

Intra-Cultural Communication Dynamics and the Performance of Women Politicians in Wajir County, Kenya

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Abstract

Despite a notable increase in the number of women taking part in competitive politics in Kenya, Wajir County, with a population of about 700, 000 people, has only elected two female legislators since independence. The two were elected courtesy of the positions reserved for women as enshrined in the Kenyan Constitution 2010. Little research has focused on the intracultural communication dynamics in political discourse particularly in rural areas of Africa, and Kenya in particular. Why do women in places such as Wajir almost always fail to get elected despite offering their candidature? 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 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 found that cultural customs inhibited female politicians from addressing public political rallies, hence disadvantaging them from articulating their political agenda to the electorate in certain public spaces. Due to the patriarchal nature of the Wajir community, male voices are more often privileged while female voices are muted. This meant that woman political leadership was possible only in situations where there was no opposition from a male candidate or in positions reserved for women.

Key words: Communication, Politics, Culture, Elections, Woman, Islam, Kenya, Wajir County

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By

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Introduction

Women empowerment involves social actions that aim at promoting women's participation in leadership positions, including politics. Globally, and Africa in particular, there is wide under-representation of women at all levels of decision-making. As far back as 1956, women in most African countries have resorted to using women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and state feminism to advocate for leadership space. Often, NGOs have distanced themselves from active politics, choosing to focus on issues such as promoting girls' education and protecting women's rights. It is in this respect that Markham (2013) cites the UN report on women leadership which shows that "women are highly active in civil society organizations, yet remain to be under-represented in leadership, except in organizations explicitly working on issues of women and gender." In Wajir County women remain under-represented in governance at all levels.

In Kenya, civil society organisations such as FIDA Kenya and Caucus for Women's Leadership have continued to advocate for women empowerment at different levels. These organizations have established structures at the grassroots that act as platforms where women can build their leadership skills, advocate for better laws and policies regarding women's rights, and enhance public awareness on gender and women's rights issues (Kariuki, 2010). In spite of challenges, there has been a consistent increase in the number of women participating in competitive politics in Kenya. However, in Wajir County, one of Kenya's 47 counties, there have been only two elected female legislators since independence, and this is as a result of the implementation of the provisions of the new Kenyan Constitution 2010.

To understand the remarkably low participation of women in politics in areas such as Wajir, there is need to interrogate the intracultural communication dynamics with a view of understanding their influence in shaping gendered spaces of engagement in political arenas of such localities. Politics, by its very nature, is talk. When the voice of any gender is muted, their capacity to participate effectively in political competition is significantly undermined. It is for this reason that this study aimed to investigate ways in which intra-cultural communication dynamics support or hinder the participation of women in political leadership. The study further aimed to find out the strategies that women in Wajir County employ to overcome intra-cultural communication challenges while campaigning for elective positions.

Using Muted Group theory and the concept of egalitarianism as theoretical lens, the study focused on women politicians (both elected and aspiring), women campaign team members, Imams, and Council of Elders from Wajir County. Wajir County is located in the former North-Eastern province of Kenya. The study employed a qualitative case study approach that allowed the researcher to obtain a rich description of participants' experiences regarding the participation of women in Wajir politics. A total of 27 participants were selected to participate in the study using a purposive sampling technique. These included women politicians and political aspirants, campaign team members, religious leaders (Imams) and members of the councils of elders. Primary data was generated using in-depth interviews which allowed the researcher to explore the meaning participants attached to their experiences regarding women participation in competitive politics. Prior to data analysis, the data gathered

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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 them 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 led to the identification of emerging thematic issues in relation to the research objectives.

Women, Culture and Politics - Global trends

Globally, women are seen not to have what could be called a niche' of delight in world politics considering that since 1950, only about 80 women have served as heads of state and that to the end of 2012, there were only 20 women leaders out of 193 countries in the world (Markham 2013, citing Oyster & Stange, 2011). Markham further notes that although inclusion of women in peace, reconciliation and political processes can provide an opening for women to participate in formation of formal government structures, no women have previously been appointed chief or lead mediators in UN-sponsored peace talks but have only participated in mediation teams.

Even though in some areas, like the corporate field, the number of women has risen considerably, they remain dwarfed in politics. Such is the case of Philippines where The Human Development Report of 2002 showed that 35% of Filipino administrators and managers are women - one of the highest in the world. However, Hega (2003) noted that the political sphere remains male-dominated, an indication that women's rise to government posts and institutional leadership does not warrant an equal rise in the political stance.

In Africa, there is women underrepresentation at all levels of decision making. In Morocco, it has been a long struggle for women who have resorted to women's NGOs and state feminism dating as far back as 1956. Although the current regime promised equality of men and women and a better life quality, the beneficiaries have mainly been people from the aristocracy and the upper class (Ennaji, 2016, citing Ennaji, 2008). The NGOs have distanced themselves from active politics and continued to deal with issues like promoting girls' education or protecting women's rights. It is in this respect that Markham (2013, p.5) cites the UN report on Women leadership which shows that "women tend to be highly active in civil society organizations, yet remain to be underrepresented in leadership, except in organizations explicitly working on issues of women and gender." To get closer to politics and to foster democratization, women in Morocco are compelled to join hands with political parties to represent women's interests in parliament and government. The civil society activists come in as middlemen, though plying at a distance, for a healthy relationship between NGOs and political parties.

Although the population of women and men in Kenya is almost equally matched at all levels, political representation is heavily skewed in favour of men (Mwatha, Mbugua & Murunga, 2013). While some countries have met the ideal 33% mass threshold of women's representation in decision making and a country like Rwanda going further and currently having 56% women parliamentary representation, Kenya still lags behind. In fact, Kenya has been overtaken by all countries in the East African region on all measures of gender equality indices. Lack of an affirmative action law and a gender insensitive male political culture are some of the factors that have been argued to keep the number of women in politics low (Kamau, 2010: i). Ironically, Kenyan women have actively championed discourse and strategies supporting women's rights and gender equality by, for instance, hosting the 3rd World Conference of Women in Nairobi in 1985.

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Kivoi (2014) traces the advent of exemption of women in active politics in Kenya to 1952 when Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO) was formed by white women settlers. The organization majored on capacity building programs to empower women economically but never ventured into empowering women to engage in active politics. Resultantly, women held politics at arm's length "partly because MYWO did not play its role well and partly because of the oppressive culture which made them believe that politics and leadership is for men only" P.176. In the 1990s, Kenya National Union (KANU) recognized the power of MYWO, only for it to take advantage and use it to mobilize women to vote for KANU's candidates.

In March, 2013, only 16 out of 290 constituencies and only 88 out 1450 wards in the 47 counties were represented by women. No woman was elected senator or governor in any of the counties. It is this exclusion that curtails entrenchment of principles of democracy and gender equity. P.176. In essence, without the active participation of women and incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision making, development and peace cannot be achieved (Kassa, 2015, citing Seyedah et al, 2010). Kassa (2015, p.6) further points out that without greater representation of women in parliamentary and executive positions as well as in the judiciary, it is difficult to achieve participatory, accountable and transparent governance which can ensure political, cultural, social and economic priority goals of the wider society

Women's activism in Kenya heightened in the 1990s with the formation of women's movements like Muslim Consultative Council Sisters Network, Widows and Orphans Welfare Society of Kenya, among others. Till then, they focused on social development issues which were mostly pursued in politically neutral language (Domingo et al, 2016). Further, Domingo et al, (ibid) citing Kabira and Kimani, (2012) observed that women's political voices were amplified following the National Women's Convention held in February 1992, which inaugurated the agenda to push for women's access to elected positions and political/public decision-making and leadership roles.

In Kenya, among the factors that hinder the participation of women in political processes is the lack of political goodwill by their male counterparts to include them in structures of political governance (Ponge, 2013, citing Mitullah & Owiti, 2007, p. 64). The patriarchal nature of politics, lack of resources, lack of support for women seeking leadership roles, societal expectations and stereotypes, insecurity, gender-based humiliation and violence further undermine women's political ambitions in Kenya (Mwatha, Mbugua & Murunga, 2013). Political discourses that involve cultural and religious perceptions, language use, including proverbs and poems, and general political communication have created negative perceptions among voters in general, and women themselves, promoting discrimination of women in politics. Globally, marginalized communities find themselves isolated and excluded from many of the national activities taking place as noted by Maathai (2006), who observed that this isolation and exclusion leads to political marginalization including exclusion from political decision-making processes

Additionally, religious beliefs use language that may aim at discriminating against women, portraying them as incapable of leading. The Muslim religion, in particular, of which a large percentage of the population in Wajir subscribe to, marginalises women as they are not expected to address public gatherings. Consequently, very few women are involved in political leadership. Almost all the 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). Moreover,

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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).

Communication, in particular, involves more than language, and culture is central to this process. A culture that is characterized by patriarchal norms and values, as is the case in Wajir County, often depicts communication patterns that are dictated by male-centric overtones, rules and regulations (Maathai, 2006). Additionally, folklore, poems and proverbs used to pass cultural perceptions from one generation to the next are also in the custody of male elders who are the clan spokespersons. When these cultural discourses are used in political communication or campaigns, they have the ability to discourage or encourage the electorate, who subscribe to such cultural discourses, in voting for women (Kaimenyi et al. 2013). Wajir County is largely homogeneous both in terms of religion and ethnicity. This means that any forms of communication, and particularly political communication, are received and interpreted within a largely homogeneous cultural environment.

Communication, Culture and Politics

Cited in Dumitrescu et al (2013), Butter and Geis (1990) assert that in leader evaluations, female candidates are likely to be punished for “competitive assertiveness” since they will be violating a deeply held and unconscious expectation about how women ought to behave. They further cite Bongiorno, Bain and David (2013) who postulate that a female candidate will pay a higher price than the male candidate when the female candidate lacks competitive assertiveness. The price could even be higher if the female candidate's speech is tentative and the delivery lacks confidence.

Gender stereotyping of women in politics is particularly strong in societies with traditional division of labour. These stereotypes are shared by men and women and have profound influence on behaviour or attitude. Thus, “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 (Jenssen & Aalberg, 2007). They cite Matland (1994) who is of the view that gender bias may not necessarily harm the chances of female candidates since it only makes them to be perceived to have different areas of expertise but this does not mean that these areas are less important. Julia Wood (2009) closely connects stereotyping with ‘Essentializing’ (the tendency to reduce something or someone to certain characteristics that we assume are essential to its nature and present in every member of a category such as men or women). This, she says, obscures the range of characteristics possessed by individual women and men and conceals differences among members of each sex.

While exploring the aspect of communication in politics, Jenssen and Aalberg (2007) stress on the vitality of a politician to be able to communicate as much as possible since much of politics nowadays take place in the media. However, the media are deeply implicated in the process of defining and framing gender. They represent and reconstruct the contrast between femininity, masculinity and politics, both in popular culture and in serious political reporting. Although women are underrepresented in politics, they are even worse represented in media coverage. Citing

Gronn and Vaagland (2000), Jenssen and Aalberg (2007) observed that women have a harder time gaining access and being portrayed in the media and when they receive coverage, reporters often ask more personal and apolitical questions.

Politics is essentially concerned with power and authority: how to obtain and appropriate it, how to make decisions and control resources within a jurisdiction, how to

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control and manipulate the perceptions, behaviour and values of those who are governed, among other things. In order to do all these, politicians rely on one key resource – communications, which is done using specific language, texts or signs. This means that politics is inherently dependent on language; hence the notion that “language is (an instrument of) power” (Hay 2002). Complex relationships between the governed and those who govern them are enacted and mediated through language.

Moreover, political activities involve communicative events and encounters where the politicians use languages or texts contextualized in such communicative events such as cabinet meetings, parliamentary sessions, election campaigns, rallies, interviews with the media, bureaucratic practices, protest demonstrations, and so on. In this study, the researcher focused on communication of politicians with the electorate towards leadership. It therefore examined the implications and perceptions developed from the communication use- by politicians in rallies, election campaigns and interviews in the media.

Many factors, including race, economic class, and sexual identity, shape how specific women and men communicate (Zinn, Hondagneu-Sotelo, & Messner, 2007). According to Malhotra and Schuler (2005, men and women mainly differ in their style of communication because of the fact that they view the purpose of conversations differently: while women use communication as a tool to enhance social connections and create relationships, men use language to exert dominance and achieve tangible outcomes. Such differences also have implications for gender differences across leadership styles of men and women. Deborah (2013) postulates that women use the language of conversation as a way of establishing connections and negotiating relationships, while men talk to preserve independence and negotiate and maintain status in a hierarchical social order. Basow and Rubenfield (2003) noted that women are, overall, more expressive, tentative, and polite in conversation, while men are more assertive, and power-hungry.

Men and women also differ in communication in the sense that while men view conversations as a way to establish and maintain status and dominance in relationships, women see the purpose of conversation to create and foster an intimate bond with the other party by talking about topical problems and issues they are communally facing (Deborah, 2013). Mulac, Bradac and Gibbons (2001) further argue that women are expected to use communication to enhance social connections and relationships, while men use language to enhance social dominance.

Communication styles used by men ensure their political dominance. In support of this assertion, Peters and Rosenthal (2010) posits that men tend to be self-assertive and view conversations as a means towards tangible outcomes, such as obtaining power or dominance. Women on the other hand, value cooperation and communal orientation which involves a concern with others, selflessness, and a desire to be at one with others. Edwards (2009) argues that women also use less powerful speech (swear less, speak more politely, and use more tag questions and intensifiers) and interrupt less than men do; researchers have hypothesized that this is possibly because of their perceived lower status to men.

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 never be able to fully articulate what it is to be a woman. For example, the English language has been considered as male centric or masculine. The term “woman” is even an abbreviation from the term “man”. Skingel (2012) argues that masculine bias in the English language is not confined to word meanings alone. It is built into the very structure of the language and supports the “male-as-norm” paradigm. There are a

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number of “overtly masculine words that are sometimes used in a generic sense, including bachelor’s degree, brotherhood, fellow man, mankind, master, spokesman, and workmanlike.

Smith argues that,

If a woman is swept off of a ship into the water, the cry is ‘Man overboard’. If she is killed by a hit-and-run driver, the charge is ‘manslaughter’. If she is injured on the job, the coverage is ‘workman’s compensation’. But if she arrives at a threshold marked ‘Men Only’, she knows the admonition is not intended to bar animals or plants or inanimate objects. It is meant for her (Smith, 1985, p.49).

As individuals strive to protect their societal norms, patriarchal societies still discriminate against women not allowing them to communicate with the public. The societal norms include customary rules that govern behaviour in women. Women who aspire to political roles, therefore, still find themselves needing to communicate within the male-centric norm and conforming to the societal expectation of femininity. Edwards (2009) argues that “Women who initiate aggressive or forceful attacks may be viewed as unfeminine, shrill, vicious, nagging... and therefore, dismissed as abnormal.

Women empowerment involves social actions that aim at promoting women’s participation in leadership positions, including politics. Globally, and Africa in particular, there is wide under-representation of women at all levels of decision-making. As far back as 1956, women in most African countries have resorted to using women’s non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and state feminism to advocate for leadership space. Often, NGOs have distanced themselves from active politics, choosing to focus on issues such as promoting girls’ education and protecting women’s rights. It is in this respect that Markham (2013) cites the UN report on women leadership which shows that “women are highly active in civil society organizations, yet remain to be under-represented in leadership, except in organizations explicitly working on issues of women and gender

In Kenya, civil society organisations such as FIDA Kenya and Caucus for Women’s Leadership have continued to advocate for women empowerment at different levels. These organizations have established structures at the grassroots that act as platforms where women can build their leadership skills, advocate for better laws and policies regarding women’s rights, and enhance public awareness on gender and women’s rights issues (Kariuki, 2010). In spite of challenges, there has been a consistent increase in the number of women participating in competitive politics in Kenya. However, in Wajir County, one of Kenya’s 47 counties, there has been only two elected female legislators since independence, and this is courtesy of the new Kenyan Constitution 2010.

Intra-Cultural Dynamics and the Performance of Kenyan Women Politicians

Our study found out that cultural practices and underpinnings of the communities living in Wajir County do not support women's involvement in politics. Most of the respondents noted that Wajir County culture does not support women's leadership; instead, it only favours men. This finding corroborates the assertion by Mwatha, Mbugua and Murunga (2013) who found that although the population of women and men in Kenya is almost equally matched at all levels; political representation is heavily skewed in favour of men. While some countries have met the ideal 33% mass threshold of women’s representation in decision-making and a

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country like Rwanda going further and currently having 56% of women's parliamentary representation, Kenya still lags behind.

In Wajir County, there is a stereotyped culture that sees the men's voice as more commanding than the women's voice. Yet, international conventions and bill of rights aim for same share of voice for both genders. Discrimination goes against the most international conventions including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979. This Convention calls for equal access to and equal opportunities in political and public life and these include the right to vote and to stand for election (see Ivanus, 2014, p.59). Unfortunately, the culture in Wajir County offers no semblance of equality between men and women politicians. This view confirms what Dumitrescu et al. (2013) and Butter and Geis (1990) assert that female leaders often get punished for "competitive assertiveness" since they will violate a deeply held and unconscious expectation about how women ought to behave.

Consequently, women politicians received support only through the help of campaigners who could talk to the voters face to face in open forums. Relying on campaign managers to articulate their political ideas on their behalf meant that the women had to make do with how well the campaigners could sell their policies. In addition, it would mean those female politicians needed to engage educated, highly articulate male campaigners, unlike their male counterparts who did not need campaigners to speak on their behalf. Hiring these highly qualified campaigners would be an additional campaign expense for the female politicians. To campaign for elective positions, let alone to win, came at a very high price. No wonder, Bongiorno, Bain and David (2013) argue that a female candidate will pay a higher price than the male candidate when the female candidate lacks competitive assertiveness. Unfortunately, women in Wajir County do not necessarily lack assertive competitiveness; it's the culture that denies them the chance to articulate their views in public.

In their 2007 study, Jenssen and Aalberg argued 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 laughingstock among both women and men." In Wajir County, women politicians had to go the extra mile of first convincing the voters that women leadership should be encouraged, then imploring them to vote in their favour, which came at a very high cost.

Study findings further indicate that religious beliefs undermined women involvement in leadership during the 2013 general election. The results of this study indicated that Islam, the religion professed by the majority of Wajir County residents, does not support women leadership and undermines women participation in political discourse in local political spaces. According to the respondents, "Islam does not allow a woman to 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 decide. 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." The results of the study indicated that Islam does not support women leadership and undermines women participation in political discourse in local political spaces.

The religious teachings and communication depict women as lesser beings compared to men. Women are taught to assist men to achieve their everyday goals by handling house chores that men cannot do. The study found out that religious teachings do not allow women to work, mingle with men, attend public meetings and have opinions on decisions made by

men. On the other hand, religious teachings tend to support women to listen and obey while allowing their men to make all the decisions.

Islamic religious teachings and communication that do not allowing women to work, mingle with men, attend public meetings, among others, have discouraged women participation in politics where it is necessary to address the public, have opinions about issues affecting the society, and participate in deciding and choosing priorities and better solutions to existing societal problems. Although during the 2013 general election, contemporary Imams and Sheiks focused on sensitizing Islam followers that times have changed and that women should be accorded equal opportunity in the society as men, there is still much to be done. These findings are supported by the assertion that people are conscious of religious messages and they tend to believe the news about religion is extremely important (Buddenbaum, 2008). Religion, therefore, affects communication and religion is a symbol that people use to understand the world around them (Bellah, 2000). Religiosity is usually tied to doctrinal or dogmatic beliefs. Therefore, religious symbols 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. Those with high religiosity attend regular services at an organized religious institution and participate in ritualized ceremonies associated with their particular religious community. Hill et al. (2000) defined spirituality as a search for an Ultimate Truth or an Ultimate Reality. Religion, as Hill describes it, is the same search for truth but with an added dimension of rituals or beliefs that are used as a means and categorized by specific religious groups. The study also posed the idea that religion could also have non-spiritual dimensions such as ethnic identity or belongingness.

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 with men in the community. Information from women is not given any priority by men and even to extension other women.

In Wajir County, opinions leaders such as Imams and Sheikhs only 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. The Imams and the Sheikhs used the mosques to preach against women's leadership, especially in instances where women were competing against men. Religion and cultural impediments have been in the forefront in opposing women's involvement in politics. According to the report on "Religion, Politics and Gender Equality", a project carried out by the Heinrich Boll Foundation in collaboration with the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) during 2007-2010, religion to a large extent bolsters marginalization of women in the society.

However, campaign managers for Wajir Women politicians argued that women were not weaker or incompetent in articulating their political views. Interviews with campaign managers found that women were not challenged in articulating their views to the electorate. However, it noted women politicians' self-efficacy in effectively communicating their political ideas during campaigns was affected by the treatment they receive from the society. "The problem is that the male-dominated electorate does not want to listen to their views," said one of the campaign managers. Another campaign manager involved in peace-building noted that women are not disadvantaged in terms of their skills and competency in communicating effectively to the electorate. She pointed out that to the contrary, women can communicate far much better in political rallies and campaigns. However, "the society has an

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already stereotyped mind that (women) are meant to be ‘mothers’ and not leaders and therefore should not campaign,” she added.

Campaign managers noted that challenges such as male dominance, cultural beliefs that men are better than women, religious restrictions that women are not supposed to assume leadership and clannism limit the ability of women to campaign in open forums for positions where there is competition against male politicians. Maathai (2006) noted that a culture that is characterized by patriarchal norms and values, as is the case in Wajir County, often depicts communication patterns that are dictated by male-centric overtones, rules and regulations.

Conclusion

These findings suggest that intra-cultural communication practices and religious beliefs, to a large extent, account for the low participation of Wajir County women in competitive politics. Politics by its nature is talk and when women are not able to talk they will not be able to compete with their male counterparts in a political space. There is therefore urgent need for civic engagement targeting cultural changes especially in communities where women are marginalized, if sustainable development goals on gender equality are to be achieved.

Additionally, there is need to build the communication capacity of women politicians to enable them to package and deliver their messages through culturally cherished discourses such as poems, folklore and proverbs. Since politicians are elected to solve local problems and help steer the community to the development and representing them in the national arena, communicating with the residents in using folklores, poems and proverbs help convince that voters that you are in touch with their problems. According to the respondents, a lot still needs to be done to achieve complete political empowerment of women. The respondents from the study proposed mitigating measures that can be employed to encourage or empower women to participate in politics in Wajir County. While most of the recommended measures requires political and leadership support from politicians in Wajir County, which according to the respondents is unlikely, they are measures that can prove to be effective in women empowerment.

Although there was hardly a one size fits all solution to ensuring women empowerment, commitment to the following measures were identified in improving the current situation: Policies to encourage positive perception of the ability of women to lead and eliminate the patriarchal culture in Kenya and specifically in Wajir County; Sensitization on Politics and Political Career to avert negative perception; Communicating the ability of women to lead; and eliminating or revising teachings and cultures that do not support women empowerment in the society. Therefore, proposed mitigation measures require a lot of commitment from the leaders, which is not an easy task.

However, since the challenges affecting women involvement in politics largely emanate from the cultural discourses communicating negative perceptions about women involvement into politics, the study proposes a framework that will focus on assessment of communication practices based on the 5Ws of effective communication during campaigns. This include assessing who (source of the communication), what (the content of the communication and what it aims to achieve), which (the communication channel or medium used), whom (the targeted audience of the communication) and what (the desired effect of the communication). Imams and elders need to play a more significant role in empowering women in Wajir to publicly communicate their political ideas is urgently needed to enable more women to attain their political leadership aspirations. Women political leaders also need to learn how to communicate their ideas in culturally-accepted manner particularly through poems, songs and folklore.

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Recommendations

Policy makers need to address the problem of women under representation by increasing women's participation in politics. 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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