GENDER INEQUALITY IN SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPALITIES

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ABSTRACT

Because they are frequently disenfranchised at societal, business, commercial, intellectual, bureaucratic, and political levels, women still hold lower status as professionals. Africa is not atypical of the trend of gender inequality that is pervasive throughout the world. Politics, which has predominantly masculinized in the continent and has only allowed women to provide preventive care within their own homes, is still being prohibited to women. The rationale is that in a patriarchal society, a woman's value is to care for the house, whereas a man can serve in the political spotlight. Women's representation and participation in political decision-making structures and processes are a matter of continuous discussion. Even African countries have legislative frameworks, and institutional processes in place, the gap of gender disparity is not reducing. The situation in South Africa is challenging as the society still follows patriarchal and stereotypical mindset, has cultural and traditional norms that may restrict women to be superior and higher in professional portfolios. The situation gets more dire at lower government level due to the lack of understanding of gender roles, responsibilities, and contribution that women may bring as political office-bearers. The political level of gender disparity in South African municipalities is examined in this article. It discusses the challenges that local governments encounter regarding electing women on political decision-making levels. The article therefore explains the factors that lead to gender inequality difficulties and suggests the types of support or resources needed to promote gender equality in political portfolio in South African municipalities.

Keywords*: Gender equality, political appointment, municipalities, qualitative, South Africa*.

1. INTRODUCTION

The ultimate legislation of South Africa, the Constitution of 1996, declares that everyone is entitled to the same rights, regardless of gender. As a result, South Africa has decided to commit to a developmental local government, whose objectives include providing democratic and transparent local government, guaranteeing the sustainable delivery of services to communities, and encouraging participation of the community and community organizations in local government affairs. Considering the opinions of Mokoele (2017:186), the importance of placing all residents at the center of all development initiatives is emphasized as a way for local governments to further their objectives of democratic and accountable governance. Due to the underrepresentation of women in local government, most planners still struggle to practice inclusive planning.

Women's exclusion from local government planning not only undercuts community goals, but it also changes the elaborate social structure that apartheid government, African custom, and culture created, which reinforced the image of male dominance and female inferiority. The complex interplay that prevents women from participating in planning should thus be eliminated or at least diminished by gender mainstreaming and inclusion in planning, as per the thoughts shared by Devas and Grant (2011:307). The inability of local government to address gender inequality demonstrates the issues faced and experienced in this phenomenon, as suggested by Baiocchi (2016:23). As highlighted by Mokoele (2017:188) The issue of women's underrepresentation in local government, which has long been a concern, is only becoming worse because many rural women are still not included in planning or involved in issues. Urban women's circumstances, however, are also not excellent because they are underrepresented in political institutions and procedures. Ginige and Haigh (2009:54) therefore suggested that women's perspectives must be incorporated into all planning and decision-making processes because, without doing so, local government would continue to wage an endless war in its efforts to address social and economic problems.

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Considering the opinions of Hendrickse (2004, adopted by Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2018:122), it is observed that racial inequality and discrimination have a long history in South Africa, where opportunities and rights were determined on a person's ethnicity and gender. According to sociocultural perspectives, women are perceived as inferior to males and as having minimal privileges in both the public and private life domains. The possibilities available to women in the workplace and formal and informal interactions were influenced by historical, traditional, conventional, and patriarchal attitudes. This situation is more dire at the local government level. According to African Development Bank (AfDB) (2009:2) many municipalities faced with political and economic gender inequality challenges. For instance, traditionally there is male domination in political parties and structures, which hinders women's participation. This domination by males' results in political parties having male domination on national importance issues (Bari, 2005 cited in Marumo, 2014 :12). As a result, issues affecting women are being undermined and ignored. Allen (2011 cited in Marumo, 2014:1-13) state that most political parties do not include women in their inner circle. Few political parties' elect women to positions of power. Within the political sphere, women's views and inputs are not always seen as seriously as those offered by men. When women enter politics, it is normally viewed as a side project to family duties, which is a true gender obstacle. Most women lack experience in government, because the dropout rate for women is higher than that of their male counterparts. This makes most women in local government new entrants. The article aims to explore challenges faced by women to be considered for political appointments in South African municipalities; factors causing gender inequality; and resources required to improve the extent of gender equality at grass roots level.

The article adopts an empowerment approach of the feminist theory. The reason is substantiated by Vyas-Doorgapersad (2014:101) emphasising that the empowerment approach has its own indicators for measurement varying from individual to collective at micro and macro levels. The micro level symbolizes an individual seeking progression from subjugation to an evolutionary personality. The macro level symbolizes the institutions/authorities/regulations taking relevant decisions regarding progression of individuals. In this article, the micro level, that is, the individuals, are women seeking empowerment and recognition, while the macro levels are municipalities (organizations), authorities (political office-bearers), and regulations (gender equality policies and programmes).

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study utilized qualitative research to compile information. The qualitative research was considered due to "its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. It provides information about the 'human' side of an issue – that is, the often-contradictory behaviours, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals. Qualitative methods are also effective in identifying intangible factors, such as social norms, socio-economic status, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion, whose role in the research issue may not be readily apparent" (Northeastern University, n.d. cited in Bangani, 2019:10). In this study, the qualitative research is considered significant as it "seeks to develop an in-depth understanding [and] views social phenomena holistically" (in Nyikadzino & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2020:33; Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2021:1). The study used a secondary qualitative data collecting strategy in which data were acquired by examining published materials like books and articles. Document analysis was used to analyze data, that in the opinion of Auriacombe (2007:25 cited in Nhlapo, 2020:39), is a popular method in a wide range of social sciences, as well as the arts. In essence, it means taking a systematic approach to understanding and interpreting documents. The documents reviewed includes Acts, official reports, newspapers, journals, internet sources, and speeches.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Gender inequality requiring initiatives for woman empowerment continue to be an issue in the society due to social and economic factors. According to Rai (in Bari, 2005: 2-3 cited in Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2015:7), the study of historical, philosophical and political texts show that women have been kept outside the public domain of politics as most of the political thinkers and philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, John Lock, Thomas Hobbes and Hegel considered women fit only for

domestic roles in the private sphere and maintained that there was no place for women in politics because of their suitability in caring roles as mothers and wives. Vyas-Doorgapersad (2014:102) further states that there are a number of practical and existing hindrances that underestimate women in the political participation. The first one is fundamental inequality: even though women have constitutional rights they are not regarded as equal to men. The second one is political and economic instability: it affects the development of a political culture with democratic norms. The third one is discrimination: women are discriminated when they stand for the office and when they are elected to local government positions. The last one is the male environment with political institutions: while there are a few women involved in decision making, the styles and modes of working are those that are acceptable to males.

Through literature review (United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2006; Economic Commission for Africa, 2007), several factors can be considered as possible challenges causing gender inequality. The author identifies some of them as a lack of confidence in women leadership; safety and security risks in special portfolios such as correctional/police services, war-based peace treaties, political positions in countries facing racial and ethnic genocides; psychological unpreparedness of women dealing with political portfolios in countries facing dictatorship, and authoritarian background of ruling; societal/ideological reasons where women is consider inferior in terms of knowledge, training, education, intellect, mental strength, etc.; lack of female-oriented mentorship and role model scenarios to follow; lack of support from family, husband, society, community, colleagues; lack of political will; to state a few. Considering the opinions of Mongoato (2018:33), the author agrees that although it is possible to encourage women to participate in decision-making at the local level, there may not be much evidence of their preferences or involvement in the Integrated Development Plan, budget speeches, council meetings, or local economic development initiatives. One explanation for this can be that they are either not notified about the programs in a timely manner or are just now becoming aware of such initiatives and venues for involvement. These and various other factors can make it difficult or practically impossible for women to participate in local government processes.

The article explores some of the factors causing gender inequality under discussion below.

3.1 POLITICAL FACTORS

According to the statistics of the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) (2006:7 cited in Bangani, 2019:99), this situation "has improved since the 1994 elections. There is strong representation of women in the national, provincial, and local legislative branches of government and in government departments. The challenge to political institutions is to change their culture to be more responsive to the needs of female politicians and civil servants". Vyas-Doorgapersad (2015:122 cited in Bangani, 2019:99-100), however, emphasises that the reality is that "plans and policies have not been 'gender responsive'. That is, they have not recognized existing gender imbalances, and have not considered the different gender roles which men and women play. Women are therefore constrained in participating effectively in the development process because their subordinate position in society is ignored in development planning and policy making, while their concrete needs are equally ignored". A major political factor which causes challenges related to gender inequality in South African municipalities relates to a lack of political representation and participation within municipalities (Hicks and Buccus, 2012:38). The independent Electoral Commission revealed that for the 2011 local government elections, women only comprised a low 38.5% of municipal councillors, thus underpinning the foundation of gender inequality within municipalities as women are not given equal access to political participation within local government (Hicks and Buccus, 2012:38).

Manyaka (2014 cited in Mokoele, 2017:194) states that although various legislation such as the Constitution 1996, Employment Equity Act, 1998 and Municipal Structured Act, 1998 exist to afford women equal opportunities, such legislation on a local level is inadequately planned for and implemented.

The formulation of municipalities' integrated development plans proves a major political factor causing gender inequality as such integrated development plans do not prioritise gender employment equity, empowerment and participation in local policymaking, thus emphasising unequal power

relationships and the fact that women have no place in municipal policymaking and participation since key integrated developments plans fail to prioritise gender equality for women in municipal politics (Todes, Sithole and Williamson, 2010:77).

3.2 LEGISLATIVE FACTORS

Women remain trapped in the masculinised male-dominated world where men took charge of politics and the economy. Discrimination against women in political jobs may be rife in South Africa as many of them lack the basic political knowledge and confidence to stand for political offices. Such a broad and discriminatory phenomenon has resulted in low women's participation in the country's political affairs from the grassroots up to the national level of government. Reversing these ills has been the call by the national government through various legislative frameworks (Vyas-Doorgapersad & Shava, 2022:142). However, "the development of policies and legislation has only ensured the minimum equity targets as the indicator for gender mainstreaming" (Public Service Commission (PSC), 2006: ix cited in Nhlapo, 2020:216).

3.3 INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

Within South African municipalities the presence of a 'glass ceiling' results in a massive hindrance to gender equality within senior management and other top management position appointments and promotions for women, where women's career development is hindered due to the glass ceiling where barriers exist for women due to their gender, this inevitably causes job segregation and career advancement for women in municipalities to be unreachable (Mathur-Helm, 2005:60).

According to Karlsson (2010:498) a lack of gender mainstreaming and gender focal points possess a massive hindrance to gender equality practices and policies for women within municipalities where South Africa's Public Service Commission undertook an audit of all three spheres of government's gender equality policies where it was noted that 'a general lack of knowledge and understanding of gender concepts and gender mainstreaming' is evident in most departments across all three levels.

Additionally, it was noted within the same audit that gender focal officers within all three spheres are plagued with a high workload where they have to juggle more than one function, effectively reducing attention towards formulating, implementing, and integrating gender focal points into the functioning of municipalities (Karlsson 2010:498). Madsen, Gouws and Chiweza (2021:532) provide a similar insight into gender mainstreaming and focal points within municipalities stating that most departments are only interested in compliance reporting of gender mainstreaming and do not take the time to undertake skills training for gender mainstreaming to ensure implementation and understanding.

Municipalities Integrated Development Plans and Budget plans are two of the most important documents within municipalities as they outline five-year plans for municipalities which ensure accountability and monitoring and evaluation of policy priorities and needs of the municipality (Matoane, 2015:65). However, within South African municipalities, there are serious deficiencies with regards to the inclusion of women empowerment and gender equality within these plans which inhibits women's abilities to have access to decision making and leadership positions (Matoane, 2015:66).

Kuzwayo (2020:41) provides a similar view on the inadequacy of municipalities' Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) with regards to gender mainstreaming, stating that municipalities' IDPs do not have a 'dedicated area for gender mainstreaming', which most of the time makes it difficult for the Mohokare and Matjhabeng local municipalities to fully capture and achieve gender equality. Additionally, within both the Matjhabeng and Mohokare municipalities, employment equity plans and gender policies are inadequately formulated and barely implemented, which inhibits each municipality to progress toward gender equality with regard to recruitment, selection, and training and development (Kuzwayo, 2020:44).

Political support within the political level of municipalities is essential to appoint female mayors and councillors where political parties ensure compliance with The Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill which requires gender quotas to be met within the appointment of all politicians, especially within municipalities (Hills, 2015:155). Hassim (2014:89) notes that the African National Congress (ANC) should ensure support for gender equality within their manifestos as women

demanded more representation within the political party in the early 1990s. Gender equality quotas need to be supported and implemented within political parties' manifestos, however, in South Africa, neither quotas nor reserved seats were written into the constitution, but the ANC did enact a voluntary quota for women for national electoral lists which highlighted a move towards increasing the number of women on other party lists (Hassim, 2014:89).

Within the local sphere of government, however, the number of seats for women was only legislated in 2000 but did not include a 50% women quota, whereas multiple other political parties did not include any relevant gender equality within their manifestos, thus highlighting the need for all political parties to entrench gender equality quotas, gender mainstreaming and, women empowerment within their manifestos to enhance support for gender equality within municipalities with regards to female municipal mayors and councillors since, as it stands, political party manifestos lack support towards gender equality quotas for women within local political appointments (Hills, 2015:157).

According to the Public Service Commission (PSC) (2006: 17) report, the Employment Equity Act of 1998 is a further tool provided to enhance gender equality in political appointments in South African municipalities. To give more mechanisms for promoting action and gender equity in all workplaces across the nation, the Employment Equity Act of 1998 was introduced. The purpose of this Act (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1998; PSC, 2006) is to achieve equality in the workplace by promoting and encouraging equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination and the implementation of affirmative measures to address the disadvantages in employment experience by designated groups, to ensure equitable representation in all workplace categories and levels of the labor force of work (PSC, 2006).

According to the PSC (2006:17) affirmative action policies are intended to guarantee that eligible individuals from certain groups are given the same chances and are fairly represented in all job categories and levels. These measures must also be intended to increase diversity in the workplace based on the equal treatment and respect of all individuals, to identify and eliminate employment barriers, such as unfair discrimination that disproportionately affects women, to make reasonable accommodations for women, to create equal opportunities for everyone and to develop everyone, particularly women, and to implement training programs that are appropriate for their needs.

According to Matoane (2015:37) significant assistance is needed to enable women who are impacted by development interventions a voice to influence the goals, priorities, and methods of development. It is crucial that these legal changes are implemented in a way that enables women to actively participate, in a way that they can oversee, and in a way that enables them to hold decision-makers responsible for their decisions because otherwise, the participation of women in other spheres of life may be disregarded or not implemented. To make local government policy changes relevant, identify the goals of gender transformation, identify strategies and priorities, and allow for future accountability and monitoring, it is also important to include and consult with women in the decision-making processes of local government and in leadership positions.

4. CONCLUSION

The article recommends that there is a need to implement gender mainstreaming in governance processes. According to Ginige and Haigh (2009:47) regardless of status, all government personnel need to have a sound conceptual understanding of notions, concepts and issues regarding gender mainstreaming. This is especially applicable to people working in extremely critical ministries that establish national policy. Knowing the reality of gender mainstreaming as a strategy increases the likelihood that decision-makers will abandon the narrow emphasis on women, as suggested by Shefer (2008:170). Gender mainstreaming should be implemented since it is a vital part of good governance for the public sector to guarantee that institutions, their policies, and programs reflect the needs and interests of all employees and equally divide rewards between men and women, as further highlighted by Ginige and Haigh (2009:47). Following the opinions of Mokhele (2015:15) it is important to consider that to achieve gender equality, all sexes must participate. Though inclusiveness of policies does not actually happen in a vacuum, mainstreaming of gender needs to be advocated at all levels of government. Numerous institutions have organisational structures that devalue women and their

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interests, and this is utterly wrong. It is therefore suggested by Kornegay (2000; Mwashita, Zungu & Abrahams, 2020) that to increase the representation of women in government at all levels, gender mainstreaming should be made necessary for all organisations within the government.

There is also a need to implement the Gender Policy Framework for Local Government. According to Kornegay (2000; Mwashita et al., 2020) In addition to addressing women's underrepresentation and involvement in local governance in South African municipalities, efforts have been undertaken to advance gender equality in local development planning and service delivery. The Department of Provincial and Local Governance (DPLG) launched its Gender Policy Framework for Local Government in order to provide guidance and support to the sector around gender mainstreaming and women empowerment (DPLG, 2019:2). According to Baiocchi (2016:41) this policy framework outlines a comprehensive system for managing gender issues, including a women's caucus to empower female council members and a gender equality committee, also at the council level, to offer political supervision of municipal gender mainstreaming practices. Employees at all three tiers of government—national, provincial, and local—need to be made aware of the importance of gender mainstreaming and other principles, as well as gender equality. This suggestion is substantiated by Nhlapo (2020: 2016) who stated that a clear conceptual understanding of gender concepts and gender mainstreaming is essential for all government employees at all levels, especially in key departments that determine national policy. When decision makers understand the practicalities of gender mainstreaming as a strategy, they are much more likely to abandon the narrow focus on women.

Monitoring, assessment, and reporting of the procedures carried out by the Commission for Gender Equality are required. In accordance with Chapter 9 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) is an independent statutory authority. The Commission for Gender Equality's purpose is to advance, safeguard, maintain, and assess gender equality through analysis, public outreach, the formulation of legislation, effective oversight, and legal action. According to Ginige and Haigh (2009:74) the CGE's main duties include keeping an eye on and evaluating government, private sector, and other organizations' policies and practices to ensure that they advance and protect gender equality, public education, and information. It also reviews current and upcoming legislation from a gender perspective, examines inequality, commissions research, and makes recommendations to parliament or other authorities. It also investigates complaints on any gender-related issues. It is important to make sure that the Municipal Structures Act No. 117 of 1998 is being followed. The Municipal Structures Act No. 117 of 1998 mandates local councils provide equal representation of women in any ward committees they decide to establish. The Act also pushes political parties to have a woman running for every position on their party's alternate list. The Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 mandates that political parties take aggressive steps to increase the representation of women.

It is important that local government promote gender mainstreaming in political decision-making portfolios. This can be achieved by offering civic education in schools preparing female learners to understand varied aspects of politics; municipalities can organise workshops to aware female community members regarding municipal political structures and processes; by establishing gender focal points to discuss gender-related matters in the municipalities; by implementing gender-based policies and programmes; by providing a quota to women representation in local political parties; by funding the campaigns promoting women representation in local political structures; to state a few.

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