

Impact of the Pan African Parliament in Promoting Gender Balance

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Abstract – This article is about the impact of the Pan African Parliament in promoting gender balance. It is obvious that the Pan-African parliament has had significant results in promoting gender balance and women representation across the African continent. Since its inauguration in 2004, the parliament has continuously instilled measures that ensure women are encouraged to participate in leadership roles, and their rights are respected. Although many nations in Africa are male-dominated when it comes to leadership, tides are changing to a gender-balanced society where both males and females are seen as equal. Through the efforts of the Pan African Parliament, more women in Africa are participating in both political and economic leadership including running international and regional institutions for the development of the African continent. The inclusion of women in political activities is a fundamental right. It fosters gender equity as well as a democracy. Engaging women in leadership goes against previous practice of dominant male society thus promotes gender balance. Further, the inclusion of women in political matters is seen to give rise to a series of benefits, both economically and politically. In terms of politics, the addition of women is seen to promote the inclusion of minority groups in public offices, widen the number of women in parliament, reduce and fight corruption in governments and enhance policy results. Hence, the Pan African Parliament should consistently push for gender balance until a time when both genders shall establish equity, which will help grow Africa as a whole.

Keywords – Impact, Pan African Parliament, Parliament, Gender, Balance.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Pan-African Parliament is a body set up under the African Union and started in March 2004. It was established to guarantee the contribution of Africans in the growth of the economy and promote unification in the continent. The parliament is charged with oversight responsibilities but also exercises advisory and consultative authority, which lasts for five years. Previously the parliament would have its seating in Addis Ababa the capital of Ethiopia, but was shifted to Midrand in Johannesburg in South Africa. Also, the Pan African Parliament is a stage where individuals from African nations participate in talks and can make decisions on matters that affect the continent. Therefore, the Pan African

Parliament has endorsed measures that ensure equality among all genders across the continent. For instance, the Pan African Parliament in union with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has worked together to abolish female genital mutilation (FGM) (Dinokopila, 2013). Moreover, the two bodies have also worked to endure the abolishment of underage marriages that is rampant in remote areas across the continent. The Pan African Parliament has established a working committee to overlook the establishment of laws that ensure FGM and early marriages are abolished. It has also encouraged the male counterparts to join forces and ensure FGM is eradicated, through its President Dang.

II. PAN AFRICAN PARLIAMENT STRUCTURE

Three bodies constitute the Pan African Parliament (African Union, 2004). The Plenary makes decisions in the parliament and also endorses resolutions. Delegates from member states make up the plenary, and the President chairs meetings. The legislatures of forty-seven African union states elect 235 representatives to the Pan African Assembly. Member states are allowed to send a five-member delegation to the parliament, and of the five one, there should be at least one woman.

Woman representation in the parliament has promoted gender roles and has motivated more women in Africa to participate in politics and in leadership roles, which previously positioned firmly held by male counterparts. The Bureau of the Pan-African Parliament is the body that has the leaders of the parliament and is made up of the President and four Vice-Presidents (African Union, 2004). Owing to different regions in Africa, members of the Bureau each represent a particular region. Currently, The President of the Parliament is Roger Nkodo Dang, who has his origins in Cameroon. He represents the Central Africa region and was elected in 2015. The secretariat is charged with the responsibilities of overseeing the day to day activities of the parliament. It is made up of a clerk, two deputies, and support staff. The secretariat also performs functions such as minute writing in meetings, planning elections, and presiding over staff. The parliament has various objectives with the major ones being to carry out the policies of the African Union and to foster cooperation among member states in carrying out economic activities, and to promote peace and security within the continent.

III. WOMEN INCLUSION IN PARLIAMENTARY ROLES

The inclusion of women in political activities is a fundamental right. It fosters gender equity as well as a democracy (African Union, 2009). Including women in leadership goes against previous practice of dominant male society and promotes gender equity. Further, the inclusion of women in political matters is seen to give rise to a series of benefits, both economically and politically.

In terms of politics, the addition of women is seen to promote the inclusion of minority groups in public offices, widen the number of women in parliament, reduce and fight corruption in governments and enhance policy results.

Concerning the economy, women are depicted as promoters of development by rallying other women to unite with their male counterparts in the labor market. Hence, gender equity should be enhanced to ensure that people benefit from the diverse leadership qualities of both women.

Women who are elected to parliament are increasing across the continent (Thornton, 2019). South Africa has a significant number of women representatives, with 46 women in parliament. Tanzania has 37 female members of parliament, and Burundi has 36 women in parliament. Nigeria has the lowest record of Women in parliament, having only three representatives. Males still dominate a majority of the parliaments, and some have no women in parliament at all. Even in Nations that have women representation in parliament, there are social barriers that limit them.

IV. CHALLENGES THAT FEMALE REPRESENTATIVES EXPERIENCE DURING ELECTIONS

Women who vie for elections across the continent are faced with various challenges. Discrimination and cultural customs that instill women as home keepers are a considerable challenge. In diverse African communities, Women are seen as home builders whose significant roles are to prepare meals and ensure children have good care (Krook, 2013). Males assume the role of being the provider, and hence decision making is dependent on them. Also, positions of power are mainly left for male counterparts with women's opinion having little or no impact in decision making. It is such beliefs that limit Women's leadership in Africa.

Moreover, having a balance between political life and family life is, at times, a challenge as both roles are very demanding and require concentration and investing a lot of time for credible results. Intimidation and harassment are also common, especially from male counterparts during campaigns, which limit many females from vying for political roles. Although there are laws that protect women from harassment, Law enforcers should ensure that perpetrators are convicted and charged for abuse of the law.

V. NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS

National Parliaments can be defined as the law-making body of a nation. It falls under the legislative arm of government and has several functions like representing the voter's views and needs. Also, laws that govern a country are made in parliament (South African News Features, 2014). For many years women have demanded their civil rights of being representatives in parliament. Although at a slow pace, women are increasingly being elected for administrative positions and representing the minority groups. It is through Women's representation that Women empowerment has increased in the continent and has factored in significant policies such as education for girls who previously were married in their teen ages. Also, it is through Women's representation that more women today have indulged in economic activities and diversified to the extent of owning their entities. Previously,

in many African communities, women were hindered from owning properties, and most of their wealth had to be attributed to their husbands.

VI. METHODOLOGY

The methodology this research was guided by the qualitative research approach, which is focused on theory building (Opoku, Ahmed, & Akotia, 2016). The qualitative research method has been appropriate as it allowed the researcher to apply a subjective qualitative approach for addressing these gaps of disseminating and analysing the sources (Collis & Hussey, 2009).

As the preliminary literature review has indicated, there are gaps in the current literature on gender balance especially in the running offices of International and Regional institutions such as European Union, European parliament, African Union and Pan African Parliament. The background of this article has also indicated that the area of research involves a number of narratives and concepts that can be best addressed with the qualitative method.

A case for qualitative research in the present subject of research is made out because this method is ideal where more insight into a given area of research is needed (Creswell, 2013).

A qualitative method is not rigid like the quantitative method, it does not require fixed hypotheses to be formulated by the researcher nor does it demand the adherence to any pre-specified methods that have to be followed by the researcher (Willis & Jost, 2007). In research studies like the present one, where the researcher is required to go through layers of information and explore multiple and contrasting narratives, a quantitative research method does not allow the researcher to explore or analyse such multi-layered information; the strength of the qualitative research method is that it allows the researcher to explore and analyse such areas of research (Walliman, 2015). The research approach which has allowed the researcher to relate the research to theory may be chosen between the inductive and deductive methods (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Research approach is essential for the researcher to narrow the broad assumptions about the research topic that are inadvertently made in the initial stages of the research process so that the researcher can formulate methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation as they move along the research process (Creswell, 2013). In this case, a deductive approach was chosen because the researcher was first identifying a theory in the gender balance field with reference to an existing Pan African Parliament (Collis & Hussey, 2009).

The deductive approach helped the researcher move from general theory applicable to the research context, to the specific context of the case study, which is the Pan African Parliament (Perrin, 2015). An inductive approach, which first observes some phenomenon and then relates it to a general theory, is not appropriate in this research because, the theory is already identified (Perrin, 2015).

Another advantage of employing the qualitative research method is that it allows the researcher to adopt an interpretative approach to the data collected and analysed. Primarily, there are four research philosophies: Realism, Positivism, Pragmatism, and Interpretivism.

The researcher employs the research philosophy that would be the most impactful in terms of research design which is underpinned by the research philosophy (Wilson, 2014). The research philosophy is closely linked to whether the researcher adopts the qualitative, quantitative or mixed research design approach (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). If the researcher chooses to augment empirical knowledge by collection of primary data, then Positivism or Realism may be adopted with a quantitative approach; but where the researcher explores an area that involves multiple narratives and subjective data Interpretivism with qualitative method may be more appropriate (Bashir & Marudhar, 2018). Based on the ontology, epistemology and axiology, a specific research philosophy may be adopted by the researcher. Ontology includes objectivism and subjectivism; objectivism relates to existence of social entities external to the social actors, and subjectivism relates to the social phenomenon created from the beliefs and perspectives of the social actors. Epistemology gauges the scope of knowledge through critical, interpretivist, or positivist approaches (Walliman, 2015). Axiology relates to the philosophy of values in research. In this article, the Interpretivism approach was chosen based on the subject matter of research and the purpose of the researcher, which is to explore the impact of Pan African Parliament in promoting gender balance in the context of a Pan African Parliament (Brown, 2010). The purpose of applying this methodology is to gain more insight into the role played by the Pan African Parliament to promote gender equality. The secondary data gathered the readings provided a critical insight into the area and help to consider the ways in which the practices of the gender inequality in Africa is being addressed.

VII. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This paper on the impact of the Pan African Parliament in promoting gender balance asks what kind of impact that the Pan African Parliament has had to promote gender equality

and to promote women to leadership positions in Africa. It supposes that Members of the Pan-African Parliament plays a key role in promoting gender equality across the African continent. Data for this research relied mainly on secondary sources. A secondary source is a document that debates on data that is initially presented at a different place (Thoughfullearning, 2014). They include books, journals, and articles that discuss the impact of Pan African Parliament in promoting gender equality.

The researcher relied on articles from Google and journals from Google Scholar to conduct this research. Secondary sources are quite advantageous as they provide a pool of professional data and the insights of experienced writers. Also, through peer review, one can analyze the data and use the data that proves to meet one's expectations (Harvard Library, 2020). Articles that were written within the fifteen years between 2014 - 2020 were used in conducting this research. This is because Women's leadership in Africa is only gaining momentum, and the most credible occurrences have taken place within this period. To attain these goals, since it was formed, the Pan African Parliament, has been implementing programs such as supporting the Africans Women's Protocol in a bid to ensure Women's rights are protected and to strengthen gender equality. Further, the Pan African Parliament has overseen the creation of ten permanent committees that deal with different sectors and concerns that affect Africa as a whole. The committee that is majorly concerned with The Youth, Gender, Family, and persons living with disabilities is endorsed with the function of examining matters that relate to gender equality promotions and also helps this regional parliament in establishing laws and policies regarding the same. They also foresee the implementation of the policies set by the African Union (Nassir, 2014).

Moreover, the Pan African Parliament inaugurated the Pan African Parliament Women's Convention to play a supervisory role with matters affecting women's rights and gender issues (Barnes, 2012). This convention has overseen the endorsement on the approval and implementation of Women's across the continent. Also, the Pan African Parliament started the Annual Women's Conference, which is a platform meant to publicize the decisions and plans of the AU on Women. This caucus has enabled the Pan African Parliament to focus on critical matters like human rights, maternal health, child mortality, political issues, and the involvement of women in decision making. The annual women's conference has also been used to measure policy advancement and oversee the progress of the policies that are set by the African Union.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The Pan African Parliament has had a positive influence in promoting Women's leadership and gender balance across the continent. Women today are more respected, and their views listened to when discussing matters affecting the continent. Moreover, they have proved to be credible and accountable for their actions like the male counterparts. Although Women's participation in politics across the continent is still quite slow, Nations like South Africa who have a significant number of women in their parliament are quite encouraging. It is through their impact and success that more women will get the motivation to participate and have a say in the political matters of their states and even participate in elections. Although not entirely, the Pan African Parliament has promoted gender balance across the continent, and its efforts will see to a better Africa with both Women and Men fully participating in leadership roles.

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