish their opinions on the debate in order to balance out the debate.

Face to face interviews were done due to financial constraints in the locality of Maseru urban and the 20 interviewees were selected randomly in order for the population to be fairly covered. The age group of interviewees ranged from 18 to 65 in order to give a fair representation of females from different generations within the polity of Lesotho.

Questions which were asked skirted around: (1) ambitions and expectations related to the role of women in national politics, (2) experiences and considerations connected to the appointment of women to positions of authority in government, (3) experiences related to conditions for influence and power and how women are positioned in such matrix (4) perceptions of appropriate leadership skills in relationship to gender equality.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

There is no clear cut policy to guide gender inclusivity in political practice in Lesotho at national or political party level. Lesotho is a "signatory to the SADC Gender and Development" Declaration that advocates on inclusion of women in political decision making to the level of 50/50 with men; therefore the country adheres to this policy but evidently only when it comes to the allocation of proportional representative seats to political parties after an election. The Independent Electoral Commission of Lesotho requires every political party to present a list of candidates with an order of preference that reflects a woman to follow a man or vice versa to reflect 50 percent men and 50 percent women as per the SADC protocol. After the election, political parties are allocated proportional seats according to that particular order and that is where women only get to benefit from the SADC protocol.

A total 337 female candidates contested the 28 February 2015 national election as compared to 779 of their male counterparts. The 2015 parliament had a total of 30 female legislators and this is after the allocation of proportional representation seats by the IEC as per the guide of the SADC protocol on gender.

For the 3 June 2017 snap election, 365 female candidates contested as compared to 921 of their male counterparts. The outcome was a total 27 female legislators which is 23.08% of the parliamentary seats, after the proportional

representation seats allocation as compared to 90 male members of parliament which is 76.92% of the legislative seats. As for the Senate, currently there are 31 senators out of a possible 33 but of those 31 senators, only 8 are female (Inter- Parliamentary Union, 2017). The only consolation being that the senate president is female.

The June 2017 election had only three constituencies fielding more female candidates than men out of 79 constituencies. The statistics is evidence pointing out the fact that in Lesotho, there is no policy even at political party level to try to balance out gender in representation in constituencies. In Zimbabwe, there is a quarter system that at least sets aside a certain number of constituencies to be contested specifically by female candidates (Election Resource Centre, 2013).

As at 01 September 2017, in a cabinet of 36 members, women are few, they are only 8 and of the 8 female, five are ministers and the other three being deputy cabinet ministers. The 28 February 2015 cabinet had 8 women (23%), down from 28% in 2012. The government that came to power in 2015 was made up of 7 coalition political parties which all had male leaders so when it came to cabinet position allocation the names of the leaders were proffered first (Nthakoana, 2016).

The Bureau of Statistics (2013) established that men dominate in "mining, public administration, electricity, private enterprise, construction, transportation, and communications- sectors where economic and political power is concentrated", (Nthakoana, 2016). "A study conducted in 2011 found that there was higher female than male population in almost all districts except Mafeteng, and Maseru had the lowest percentage of males at 48.3% perhaps as a result of the textile industry that mostly absorbs females", (Nthakoana, 2016). Lesotho has a total of 10 districts.

Lesotho has a basic literacy rate of 88%. "56% females in urban areas and 58% in rural areas can read and write Sesotho and English with ease, compared to 44% males in urban areas and 43% in rural areas", (Nthakoana, 2016). Nthakoana (2016) cites the Bureau of Statistics saying that "illiteracy seems to be much more pronounced in males at 70% in urban areas and 76% in rural areas compared to females at 30% in urban and 24 in rural areas".

From the interviews with females in academia and positions of authority in Lesotho, the gender imbalance matrix was dissected in a very interesting manner. One female lecturer at a university and former Principal Secretary in government contributed that through socialization at home, in the community, in church and even through the education system; the female in Lesotho is taught that there is a certain break off point for her. This she is taught in a subtle way and the end result is the entrapment of the female psyche into a certain social class which is difficult to break away from. The respondent went on to say that, in Lesotho, women do not have problems having children out of matrimony and raising them on their own because traditionally the Mosotho girl child is educated that she is stronger than her male counterpart. This is more so due to the systematic migrant labour provision to South Africa of the greater majority of the potent male Lesotho population to work in the mines and on farms. The men's subsistence in the form of cash from the mines would go towards the purchase of land, cattle, farm

equipment and the wages for the boy who helps look after the livestock and work on the land. The female would cater for the children's welfare, school fees, food and clothes. Traditionally this would take up most of the woman's time that she would not have time to indulge in politics at the level beyond her homestead. The same respondent went on to shed more light on the subject by mentioning that women in Lesotho have to negotiate and surpass traditional kinship structures in order for them to reach high political office. Traditionally, men and boys would have a courtyard (kotla) where they sit and deliberate on serious matters of state and no woman would be allowed there. This courtyard system backed up by the mentality of a traditional law system that is still in existence today called Molao oa Lerotholi (the Law of Lerotholi) systematically subjugates the Mosotho woman forever by forbidding female heirs from succeeding their royal fathers after the death of the royal father. A typical example from recent times is when the Law of Lerotholi was resorted to bar one princess Senate Masupha from ascending the throne after her chief father's demise simply because she is a woman.

Another female scholar and renowned sociologist weighed in to say that women in Lesotho are quite aware of the anomalies in gender representation in positions of authority in the country's political set up but are not making any serious efforts to militate and advocate for the female quarter at political party level. She went to cite the example of just one prominent female politician from the Democratic Congress, Ponto Sekatle, as the only vocal and visible female politician advocating for female empowerment in party leadership structures but unfortunately only to perennially suffer stumbling blocks and blockades from her male counterparts from within her own party.

In an interview with another female respondent, a woman of power in her own right as a faculty manager in one of the universities in Lesotho, she said that generally, women in Lesotho are not trusted with positions of authority due to tradition. She says that women have come to accept that fact because women themselves are reluctant to follow the leadership of other women. She gave the example of the Reformed Congress of Lesotho (RCL) led by a lady, Keketso Rantso. Just before the 3 June 2017 snap election, the female Secretary General of the RCL, Mamolula Ntabe, defected to the All Basotho Convention led by Thomas Thabane. The respondent said this showed Mamolula Ntabe had no faith, trust or belief in the leadership of Keketso Rantso because of her gender. Out of a total 581 692 national votes, Keketso Rantso's RCL managed to garner a total of 4 037 votes, a paltry 0.69% of the national votes.

A female respondent in her mid twenties responded that Lesotho is a Christian nation and biblical teachings socialize women to be meek and humble and to submit to men. She also went on to say politics is a dirty game characterized by survival of the fittest and women cannot match their male counterparts in the ruthless cutthroat business that is politics. She also went on to say that females who make it in politics in Lesotho tend to be labeled as some political male big shots' mistresses so if a woman rises in her political career, society will regard her to have slept her way to the top. This, she says, happens despite the fact that some women are intelligent hard workers who can hold their own in this male dominated world.

Male interviewees weighed in also to say women in Lesotho do not have faith at all in women's leadership. One male interviewee respondent cited the example of one lady leader of a political party contesting the 2002 general election. The lady, the late Manapo Majara of the New Freedom Party responded to a radio phone in programme to propose Pakalitha Mosisili as the most ideal prime minister for Lesotho in spite of the fact that she was contesting against the same Mosisili she was presenting to the electorate as the most ideal candidate for the premiership. The male interviewee said this shows unreserved vote of no confidence in the female candidates by their compatriots as women evidently do not believe in their leadership capabilities.

CONCLUSION

"Parliament is the place where a country's policy direction is set and a democratic parliament reflects the views and interests of the society from which it is drawn and allows those perspectives to shape the society's social, political and economic future". After the Beijing Conference on gender of 1995, one would expect that polities would strive for gender inclusivity so that it's fair for previously marginalized women to actively engage themselves in politics, but in Lesotho it is not the case as men continue to dominate the political space with very little consideration for their female counterparts. This study sought to establish the steps being taken by the government of Lesotho to level out the political field to include women in politics at national level noting also how political parties are trying to empower women in positions of influence. The theory informing this study is the feminist political theory. "Electoral system structure, left party government, the timing of women's suffrage, the share of women in professional occupations, and cultural attitudes toward the role of women in politics each play a role in accounting for variation in the degree of gender inequality in political representation around the world". Moreover, in-depth interviews with female intellectuals, female sociologists, and women in positions of authority and gender scholars. There is no clear cut policy to guide gender inclusivity in political practice in Lesotho at national or political party level. Lesotho is "a signatory to the SADC Gender and Development" Declaration that advocates for embedding women in political decision making to the level of 50/50 with men; therefore the country adheres to this policy but evidently only when it comes to the allocation of proportional representative seats to political parties after an election.

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