




Chapter Five

Women's Political Representation and Participation in the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature: Prospects, Consequences, and Implications


Tafadzwa Clementine Maramura 

*Department of Public Administration and Management
University of the Free State 
Bloemfontein, South Africa
MaramuraTC@ufs.ac.za*


Torque Mude 

*Department of Public Management and Political Studies
University of Namibia 
Windhoek, Namibia
mudetorque@gmail.com*

Mzoleli Mrara 

*Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature 
Bisho, South Africa
mzolelimrara@gmail.com*

Stellah Lubinga 

*Economic and Management Sciences
University of Pretoria 
Pretoria, South Africa
stellah.lubinga@up.ac.za*

Introduction

Across the globe, in the full exercise of their right to participate, women continue to face considerable discrimination. As a result of access to power at all levels, they face a multitude of major obstacles to decision-making, even though half the world's population is made up of them (IDEA, 2013). Part of the pre-requisites for democratic governance is the equal and active involvement of women within the political circle. It is imperative to include and enable women to partake in the resolution procedures, which mostly are important in bringing about sustainable development in poor economies across the developing world. The global picture, however, paints a tainted image where, because of lack of resources, poor healthcare, poor quality of education, which has disproportionately low access, discriminatory cultural practices, institutional barriers, and restrictive laws, in terms of entrance into the political sphere, inequality and marginalisation remain for women and girls (DiLanzo, 2018). In essence, women have a right to engage and express themselves in systems and organisations where choices are made that impact their lives (IDEA, 2013).

Women's under-representation is evident in the predominance of men amongst parliamentarians, cabinet ministers, and representatives of the judiciary, local and regional officials, government and state heads, and executives within the private sector (Nhundu, 2013). Some significant qualitative and quantitative progress has been made towards growing women's participation and representation since the Beijing Platform of Action (FWCW, 1995) was funded, especially at the legislative level, although this progress is slow and inconsistent across the world's regions (Vetten, 2016). This is quite a common phenomenon amongst many African countries like Morocco (5.6%), Nigeria (8%), and Mauritius (8.7%), as noted by Musau (2019), where the representation of women at the political level is still low. Thus, this is a major challenge in fighting poverty, unemployment, development, and inequality, which characterises the development trajectory of these countries.

Women's talents and leadership have been untapped, thus leading to the growing recognition of this notion. This is in relation to their limited participation and representation in politics. Their active involvement within the political sphere is a mechanism to pave the way for their contribution in decision-making processes, ultimately leading to their influence in policymaking issues and thus the advancement of gender equality. Legislators have an influence in policymaking and priorities, whether they are female or male, and thus there is a need for women to remain actively involved to have their issues and concerns addressed by those representing them (National Democratic Institute, 2015). Furthermore, women's involvement will ensure that governance issues are well adhered to and that women have a voice within the political sphere. Thus, women's contribution and demonstration within the political fraternity is a crucial element in influencing policies that are geared towards gender equality.

Several international and continental treaties have been ratified and signed by the country as part of its efforts to address women's issues and empower them. On the African continent, these include the Dakar Platform for Action of 1994; the Beijing Platform of Action for the Advancement of Women of 1995 (UN, 1995), and the Protocol of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the rights of Women in Africa of 2003 (Kivoi, 2014). On the international front, these include the World Summit for Social Development in 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 and the Cairo Conference on Population and Development of 1994 (Kivoi, 2014). These statutes were created because of the mounting challenges that women face within the political spectrum despite global efforts to improve their conditions and ultimately address the inequalities that they are facing. In essence, the equivalent political contribution of men and women is an important aspect in ensuring that good governance prevails, and this includes the respect of one's fundamental rights and the freedom of expression.

Moreover, South Africa uses three forms and approaches to ensure political representation of women within its

parliamentary structures. These mainly include (i) the voluntary promotion of rations by the African National Congress (ANC), (ii) draft legislation mandating gender equality in partisan formations and (iii) women's parties (Vetten, 2016). It is because of these policies that South Africa has a high level of women's representation within its political spheres. Furthermore, this has been largely influenced by the ANC's policy and stance towards women's empowerment, as evidenced in its obligation to a 30% active involvement quota of women in 1999, which significantly increased to 50% by 2004 (Sadie, 2014). Since 1994, the ANC policy on women's representation and participation has evolved, resulting in the quota system being the main agenda.

Women's political representation took a slump in 2014, when it declined to 40.8% (Sadie, 2014). This meant that the Protocol on Gender set by the regional body SADC (Southern African Development Community) on gender parity ahead of the 2015 deadline was not met. With the provincial legislatures, the representation of women dropped from 41% to 37% (Sadie, 2014). Regarding the cabinet, there was a 41% involvement of women and most significantly, the number of women premiers dropped from five in 2009 to two in 2014 (Sadie, 2014). However, in 2019 the new cabinet that was announced met the 50/50 gender quota with half of the new cabinet constituting women (Fleming, 2019), a significant stride forward for the empowerment of women. In 2011, local government also witnessed a decline in women's representation from 40% to 38% (Sadie, 2014). Some of the reasons for this predicament can be attributed to the decline in the engrossment of women such as the intensification in the number of opposition parties and failure by the ANC to adhere to its quota policy in its party list.

Taking a closer look at the local governance sphere, women's representation in local government has risen from 38% in 2011 to 41% in 2016 in the local government/municipal elections (Hick et al., 2016). There have been several significant achievements on the political front with respect to females' input in the field of local administration and governance. By and large, meaningful representation of women should be prioritised by public institutions to provide a leeway for more women to

be vigorously involved in politics as part of the measures to ensure gender parity. Despite the introduction of the quota system by the ANC, there are still difficulties in ensuring the empowerment of women on the political front and the guarantee of a viable and successful empowerment agenda for women. Despite being voted for in local government structures, women still face barriers, such as a lack of training and support, unfamiliarity with the procedures and linguistics and the existence of patriarchal norms. These are constraining issues to the effective partaking of women in political affairs within the local government structure. Therefore, it is imperative that an inclusive environment is created to accommodate and nurture women within the political sphere, and this should extend beyond their numerical representation (Stats SA, 2016).

In the national legislature, the number of seats occupied by women is used as a metric to assess progress towards women's empowerment. The ANC (2012), however, has noted with concern the significant reduction of women mayors over the years. Despite the increase at the national level, it is also imperative to measure women's representation within the lower levels, such as the local government spheres, to determine progress that has been made towards achieving gender parity. In essence, the active immersion of women in politics is key in achieving gender parity and that women have a meaningful contribution to make towards the attainment of good governance (Stats SA, 2016).

According to Statistics South Africa (Stats SA, 2016), the local government sphere has lower (11%) proportions of the representation of women. Females' participation at this stage is significant since local government structures deal with the daily lives of women and thus their involvement at this level can influence policy and decision-making processes to improve their lives (Stats SA, 2016). The input of women, at the national and provincial levels, is crucial to advancing women's empowerment. It is also a forum that can be used to consider the key role that women play in the processes of policymaking and decision-making to help to shape gender equity and parity. In the recently announced 2019 cabinet, President Cyril

Ramaphosa noted that, “for the first time in the history of our country, half of all the ministers are women” (Times Live, 2019). This is quite a huge milestone in reference to women’s involvement at the national level, with the ANC promising to deliver on its quota system. However, the provincial legislatures across the country are quite a sharp contrast. In relation to these circumstantial views, the current chapter, therefore, aims to explore the opportunities, repercussions and consequences of the contribution and representation of women in the Eastern Cape (EC) Provincial Legislature.

Issues of Debate

The relationship between gender parity and development is well-documented. The UNDP (2018) acknowledged that equal political representation is a precondition for women’s emancipation. Based on numerous legislative and regulatory statutes such as the National Policy Framework for Women Empowerment and Gender Equality (WEGE) and the quota system guiding political parties, it is apparent that South Africa envisions institutions where women are fully represented (Hills, 2015). Despite the existence of numerous statutes and policies that seek to promote the emancipation of women, closer scrutiny of the current status quo reveals that gender gaps are still evident, and little progress has been made thus far. This has resulted in the Commission for Gender Equality (2016) declaring that women, as likened to their male colleagues within the political spectrum, are still under-represented. Even though decision-making processes and entrance into political authority by women has developed ever since the dawn of democracy in 1994, there is still an urgent need for political institutions to be proactive to the prerequisites of female politicians. Without a shred of doubt, the contribution of women in politics is an essential ingredient in accomplishing gender fairness and improving female’s lives, despite them being the majority in terms of the population figures (Goldblatt, 2014).

Relatively more has been achieved by South Africa, which ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1996, in uplifting

women and children, and in gender impartiality. However, this aim has not been accomplished because of the government's commitment to intensifying women's image and achieving gender parity. As a result, more needs to be undertaken to reach the target of 50/50 parity (as adopted at the ANC Nasrec Conference held in Johannesburg in 2017) and thereby increase gender equality and local government representation. The Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature has not achieved gender equity and representation because of a lack of 50/50 parity. In terms of gender representation in the current Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature, there are presently 27 women legislators across all political parties as opposed to 37 male legislators (Gender Links, 2019). On average, the gender representation of the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature places women at 42% as compared to 58% males (Gender Links, 2019). This is a disproportionate representation of women affecting their political representation and involvement in the decision-making process within the legislature.

The absence of women in leadership positions within the political terrain has dire consequences for the socio-economic development of communities. Women's population outnumbers that of men, and yet they do not have a voice representing their interests in the political arena. As of mid-2024, South Africa's population reached approximately 63 million, with women accounting for about 32.13 million (51%) and men approximately 30.89 million (49%) of the total population (StatsSA, 2024). In turn, this means that the interests of other vulnerable groups, such as youths and children, are not represented. The decision-making processes will rest in the hands of their male counterparts, indicating the absence of legitimacy and representativeness of such political structures. In addition, women's inclusion in the political arena is a crucial element in ensuring that democratic governance, openness, and accountability take place and that their absence in this respect challenges democracy's prerequisites and benchmarks.

By participating in politics, women can promote gender equality. However, it is difficult to achieve this with the current situation that alienates women from occupying leadership

positions because of party politics and the patriarchal nature of societies, amongst other reasons. Therefore, this is the main consequence that arises from gender imbalances in government institutions because of the continuous marginalisation of women. In this scenario, women remain as subordinates to their male counterparts and their potential in contributing to development is stifled. It contrasts with this experience that the present research sought to analyse the prospects, consequences and implications of women's participation and representation in the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature.

A variety of studies and research on substantive participation and inclusion of women in the field of South African political administration have been conducted. Hills' (2015) article aims to investigate the degree to which, in the South African context, policies and regulatory statutes have responded to the problem of women's empowerment. It criticises the fact that the quota system has had insufficient influence on ensuring that women have a say in matters concerning their daily lives. An article by Rosen (2017) provides an analysis of the quota system and the influence it plays in influencing meaningful women's representation in the South African political context. Vetten's (2016) research, meanwhile, traces the history of South African women's political participation since the first democratic elections in 1994. It explores the gains that have been made policy-wise in relation to implementation and practice. The point of departure in this chapter is that political representation is not an end in itself; it must go beyond mere participation to influence changes in women's lives. On the other hand, Gouws (2011) provides an analysis of women's representation, with a specific focus on the government. The role that political parties play in achieving gender diversity is discussed in this chapter.

Social exclusion theory

A citizen's right to participate in society is one of the most important directions of contemporary society development (Eflova et al., 2017). The social exclusion phenomenon was developed as a scientific theory and has now become a socio-

political discourse. Social exclusion theory was developed as an attempt by Western scholars to discuss issues of poverty and marginalisation (Eflova et al., 2017). Individuals and groups excluded from the social mainstream were chosen as the subject of the research and in this case, women are still marginalised and segregated even in politics. Social exclusion is commonly defined as a complex process of incremental multidimensional rupture of the 'social bond' at the person and collective levels (Silver, 2007). Therefore, the theory of social exclusion was used in the chapter to understand how women are stripped away from multiple dimensions of social involvement, resulting in their social isolation (Silver, 2007). This has negative consequences on their participation and representation in politics because of the patriarchal nature of societies that discriminate and segregate them from participating and holding positions of leadership in politics.

Critical mass theory

Political scientists concerned with gender relations have long been interested in the numbers of women in national legislatures. Women make up slightly more than 50% of the world's population, but on average, make up just 16% of the world's elected political posts (Grey, 2006). This has contributed to calls for action to increase the number of women in legislatures on the grounds of justice concerns and suggestions that an increase would significantly alter decision-making processes and performance (Grey, 2006). Part of the conversation on major changes in democratic decision-making focused on whether women in the legislature must hit a "critical mass" to shift the political arena (Grey, 2006). Therefore, to explain the dynamics and interplay of numbers and how this could increase the number of women taking part in politics, the critical mass hypothesis was used. The increasing chants of critical mass have led several countries across the globe to implement the gender quota system to increase women's participation in the political sphere.

The contribution of women in the political domain is important in recognising the important part played by them in

influencing decision-making and policymaking. Despite this notion, women continue to have, and are still faced with, low representation in politics, which is an impediment to achieving gender equality and parity. This is fundamentally caused by several dynamics that relate to economic, political, social, cultural and educational barriers, as articulated in Figure 1.

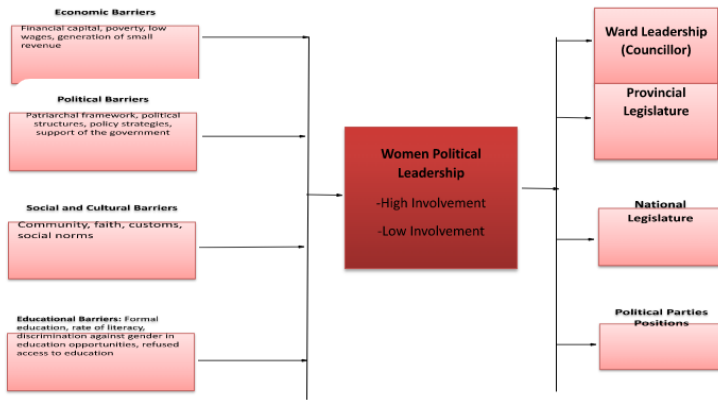


Figure 1: Barriers to women’s political participation and representation. Source: Stanus (2016)

The notion presented in the conceptual framework above is that dealing with these challenges can lead to high participation of women in political leadership, which would result in them participating and being represented at ward, provincial legislature, national legislature, and political parties’ levels. If not properly dealt with, this would result in low numbers of women in these various platforms. Within the political process in South Africa, politicians and scholars have hailed the progressive legal framework which provides the platform for significant strides that have been made thus far towards women’s empowerment, gender equality and parity as a success story in South Africa, given the history of apartheid towards marginalised and disadvantaged groups such as women (Sadie, 2014).

Methodology

A phenomenological model was introduced, considering the qualitative aspect of the analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Qualitative research paradigms, also known as constructivist/social constructivist, interpretive (De Vos et al., 2018), naturalistic, post-positive or post-modern perspective (Liu et al., 2018), concentrate on a phenomenon's structural, descriptive, and deeply comprehensive meaning. The lawmakers (males and females) served as a case for the sub-chapter. Denscombe (2014:31) is of the opinion that the defining feature of the case chapter methodology and its emphasis is also to focus on what needs to be investigated.

The goal of this chapter is to explore women's political representation and participation in the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature, with a particular focus on the prospects, consequences, and implications. The chapter deliberately chose the provincial legislature as a case chapter, as it is considered a provincial structure with immense powers in the political governance of the province because of the representation of different political parties. Selective/purposive sampling methodology (Newman, 2014:278) was employed to select a sample group (Brynard et al., 2014).

The population in this chapter was made up of 10 legislators, 5 leaders of political parties, 4 members of the Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Department and the legislature's speaker. The chapter used purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research to identify and define information-rich cases for the most efficient use of limited resources (Patton, 2015). It involves selecting and recognising groups of individuals or individuals who are particularly familiar with or informed about a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

In-depth interviews were used in conjunction with any related documentation to be evaluated, such as reports, project documents, plans and data published in acknowledged websites. Findings from these instruments were thematically analysed (Creswell, 2014; Gaudet & Robert, 2018). The interviews

were conducted during the respondents' free time, and each interview lasted about 40 minutes. Questions asked focused on the chapter's priorities and objectives. Since the chapter worked with humans, the University of Fort Hare received ethical clearance application forms before the commencement of the chapter. In addition, permission was obtained from the legislature and the Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Department, whose participants were part of this report. The respondents signed an informed consent form, which is part of the University of Fort Hare's ethical clearance application.

Findings

Understanding women's participation, representation, and role in the legislature

Women's representation and involvement in the provincial legislature is imperative in addressing challenges and problems affecting them. This is largely because of their involvement in the decision-making processes. Therefore, participants' understanding of women's participation, representation and role in the legislature was interrogated in this section. The views collected on this issue were divergent. This is reflected in the excerpt below, where during an interview, one respondent echoed the following sentiments:

I believe women play a crucial role in the political sphere of our country since they constitute the largest part of the population. In addition, their involvement is important in the formulation of policies that are geared towards the empowerment of women, children and the youth who are the most vulnerable in our society.

The comment above shows the integral role that women play in policy formulation and decision-making platforms. Through the participation of females in politics, other susceptible groups, such as the youth, can be represented and have their concerns heard. The above excerpt clearly demonstrates that the participants understood the connotation of females'

involvement, representation, and their role in the legislature. In addition, these results coincide with a Kivoi (2014) article that noted that fair representation and involvement of females in the process involving policymaking procedures locally is central for prioritising the realistic necessities and concerns of women in the agendas of the local governance sphere and for localising the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A gender representative and balanced local council can be an essential step in facilitating the achievement of the national gender equilibrium (Kivoi, 2014).

Women's participation and representation in the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature

The participation and presence of females in politics has increased, though at a very slow rate, since the advent of democracy in 1994. The national legislature has recently witnessed an upsurge in the number of women MPs, with the ANC meeting its 50/50 quota related to the composition of its cabinet, where men and women are evenly represented in ministerial and deputy ministerial roles. In addition, the ANC has set a gender parity of 50/50 to be enforced in the civil service, the private sector, and the government (Mamogale & Masekela 2014). However, the same cannot be said about the provincial structures, where women are still under-represented. According to Gender Links (2019), the general representation of women in the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature stands at 48%. In addition, the speaker of the legislature is a female, and the overall ANC female representation stands at 53%, which is slightly lower than the ANC target for female representation of 60% (Gender Links, 2019).

Using the critical mass theory, this chapter argues that the benefits of gender diversity in the upper echelons of organisations (including political organisations) come from a balanced gender distribution, rather than a token presence of women or a position of absolute or proportional critical mass, as found in previous empirical studies (Ararat et al., 2015). Therefore, this chapter suggests the examination of the output impact of providing a balanced gender distribution, in

addition to the mere presence of women in leadership roles and the pursuit of defining a sufficient critical mass. In essence, the number of women is important in ensuring that they are properly represented and have their voices heard. However, a gender balance is the most significant step that can be taken in ensuring gender parity and equality within the political fraternity in South Africa.

In the case of the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature, the respondents echoed the following sentiments.

The issue of women and their participation and representation within the legislature has significantly improved since the attainment of democracy in 1994. The current speaker of the legislature is a female, and this is a huge milestone achievement for the legislature and women in the Eastern Cape.

The excerpt above shows the important and crucial role that women play in politics and in addressing some of the socio-economic development challenges affecting communities in the province. Moreover, women legislators can represent other women, and this is a rare phenomenon because of the previous dominance of males in this regard. This has also seen an escalation in the total number of women elected to the legislature, resulting in the appointment of a female speaker in the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature.

The chapter's results agree with research conducted by Hassim (1999:6), who noted that women's role and efficacy have extensive consequences in the definition of democratic citizenship. The disparity concerning women's inclusion within the political system raises many debates related to the citizenry status of women, who seem not to enjoy the same status as men. This is usually influenced by patriarchy that limits women's participation, including taking up leadership roles and positions in politics, because of the pertinent question of citizenship, in which women are subjected to unequal access and enjoyment of the same legal right. However, Vetten et al. (2012) argue that focusing only on formal status neglects how, through their lower

levels of involvement, women are increasingly disempowered and thus not included in key decisions about resource allocation through fiscal and social policy and legislation.

Political parties and women participation and representation in the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature

The current Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature consists of six political parties (as shown in Table 1), namely, ANC, DA, EFF, UDM, ATM, FF Plus and MK. However, despite these numbers, the current electoral gender quotas within political parties in South Africa are in clear contrast to the critical mass theory, which pushes for increased women’s political participation.

Table 1: Party seats in the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature in 2024

Party	Seats	% of Votes
ANC	45	62.16%
DA	11	14.89%
EFF	8	10.14%
UDM	3	3.71%
ATM	2	2.31%
FF PLUS	1	1.55%
MK	1	1.44%

Source: *Parliamentary Monitoring Group (2024)*

Based on Table 1, the ANC has the most seats, with 45 out of 63 legislative seats in the province. It is followed by the DA, with 11, and this makes the DA the main opposition party in the Eastern Cape. Subsequently, the chapter interrogated the structure of selection of candidates to represent political parties in the legislature in relation to the incorporation and involvement of women. The findings are discussed and analysed in the section that follows.

Local governance, women participation, and representation in the Eastern Cape

It is imperative for the chapter to touch on what is taking place within the local governance sphere to provide an overall picture of women's participation and representation in the political space in the Eastern Cape province. According to the United Nations (2017), women's participation in local government will make a difference, as they are willing to deal with problems that are of concern to them. According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance Report (2024), with only six years to 2030 and a paltry 1% increase from 25% in 2021 to 26% in 2024, it is impossible for the majority of African countries, including South Africa, to achieve the 50% target set in SDG 5: Gender equality in relation to women's political participation and representation in legislative affairs (UNDP, n.d.). Provinces such as the Eastern Cape are also affected by the slow progress in women's participation and representation in legislative affairs. Therefore, the chapter interviewed legislatures from various jurisdictions to seek their views and opinions on the incorporation and inclusion of women in the system of local government. They echoed the following sentiments.

Women are still largely under-represented in the local governance structure. This is a cause for concern because women continue to be undermined and disempowered to influence policymaking and decision-making at that level.

One respondent noted that.

It has been difficult for women since the advent of democracy to occupy influential political positions at the local government sphere. Male patronage and the patriarchal nature of our societies have favoured male dominance in the socio-economic and political spheres. This has seen women being side-lined in political leadership roles.

The above sentiments show that women have been sidelined from political positions caused by several reasons such as patriarchy and continuous male domination within the political spectrum. Political positions continue to be viewed as the preserve of male domination. These findings correlate with research steered by the Commission on Gender Equality (2016), which notes that while stable growth has been made in making significant changes to the total of women's involvement and incorporation in governance structures and partisan politics at grassroots level, there still exist disparities in relation to the appointment and selection of women at ward level to become Councillors. Moreover, this is a worrying trend because females remain under-represented as office bearers at the level of local government (Commission for Gender Equality, 2016).

Meanwhile, the United Nations (2017), notes that the worldwide number of females nominated to local government is presently unidentified, reflecting a substantial awareness gap. Political parties subsequently function in a variety of ways as barriers to women's involvement (Franceschet, 2005:85), namely by opposing the introduction of gender quotas, women's marginalised selection, cultural traditions within the organisation and the continued monopolisation of structured politics. In the same vein, the analysis by Kivoi (2014) states that a democratic deficit arises from the lack of women's incorporation at every stage of policymaking and governance. It has been proved time and again that different communities make better choices. Such assertions are a true reflection concerning service delivery and satisfying the interests of the citizenry in local communities at the regional level of governance. Local government also influences housing, protection, transport, and economic policies, making crucial choices that impact men and women in their societies.

Implications of women participation and representation in the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature

The enactment of policies geared towards the promotion and empowerment of women in South Africa since 1994 has paved the way for their active involvement and prioritisation

within the political domain in South Africa (Pitamber, 2016). Moreover, issues related to women's rights have been put at the forefront to fight the high prevalence of gender inequality. The government has introduced and instituted different legislative and policy frameworks aimed at promoting women's issues and addressing the gap of gender inequality that exists in the political fraternity, particularly at local governance level. These include the Gender Policy Framework of Local Government, Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality National Policy Framework, the Gender Equality Act of Commission, the Municipal Structures Act of Local Government, the Bill of Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality (WEGE) and the Legislation on the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination. These pieces of legislation and policy framework are reflective of the international statutes aimed at ending gender inequality while advancing women's issues such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Africa Charter on Human and People's Rights (Commission for Gender Equality, 2016).

The chapter identified four factors that are brought about by the participation and representation of women within the provincial legislature. These are namely, (i) increase in legitimacy and representativeness, (ii) good governance, (iii) equality in decision-making processes and (iv) advocating for gender equality. These findings have been analysed in line with the tenets of the social exclusion theory where women are continuously side-lined in entering and being elevated into higher echelons of leadership positions in politics because of societal norms and constraints.

Equality in decision-making processes

Males control the space of political matrices, ensuring that all decision-making processes are placed in their hands. The patriarchal existence of African cultures where women are believed to make no decisions at all, strongly characterises this assumption. In addition, the traditions of many African cultures seem to refute women's central role within the political

spectrum despite their roles as homemakers, thereby limiting their promotion into leadership positions in the political fraternity. However, women can engage fairly in the decision-making processes by holding political leadership roles. During an interview, one respondent noted that:

Women are now able to participate in the decision-making processes and have a voice in issues that are deeply affecting them. Prior to their participation and representation in politics, the decision-making processes were done by their male counterparts; a sharp contrast of the ideals of democracy.

During an interview, another respondent stated that.

By being able to participate in the decision-making processes women can attain gender equality and address some of the socio-economic and political challenges adequately affecting them. They can influence some of the policies enacted by government; so, they can be able to benefit everyone especially the marginalised and vulnerable women.

The excerpts show that women have as equal a voice as men in decision-making if they are given opportunities to participate in politics. This observation is in agreement with the FWCW (1995) report, which argues that governments have continuously failed to incorporate women within the political structures to provide a leeway for their involvement in crucial decision-making processes. It seems that the reality on the ground is a sharp contrast to the continuous rhetoric and promises of promoting women to the echelons of leadership. In essence, the equivalent involvement of women in politics is key in the overall phase of women's progression. Equal participation of females in policymaking processes goes beyond the desire for democracy or simple justice but can be viewed as a crucial circumstance for considering the interests of women. The goals of equity, sustainability and peace cannot be accomplished without

women's active participation and inclusion of their experiences at all levels of decision-making (FWCW, 1995).

Advocating for gender equality

It is prudent to note that women's engagement and inclusion in policymaking processes in the political arena facilitates gender equality. The inclusion of females within the domains of politics is a step in the right direction towards achieving women's empowerment and gender equality. In the political sphere, achieving gender representation encourages women to engage fully in policymaking processes at every level and to hold leadership roles. During an interview, one respondent noted that:

Since the dawn of democracy, women have been side-lined in political leadership positions as well as decision-making platforms, a firm characteristic of gender inequality. However, in recent times women are now being given the opportunities to be heard through partaking in politics and occupying leadership positions as well. One example is our current legislature in the Eastern Cape which is led by a female speaker.

On the same note, during an interview, another respondent echoed the following sentiments:

The active involvement of women in the political circles is a step in the right direction in terms gender equality and providing women with the same opportunities as their male counterparts. Women can represent the interests of other women and vulnerable groups, such as children and the youth.

The above comments reflect the importance of women's political engagement and inclusion in achieving gender equality. This result is in agreement with the OSCE/ODIHR (2014) report that argues that women are central to the political office advocacy procedure for gender equality. To achieve the essence of democratic government, empowering females of diverse

characters, upbringings and intensities of knowledge is crucial. This would ensure the presence of females in influencing policymaking on matters of concern to various women's assemblies (OSCE/ODIHR, 2014).

Challenges to women's participation and representation

Most of the world's population (more than half) is made up of women who also make up the bulk of the country's population within their individual nations, their numbers exceeding those of men. Women are under-represented in many social systems, including national parliaments and provincial legislatures, despite their large population numbers. Discrimination against women in all facets of life is traditionally historical as well as political. Politically, the patriarchal culture looked at women with disdain and the conventional methods of teaching or socialising only strengthened and perpetuated male superiority to coerce, dominate and suppress women. Unrealistic patriarchal stereotypes have been developed around women because of these conventional methods of teaching. Thus, men believe in the notion of the absence and non-involvement of women in the development of a nation, particularly when trying to raise the living standards of their populations (Mamogale & Masekela, 2014).

The chapter identified some of the prominent challenges affecting the incorporation and involvement of women within the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature. These mainly include socio-cultural factors, economic factors or lack of financial resources, negative cultural perceptions and attitudes about women in leadership, violence against women in politics, lack of education and training, lack of access to knowledge and support networks and discriminatory election systems and processes.

Socio-cultural factors

In many cultures, cultural variables are related to traditional expectations of women's skills and capabilities. The patriarchal paradigm, which is embedded and embraces the subsidiary and inferiority role played by women is heavily linked to cultural

factors. Stereotypes related to sex forms constitute strongly defined barriers to discrimination eradication and are thus primarily attributed to undermining gender equality (United Nations, 2001). These cultural expectations do not allow females to enthusiastically engage in politics at all. Thus, because their position is in the household with men bearing the biggest brunt of decision-making, women are encouraged to play subsidiary roles. One respondent echoed the same sentiments by stating that:

Our culture still does not recognise the key role played by women in politics and as decision-makers. The societies we live in are still deeply entrenched in labelling women as the inferior sex to men. As a result, more and more women have lost the self-confidence to participate in any activities, especially politics, in fear of victimisation and marginalisation.

The above excerpt shows that there is a lack of social and cultural transformation, which, by and large, continues to undermine the potential of women to engage in politics. This result is in agreement with a chapter conducted by Adhiambo-Oduol (2003) that recognises as chief impediments socio-cultural values, behaviours, prejudices and stereotypes. According to him, gender training and education, which women and men are subjected to from infancy, are crucial influences in promoting gender stereotypes. This has subsequently resulted in men being seen as the dominant and superior gender while the same process has subjected women to patriarchal norms and values that view them as the weaker and inferior gender.

Negative cultural perceptions and attitudes about women in leadership

The equality of women in terms of political engagement is hampered by customs and practices. Only when women are politically empowered can enduring security be achieved in the fields of culture, environment, politics and economics (Harris, 2010). A country can only achieve economic growth and

development when the entire labour force, inclusive of women and men, is put to good use to achieve maximum productivity. If the same balance can also occur in the political terrain where men and women can work together in the policymaking process, the empowerment of women can be taken into full consideration (Shah et al., 2015). However, during an interview, one respondent echoed a different sentiment by noting with great concern that:

Women have always been viewed as being under the control and tutelage of men, raising questions on their ability to be leaders and occupy key political positions. This negative perception has steered some women away from participating in any political activities.

The comment above raises the question of patriarchy and how women are continuously viewed as inferior and under the control of their male counterparts. This has ultimately led to their under-representation in political offices. This result reverberates with a chapter by Bello (2013), who notes that there are multiple reasons for the limited incorporation of women in the field of politics. The diverting of females away from taking part in politics, safety concerns and the idea of the supremacy of men to be decision-makers in political-related issues has hampered the prospects of women being involved and holding political offices. The overall assumption is that women are believed to have little interest or expertise in politics, resulting in their absence.

Several recommendations were made from the research for women, local governance systems, provincial legislature, national legislature, and government to intensify females' participation and depiction within the party-political structures, which in turn has socio-economic and political advantages, growth, and peacekeeping. To establish approaches which incorporate the advancement of societies and women residing in rural areas, policies involving empowering provincial legislatures, local government, and communities are required. The guidelines would also help to draw on the opportunities and advantages of women's engagement and inclusion in the

betterment of the way of other women and deprived groups in the form of children and young people, as well as improving the relations amongst men and women. These are some of the guidelines that the chapter makes:

Economic and financial support

There is a need to provide women with economic and financial resources and help to ensure their active involvement and participation in politics. In turn, this would ensure that females are not unduly confronted with sexism, manipulation and deprivation and that senior and leadership roles can be taken up. There is also a need to encourage further improvements and make inroads in ensuring that women take up spaces in the socio-economic and political spheres, pleas for the effective, full and equal use by all human beings of human, financial, material and information resources. In addition, the provincial legislature, municipal governance, and government need to ensure equitable rights to use natural resources, economic resources, and land, particularly in the context of rural women.

Education and training

The lack of knowledge and preparation is an obstacle to women's involvement and representation in politics. Education, training, mentorship and seminars should, therefore, be carried out to train and increase women's awareness of political issues and the benefits of their active participation in this field. In addition, national consultations, regional discussions, and symposiums pertaining to the involvement of females in the political sphere should be conducted to take account of the prospects and challenges confronting women and to recognise mitigation strategies that can increase the contribution of women. In levitation mindfulness and promoting the development of women's agenda through addressing gender inequalities, the formulation of gender policies at the provincial level would be far-reaching.

Access to information and supportive networks

One prudent prerequisite for the political commitment of women is access to information and supportive networks, and their absence is detrimental not only to women but also to society. To ensure that women are made aware of the vital position that they play in the political sphere, mentoring and grooming training and workshops are required. Moreover, to inspire other women to engage in politics, the sharing of knowledge is important.

Cultural and social transformation

Women are subject to heavy prejudice based on deeply ingrained beliefs and traditions of patriarchy. There is a common belief in patriarchal cultures that there should be minimal visibility and involvement of women in public spaces and that, by their very nature, women do not possess any leadership qualities to take up positions in the political domain. There is a need for cultural and social change to take place to overcome these values to address this problem. It is difficult to understand these intangible informal institutional principles, norms, frameworks, and procedures, and they frequently represent a greater obstacle than formal laws. For women to benefit, there is a need for a transformation and total overhaul of values and norms associated with patriarchy for women's views and perspectives to be heard. This will go a long way in paving a platform for them to take up leadership positions, including political ones. Moreover, women in these positions can bring significant changes through their active involvement in decision-making processes by questioning the status quo that undermines their value and role in the socio-economic development transformation of communities.

Conclusion

In decision-making and electoral politics, women have been excluded for a long time. Therefore, most women are deprived of information on electoral arrangements and politics, as well as tools for running successful campaigns. Cultural and

social features, political violence, an absence of education and prospects, and patriarchal perceptions that seem to be greater in rural areas as compared to urban areas are significant hindrances to women gaining admission to political decision-making, participation, and representation in the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature. The chapter also notes that the incorporation participation and representation of women at the local level, or the lack thereof, has a direct influence on participation and representation at the legislative and national levels. The political party's commitment to gender equality and gender parity at the provincial level is also important. In addition, more gender attentiveness and sensitisation interventions, supplemented by females' liberation, are required to permit men and women to clarify the perceptions surrounding the role of women in decision-making.

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