

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Gender and local governance: Women's participation in electoral politics, leadership positions, and decision-making process at local governments of Bench-Maji and Kaffa zones of southwest Ethiopia

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Abstract

The representation of women in administrative positions and local legislature in Ethiopia is very low. The average percentage of women in leadership positions and legislatures in the study area is 14.2% and 33.8% respectively. This study seeks to understand barriers to women's participation in politics at the local government level in Ethiopia. To achieve this, cross-sectional research approach and probability sampling technique was used; accordingly, 399 sample households were selected. Quantitative data was gathered through a household survey questionnaire, and complimentary qualitative information was collected via key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics whilst thematic analysis technique was used to deal with the qualitative data. The study highlights the prevalence of negative views on the capacity of women in leadership roles which adversely affects women's ability to distinguish and manage societal affairs. The cumulative effect resulted in the thinking of women's position in governmental offices at the lower level. The barrier that female political aspirants emphasised were: lack of experience, lack of confidence, low level of educational status, and domestic and societal responsibilities. Thus, the research recommends the need for strengthening women's associations and civil society groups and networks that focus on local governance and citizen participation.

Keywords: governance, election, local government, politics, women, participation

Introduction

In contemporary politics, gender equality and women's access to participation in politics, leadership positions, and decision-making process have become hot issues deriving the interest of both women and men (UN Women, 2021). These terms are also frequently used by the media, Governmental Organizations (GOs), and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Local authorities are increasingly speaking about gender equality as basic conditions for democratic, inclusive, and effective local government. UN Women (2014) argue that equal participation of women and men in decision-making is needed to

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strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning.

For local governance to be democratic, inclusive, and effective, women have to involve in the process of decision making. Governance as Gisselquist (2012) noted, is a process of governing which has mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations, and mediate their differences. Therefore, with this understanding, it is important to mainstream gender issues. Women as citizens are expected to take part in the governance process. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 21 sub-article 1 also noted that, everyone has the right to take part in the Government of his/her country (United Nations, 2015). Thus, the participation of women in governmental and various public affairs be it at national or local levels is a right that cannot be denied in democratic and inclusive governance.

However, in reality, as a result of various issues, gender inequality prevails in the governance process all over the world, but with a high degree in developing countries. In support of this, the Ethiopian Society of Population Studies (2008) states that the issue of gender inequality can be considered a universal feature of developing countries. But, the prevailing reality in the developing countries necessitate women's participation in the governance process. This is because there is a universal consensus on the importance of women's participation in governance, for even human resource development, poverty alleviation, and good governance. Another argument that necessitates women's participation is the fact that the process of governance and nations cannot reach their full human potential without including women that constitute nearly half of the world's population. (Jabeen & Jadoon, 2009) and (Yimenu, 2016). It is widely believed that women and men's equal participation at all levels of governance is important for both contribute to the local as well as national economy in various capacities as they possess distinct knowledge and skills that correspond to their roles (ILO, 2010). Cognizant to this, member states of UN in the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, pledged to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic, and public life (United Nations, 2015).

Accordingly, women's participation in the local government has to be encouraged and ensured more critically as women know well their communities and the opportunities and challenges that are faced. Besides, the participation of women in local governance structures is often easier to achieve than participation at the national level, as eligibility criteria are less stringent (ILO, 2010) and (Yimenu, 2016). In addition, since local government is the closest body to the women's sphere of life, participation in local governance can be the first level that women can break into and as such, it may serve as a Launchpad to national politics, by developing capacities and gaining experiences at the local level.

In a nutshell, women's participation in electoral politics, leadership positions, and decision-making process is vital to help them articulate their interests, negotiate their differences and contribute their share for the democratization and economic development of the nation, in particular, and the world at large (Yimenu, 2016). Considering these advantages, despite the obvious challenges and limitations, the Ethiopian government like the governments of the rest of the world is striving to ensure women's participation in the governance process at all levels of government. However, despite the efforts invested by the Ethiopian government, challenges are still there that hurdle the participation of women in elections, leadership positions, and the decision-making process from local to

national levels. Thus, women both in rural and urban areas of Bench-Maji and Kaffa Zones of Ethiopia are not of exceptions. Bench-Maji and Kaffa Zones are found in South West People Regional state of Ethiopia. This research is thus, aimed at investigating women's participation in local electoral politics, leadership positions, and decision-making process and the challenges they encounter.

Statement of the Problem

Today, the political participation of women and gender equality at the local and national government level have become critical political agenda in Ethiopia. Indeed, Ethiopia is a member of significant international conventions concerning women's rights. Meaza (2009) cited in Endale (2014) notes Ethiopia has endorsed all major human rights treaties including the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which calls for equal participation of women in public decision making, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action (BDPA), which requires governments to attain a 30% benchmark for women's representation in all public decision making positions. This hints that there is an attempt in the Ethiopian politics to ensure women's equal participation in leadership positions and decision-making process at national level.

Though, there is slow progress in the participation of women in national politics, still the figure is far away from what is expected and when we see the figure at the local level, it becomes worse. The 2021 Women in Politics Map of Ethiopia depicted that women constitute about 36.36% of the ministerial (executive) positions and 212 out of 547 or 38.8% of the seats in the parliament (UN Women, 2021). Thus, there is a gap in meeting gender equality, as women constitute almost 50% of the total population in Ethiopia. Despite such a low participation of women in politics, leadership positions, and decision-making processes, there are little researches done in assessing the variables that hurdle women's participation, especially at the local level of government offices. The research works of Endale (2014) and Miressa (2014) are among the research works conducted in the subject. Endale (2014) notes that the Organizational structures, negative attitudes towards women's participation, and the existing expectations of traditional and cultural roles for women are some of the constraints attributed to the lack of women's representation and participation in leadership and decision-making positions of Bedele town. On the other side, to Miressa (2014), less freedom attributed to family responsibility, gender-based discrimination, and level of education are reasons for the underrepresentation of women in leadership and decision-making positions in some woredas of Bench-Maji Zone.

In general, prior studies documented on women and local governance are few and confined to women's participation in leadership and decision-making positions. They are also short of addressing their participation in electoral politics and decision-making processes. In this study, for a better understanding of the existing experience, an attempt is made to investigate challenges towards womens' participation in electoral politics, leadership positions, and decision-making processes of their locality. By doing so, the study aims at examining the gender inequality and the challenges of women's participation in the process of local governance in Bench-Maji and Kaffa Zones of South West Ethiopia. Furthermore, it sheds light on societal view on women's capacity to participate in the power structure of their local government, and hopes to contribute it share in filling the knowledge gap.

To this end the following research questions are addressed in the study;

- 1) How do the societies in the study area value women's political participation and their capacity to participate in the power structure of their local government.
- 2) What does the current status and dimension of women's participation in electoral politics, leadership positions, and decision-making process look like in Bench-Maji and Kaffa Zones?
- 3) What are the factors that hurdle the participation of women in local governance of the study areas?

Methodology

Research Design

The research followed a cross-sectional research approach. According to Singh (2006), the cross-sectional approach is concerned with the information of any aspect of the phenomenon in the existing situation. This research approach is best suited to studies aimed at finding out the prevalence of a phenomenon, situation, problem, attitude or issue, by taking a cross-section of the population (Kumar, 1999). In the tent of this approach, we used descriptive design because the aim of the research was to examine the experience of women's participation in local governance. In its nature, descriptive research design is concerned with practices that prevail, beliefs, points of view or attitudes that are held, a process that are going on, influences that are being felt, and trends that are developing (Koul, 2005). Besides it attempts to determine the status of the phenomenon under investigation (Singh, 2006) and (Kothari, 2004). Adhered to the principle of the design, we are intended to describe and determine the empirical participation of women in political issues in their locality.

Sample Technique and Sample Size

The probability sampling technique is used to pick up research participants. The researchers have chosen this sampling design because in this design every item of the universe has an equal chance of inclusion in the sample (Kothari, 2004). In doing so because of the geographic size of the research areas, three stages random sampling technique is employed. The first two Zones from southwest Ethiopia were randomly selected; these are Bench-Maji and Kaffa. Secondly, one town administration namely Mizan-Aman, and six districts namely Shea-Bench, Debub-Bench, Gimbo, Chena, Bita, and Menit-Goldya were selected by using simple random sampling technique. At the third stage, due to lack of a list of house number in all selected local governments, a convenience sampling technique was used and 399 sample households were surveyed from the total 163,545 households. Here, in determining sample size; Yemane's sampling formula was used.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Key informants were also purposely selected. For focus group discussion (FGD) about 140 discussants were selected purposely. The selection of individuals for the discussion was based on gender classification. The FGD was held in seven (7) selected research areas such as Mizan-Aman town administration, Shea-Bench, Debub-Bench, Menit-Goldiya, Chena, Gimbo, and Bita districts and each research area constitutes two groups of FGD discussants which are grouped based on gender classification. Thus having 10 participants being included in one group, one study area hosted $2 \times 10 = 20$ discussants; this means the study had a total of 140 participants in all discussions groups.

Data Collection Procedure

Types and Sources of Data

Both primary and secondary data were collected. The primary sources of the data are research participants who were selected from the population, and complimentary secondary data sources were government reports, journal articles, and data from website.

Data Collection Instruments

Household Survey Questionnaire

The Household Survey Questionnaire was mainly composed of closed-ended questions with some open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions were mainly presented as 'Yes' or 'No' questions with some 5 point likert scale questions. The questionnaire was focused on the view of the society on women's political participation, capacity in power structure and leadership positions, and challenges they encounter.

Interview

Due to its advantage, semi-structured interview was employed. This is because semi-structured interview helps to follow uniform interviewing procedure which can be guided by interview schedule and the information obtained can easily be compared (Dawson, 2002). As a result, an interview schedule was prepared, and it has been administered accordingly. The objective of the interview was to get the whole experience of women with regards to participation in leadership positions, decision-making process, and elections (both as a candidate and electorate) and factors that hurdle their participation in the overall local governance.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

FGD was employed to substantiate data gathered through a questionnaire and interview. It was organized in a way that includes issues that were not included and addressed through questionnaires and interviews. In some aspects, it also includes the same issues with a questionnaire and interview intending to get detailed data on points that need further information. In this regard, the FGD theme was focused on women's capacity on power structure and challenges they encounter.

Document Review

The researchers have also collected secondary data from different documented sources such as minutes, government records or publications, earlier researches, mass media, and websites.

Ethical Consideration

This study involved different stakeholders whose participation were significant to achieve the objective of the research. Each category of stakeholders in a research activity may have different interests, perspectives, purposes, aims, and motivations that could affect the way that research activity is carried out and the way results are communicated and used. Because of this, it is important to ensure that research is not affected by the self-interest of any party and is not carried out in a way that harms any party (Kumar, 1999). As a result, the researchers have set and pursued the following code of ethics.

1. The research participants were asked for their willingness. Based on their permission, they were informed with the type of information sought from them, and the reason for their participation;
2. The information given by respondents kept indistinctive;
3. Considering COVID 19 pandemic, researchers have adhered to precaution techniques;
4. Letter of confirmation for conducting the research was presented for respondents.

Data Analysis Procedures and Interpretation

The researchers carefully dealt with data. This is because as Marczyk, Dematteo, and Festinge (2005), pointed 'data represent the fruit of researchers' labor because they provide the information that will ultimately allow them to describe phenomena, predict events, identify and quantify differences between conditions, and establish the effectiveness of interventions.

Primarily the collected data was screened intending to ascertain its accuracy and completeness. In this regard, the data were carefully checked whether the required responses are given in appropriate manner, and held complete and necessary information or not. After screening the collected data, the next step was constructing a database. According to Marczyk, Dematteo, and Festinge (2005), once data are screened and all corrections are made, the data should be entered into a well-structured database. This helps the researcher to determine which variable needs to be entered and how it will be ordered. In line with this activity, specific codes were entered into a database. For this particular research, SPSS V23 (Statistical package for social science) has been utilized to process the quantitative data and while feeding the database, the researchers performed it twice.

Considering the type of research and the research objectives, descriptive statistics were employed to statistically analyze data. The chief objective of descriptive statistics is to accurately describe distributions of certain variables within a specific data set (Marczyk, Dematteo, and Festinge, 2005). Therefore, based on descriptive statistics, data were analyzed using frequency distribution and percentage. Concerning qualitative data, the-

matic analysis was used. To ensure the validity of the study, data was triangulated.

Result and Discussion

Society's view on women's political participation

Table 1: Respondents' view on women right to political participation, contribution on decision-making, and value of women participation in political activities

Items	Respondents	Yes		No		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
Women have equal right to participate in politics and public affairs	Male	231	57.9%	3	0.75%	234	58.6%
	Female	164	41.1%	1	0.25%	165	41.4%
	Total	395	99%	4	1%	399	100%
Women can have positive contribution on decision if they participate	Male	209	52.4%	25	6.2	234	58.6%
	Female	146	36.6%	19	4.8%	165	41.4%
	Total	355	89%	44	11%	399	100%
Women participation in political activities of your locality is valuable as that of men	Male	196	49.1%	38	9.5%	234	58.6%
	Female	154	38.6%	11	2.8%	165	41.4%
	Total	350	87.7%	49	12.3%	399	100%

Source: Household survey result, 2020

The data in the table 1 above portray that, almost all participants of the research that means about 395 (99%) of participants reported yes to the view that women have equal rights to participate in politics and public affairs as of their men counterparts. This is in agreement with UDHRs (1948) where article 21 sub-article 1 states everyone has the right to take part in the Government of his/her country. Concerning women's contribution in decision-making, majority of respondents about 355 (89%) reported yes to the view that women can have a positive contribution to decision-making if they participate. In the questionnaire, respondents were also asked to reveal their views regarding the value of women's participation in the political activities of their locality. Accordingly, the majority of respondents, about 350 (87.7%), reported yes to it. It is as valuable as of men's. Literature also reveals the importance and value of women's participation in governance. According to the UN (1995), achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making is needed to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning. In agreement with this, Miressa, (2014) argue for women equally participation and representation in decision-making positions so as to strengthen the development of democracy in Ethiopia. Thus, the study reveals the public in the study area knows that women have the right to participate in politics as men, and their participation can have a positive contribution in decision-making and also their participation is believed to be valuable as of men's participation. The research finding of Yimenu, (2016) also confirmed that there is no knowledge gap regarding the right of women political participation and its importance in Ethiopia. In conclusion, based on the finding there is no deviation in the study area from the international consensus concerning the value of women's participation in the decision-making process and politics.

Table 2: Respondents knowledge on women candidates representing parties in elections

		Have you ever known women candidates representing parties for elections in the past elections in your locality?				Total	
		Yes		No			
Respondents		F	%	F	%	F	%
gender	Male	232	58.1%	2	0.5%	234	58.6%
	Female	161	40.4	4	1.0%	165	41.4%
Total		393	98.5	6	1.5%	399	100%

Source: *Household survey result, 2020*

As the data have shown in table 2, majorities of research participants, which accounts 393 (98.5%) male and female participants, were reported to have known women candidates representing parties for election in the past elections of their locality. Thus, based on the data, it can be inferred that women have participated in the election as a candidate representing either the ruling party or opposing parties.

Table 3: Respondents report on the type of party that women represented as a candidate in the past elections of their locality

		Which party do women mostly represented in the election?				Total	
		Ruling party		Opposition party			
Respondents		F	%	F	%	F	%
gender	Male	193	49.1%	39	9.923%	232	59.03%
	Female	161	40.97%	0	0	161	40.97%
Total		354	90.07%	39	9.92%	393	100%

Source: *Household survey result, 2020*

Research participants who knew women representing parties as a candidate in the past elections were asked to identify in which party that women mostly presented as a candidate. Accordingly, as the data in table 3 portrays, the majority of respondents, about 354 (90.07%) of male and female participants, reported that the ruling party was the party in which women were largely represented as a candidate. In agreement with this, the data obtained from the key informant interviews tell that majority of women do not have the zeal to join opposition parties and also opposition parties were not strong enough in supporting and encouraging women to join them. Due to these reasons especially at the local level, the number of women candidates representing opposition parties was low.

The view of the society about women's capacity in the power structure and leadership positions of their local government

Table 4: Respondents view on women capacity to know and manage society's affairs properly

		Do you believe that women as their counter partners men know and manage society's affairs properly?				Total	
		Yes		No			
Respondents		F	%	F	%	F	%
gender	Male	123	30.82%	111	27.8%	234	58.6%
	Female	29	7.27%	136	34.1%	165	41.4%
Total		152	38.09%	247	61.9%	399	100%

Source: Household survey result, 2020

The data in Table 4 depicts that, about 247 (61.9%) which means 111 (27.8%) and 136 (34.1%) of male and female research participants respectively reported that they do not believe that women as their counter men know and manage the society's affairs properly. However, the remaining 152 (38.09%) participants were reported yes to the view that women as their counter partner men able to know and manage society's affairs properly. Compared to men a large number of women respondents reported 'No' to the view that women as their counter partner men can know and manage society's affairs properly. Due to these reasons, women in the study area consider politics as men's business.

Mesfin (2004) in his study also concluded that Ethiopian women tend to perceive politics as a man's world. UN Division for the Advancement of Women, (2005) also reported that in Ethiopia women are less likely to present themselves in electoral politics; this is because they see themselves as lacking the skills necessary to perform well in politics. According to key informants and FGD discussants (2020), women themselves do not believe in their capacity when they are assigned a certain kind of responsibility most of the time. As one of the key informants narrated; "*women when they are assigned tasks independently, they request the office to add one or more men to accompany them, unless and otherwise, they believe that, they will face difficulty in handling the issue* (Key informant, 2020)."

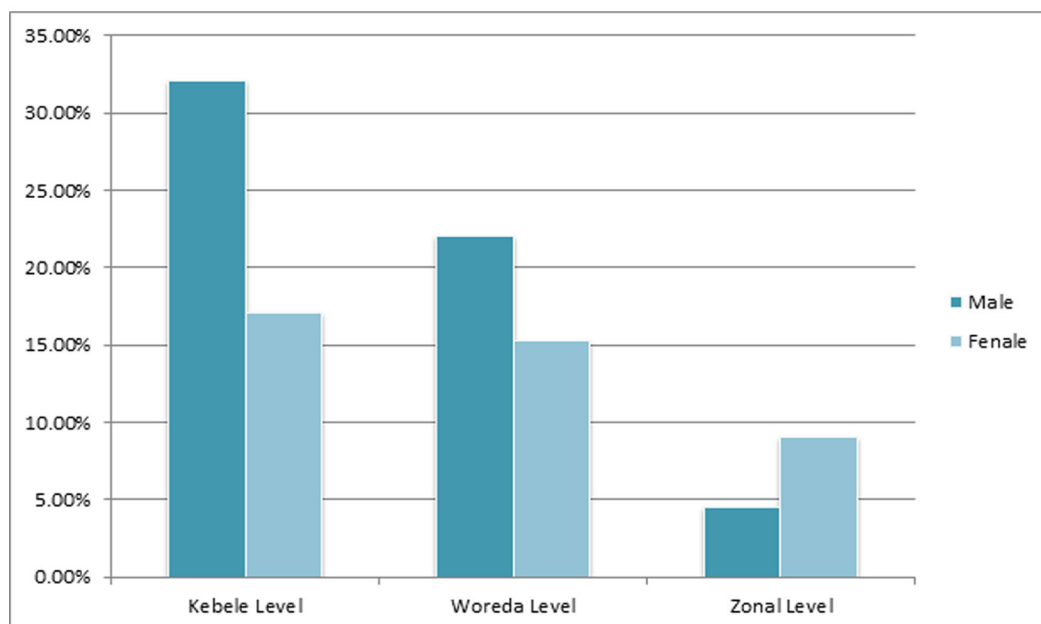


Figure 1: Respondents view regarding the level of government where women can fit more
Source: Household survey result, 2020

Concerning the capacity of women in the power structure, the data in figure 1 suggest that women are more fit to positions and responsibilities at kebele and woreda level governments. About 196 (49.12%) male and 149 (37.35%) female respondents responded that women fit the positions and responsibilities at kebele and woreda levels; whereas only 54 (13.5%) of male and female respondents suggested zonal level positions and responsibilities. Thus, the public in the study area believes that women are more fit to the lower level of local government positions and responsibilities. Respondents who reported that women are fit to lower levels of governmental positions (kebele and woreda) forwarded women's lack of experience, confidence, low level of educational status, and domestic and societal responsibilities as reasons.

Women's participation in leadership positions

Table 5: Women's in Ministerial positions in selected African states

Country	Total number of Ministers	Number of Women ministers	Percentage of women ministers
Rwanda	31	17	54.8%
South Africa	29	14	48.3%
Mozambique	22	10	45.5%
Namibia	23	9	39.1%
Burundi	16	6	37.5%
Ethiopia	22	8	36.36%
Madagascar	23	8	34.85
Uganda	29	10	34.5%

Source: Women in Politics Map, IPU, World Politic 2021

Women's equal participation and leadership in politics and public life are believed to be indispensable in achieving sustainable development goals by 2030 (UN Women, 2021). However, data shows that women are underrepresented at all levels of decision-making worldwide, and achieving gender parity in political life is found to be difficult. Across the world, only 21% of government ministers were women, with only 14 countries have achieved 50% or more women in cabinets. Therefore, based on the data, with the present pace of progress gender parity in ministerial positions will not be achieved before 2077 (UN Women, 2021).

Coming to Africa according to the data depicted in table 5, though women constitute half of Africa's population (Countrymeters, 2021) and (Worldometer, 2021) their representation in leadership positions was found low. In Africa, the highest number of women in ministerial positions is seen in Rwanda, South Africa, and Mozambique where 17 (54.8%), 14 (48.3%), and 10 (45.5%) of ministerial positions are held by women ministers respectively. In the remaining countries Namibia, Burundi, Ethiopia, Madagascar, and Uganda women constitute 9 (39.1%), 6 (37.5%), 8 (36.36%), 8 (34.85%), and 10 (34.5%) respectively. Though it is observed slow progress in the representation of women in higher leadership positions, there is still a gap except for one state in Africa in meeting the required standard set by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Table 6: Women in leadership positions in the local government of the study area

No.	Local government	Total administrative positions	Positions held by women leaders	Percentage of women leaders
1	Mizan-Amana Town Administration	57	8	14.03%
2	Shea-Bench District	41	8	19.51%
3	Dehub-Bench District	62	9	14.51%
4	Menit-Goldiya District	58	8	13.79%
5	Chena District	60	8	13.33%
6	Gimbo District	60	8	13.33%
7	Bitu District	63	7	11.11%

Source: District and town administrative offices, 2021

The data in table 6 suggested a very low representation of women in administrative positions. As seen on the table about 8 (14.03%), 8 (19.51%), 9 (14.51%), 8 (13.79%), 8 (13.33%), 8 (13.33%), and 7 (11.11%) of administrative positions are held by women administrators in Mizan-Amana Town Administration, Shea-Bench District, Dehub-Bench district, Menit-Goldiya District, Chena District, and Bitu District respectively. The average percentage of women in leadership positions for the study area is 14.2%. Therefore, according to the result of the study, the representation of women in administrative positions is very low, and the leadership role is male-dominated. This is affirmed by the research result of Endale (2014), where women found to hold a very low share in decision-making positions in Bedele Town, Ethiopia. Yimenu (2016) also argued that, due to low representation, women are marginalized from making decisions at all levels of government in Ethiopia.

According to the data obtained from the key informants (2020), the main criteria for the appointment or selection of leaders into the leadership positions are: educational back-

ground, experience, performance in previous leadership positions or careers, and commitment. In light of these criteria, women in the study area are found to be less competitive with men. Even the appointment of those who fit as per the criteria was often confined in the positions of Women's affairs, Culture and Tourism, and other social affairs positions. In agreement with this UN Women (2021) affirmed that the most commonly held executive positions by women leaders are Women affairs or Gender equality, Children and Youth, Social Affairs, Environment, Natural Resource and Energy, and Vocational Training.

Table 7: Women in national legislature in selected African States

	Lower House			Upper House (Senate)		
	Total Seat	Number of Women member	Percentage	Total Seat	Number of Women member	Percentage
Rwanda	80	49	61.3%	26	10	38.5%
South Africa	397	182	45.8%	53	22	41.3%
Namibia	104	46	44.2%	42	6	14.3%
Senegal	165	71	43.0%	-	-	-
Mozambique	250	106	42.4%	-	-	-
Ethiopia	547	212	38.8%	153	49	32.0%
Burundi	123	47	38.2%	39	16	41.0%
Cameroon	180	61	33.9%	100	26	26.0%
Zimbabwe	270	86	31.9%	80	35	43.8%
South Sudan	383	109	28.5%	50	6	12.0%
Egypt	591	162	27.4%	300	40	13.3%
Algeria	462	120	26.0%	141	8	5.7%
Somalia	275	67	24.4%	54	13	24.1%

Source: Women in Politics Map, IPU, 2021

Note: IPU: Inter-parliamentary Union

In the world as of January 1, 2021, only 25% of all national parliamentarians are women, which is more than twofold of the 1995 figure which was 11%. Accordingly, only four countries have 50% or more women in parliament in single or lower houses; Rwanda (61%), Cuba (53%), Bolivia (53%), and the United Arab Emirates (50%). Therefore, at the current rate of progress, gender parity in national legislative bodies will not be achieved before 2063 (UN Women, 2021). Specific to Africa only Rwanda has more than 50% women in parliament. Furthermore, only 4 countries in Africa have above 40% women in parliament: South Africa (45.8%), Namibia (44.2%), Senegal (43.0%), and Mozambique (42.4%). Based on the data Ethiopia only achieved 38.8% women in parliament which is distant from the goal set in Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Table 8: Women's in the local legislature

No.	Name of the local government	Total seat	Number of women councilors	Percentage of women councilors
1	Mizan-Amana Town Administration Council	60	20	33.33%
2	Shea-Bench District Council	65	12	18.46%
3	Debub-Bench District Council	90	32	35.55%
4	Menit-Goldiya District Council	57	17	29.82%
5	Chena District Council	63	26	41.3%
6	Gimbo District Council	105	40	38.09%
7	Bitu District Council	78	31	39.74%

Source: *District and town councils, 2021*

The data in table 8 suggested that women's representation in council is also below the required standard. As seen in the table, only one district (Chena District Council) achieved above 40% women's representation in local government legislation. The remaining Mizan-Aman Town Administration, Shea-Bench District, Debub-Bench District, Menit-Goldiya District, Gimbo District, and Bitu District local governments constitute 20 (33.33%), 12 (18.46%), 32 (35.55%), 17 (29.82%), 40 (38.09%), and 31 (39.74%) women representatives respectively. The average percentage of women representatives in local government legislature for the study area was found to be 33.75%. At the national level as of September 2021, 212 of 547 (38.8%) seats in the Federal Legislature are held by women. However, according to the data both at local government and national government legislatures, the gender parity is yet not achieved.

The current status and dimension of women's participation in electoral politics and the decision-making process in their local government

Table 9: Participation of respondents in local elections in the near past

Items	Respondents	Yes		No		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
Have you participated in elections in the near past?	Male	127	31.83%	107	26.8%	234	58.6%
	Female	84	21.05%	81	20.3%	165	41.4%
	Total	211	52.88%	188	47.1%	399	100%
In which way did you participate in near past elections?		Candidate		Voter		Total	
			%	F	%	F	%
	Male	19	9%	108	51.2%	127	60.2%
	Female	5	2.37%	79	37.4%	84	39.8%
	Total		11.37%	187	88.6%	211	100%

Source: *Household survey result, 2020*

Concerning citizens' participation in the election, the data in table 9 illustrated that about 52.88% of male and female respondents participated in local elections. This shows that people in study areas are actively participating in elections. Thus it is possible to conclude that public participation in elections is high. Those who were participated in the election were asked to indicate whether their participation was as a candidate or a voter. Accordingly 24 (11.37%) of research participants that means 19 (9%) and 5 (2.37%) of male and female respectively were reported their participation as a candidate. The remaining majorities about 187 (88.6%) of male and female respondents have reported their participation as a voter.

Table 10: Participation of women in pre-election campaigns

Respondents		Rate the participation of women in pre-election campaigns in your locality								Total	
		Very High		High		Moderate		Low			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Gender	Male	16	4%	18	4.51%	76	19.05%	124	31.08%	234	58.6%
	Female	14	3.5%	23	5.76%	39	9.77%	89	22.3%	165	41.4%
Total		30	7.5%	41	10.27%	115	28.82%	213	53.4%	399	100%

Source: *Household survey result, 2020*

The data in table 10 illustrated a low participation of women in pre-election campaigns. This means about 213 (53.4%) and 115 (28.82%) of male and female respondents reported low and moderate respectively concerning women participation in the pre-election campaign in their locality. The remaining 41 (10.27%) and 30 (7.5%) of male and female

research participants were reported high and very high regarding the participation of women in the pre-election campaign. Based on the data, it can, therefore, be concluded that women's participation in the pre-election campaign in their locality is low. According to key informants and FGD discussants (2021), women candidates of either the ruling or opposition party do not come to the front and mobilize supporters for their election. They fear the challenges ahead and prefer to withdraw from candidacy. The interview given to UN Women upon the training provided to women candidates running for Federal Parliament and Regional Council levels in the 6th national election of Ethiopia reveals, women candidates lack experience, and they believe that they would not be elected because of their gender. One of the candidates who were participated in the election said that "Since I do not have much experience in politics, I was afraid of the challenges and obstacles of becoming a political candidate and people not wanting to vote for me only because of my gender" (UN Women, 2021).

Table 11: Women access to election-related information

Respondents		Do you think that women have equal access to information as men regarding				Total	
		Yes		No			
		F	%	F	%	F	%
Gender	Male	93	23.3%	141	35.34%	234	58.6%
	Female	67	16.8%	98	24.56%	165	41.4%
Total		160	40.1%	239	59.9%	399	100%

Source: Household survey result, 2020

The data in table 11 indicated that women are not getting equal access to information as men regarding elections and different political activities. As seen on the table, majority of research participants that means about 239 (59.9%) of males and females reported 'No' to the view that women have equal access to information with men about the election and different political activities. However, the remaining 160 (40.1%) participants reported 'Yes'. Thus, according to the data, it can be concluded that women have no equal practical access to information regarding elections and different political issues in their locality. However, the right to access information is a human right enshrined in the UDHRs (Neuman, 2016). It allows the citizens to seek out and obtain information held by governments that perform public duties. But in practice, women are not getting equal access to information as to their fellow men. Yimenu (2016) also noted that, in local governments of Ethiopia women lack access to sufficient information concerning the background and political platform of the candidates in election. In a broader perspective literature also ascertains the result of this study that Women are not able to access information with the same frequency, ease, and rate of success as men (CARTER CENTER, 2016).

Factors that hurdle the participation of women in local governance

Table 13: Public view on women's existing participation in politics

Respondents	Do you believe that women have equal participation and representation with men in the politics in your locality?				Total	
	Yes		No			
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Male	90	22.55%	144	36.1%	234	58.6%
Female	50	12.53%	115	28.8%	165	41.4%
Total	140	35.1%	259	64.9%	399	100%

Source: Household survey result, 2020

The data in table 13 shows that women's participation and representation in politics is low. About 259 (64.9%) of male and female research participants reported 'No' to the view that women have equal participation and representation with men in local politics. Whereas, the remaining 140 (35.1%) of male and female research participants reported 'Yes'. The information obtained through interviews and FGD also supported this finding. According to the interview and FGD result, though the society believed that women have equal rights with men and their participation is important, in reality the participation and representation of women in politics is low, and it is male-dominated. Similarly, UN Women (2021) labeled the political landscape of Ethiopia as a male-dominated political landscape. Going deep, the study found out that, limited access to information, domestic routine activities (raring children and managing the household), low educational status, and cultural influence are profound reasons for low participation and representation of women in politics.

From the cultural perspective as it was raised by FGD discussants, there is a customary saying in Amharic that stands against women's participation "Set wede guada wend wede meda" meaning "let women be in the kitchen, but men to the field". Similarly, the study made by International IDEA (2021) identified proverbs the society uses to discourage women's public appearance in decision-making. Some of these are "Set wode majet wond wode segenet" meaning "let women to be in their kitchen but men to the offices"; "set btawk bewond yalk" meaning "No matter what a woman knows, it is by a man a thing is finished". Lack of confidence, absence of equal opportunity for participation, underestimating of their participation by women themselves, considering themselves as unfit to political activities especially party politics, lack of interest to go out and participate, burden of social responsibility, underestimation of women's capacity and ability to hold leadership positions by societies, political dominance or superiority of men, discrimination, husbands denial to encourage their wives to take part in politics are major variables that hinder the political participation and representation of women in the study area.

Though they considered equal and their participation is theoretically valued, it is not practically implemented. There is a limitation from the local governments in working to practically enhance women's participation in local governance. United Nations Women (2014) also stated that the majority of women in Ethiopia have limited access to training and education in leadership and they continue to face discrimination towards women in leadership. Moreover, women face difficulties in fully participating as equals in leadership and decision-making processes. Due to this reason, unlike the importance of women's participation as argued in literature United Nations (2015), Abdulmelik & Belay (2019),

United Nations (1995), and Vyas-Doorgapersad (2014), women's participation in local governance was found to be low in the study area.

Prior research findings in Africa also affirmed the reality in the study area. The study made by Vyas-Doorgapersad (2014) showed that there is a lack of women's participation in political decision-making, especially at the local government level. The study reveals a lack of skills, capacities, household responsibilities, societal pressure, and cultural beliefs as profound factors for the low participation of women in politics. In addition patriarchy, male domination, and political parties, and the culture of the formal political structure are essential determinants of women's participation (Godwin, 2013). Due to this reason, the representation of women in local authority leadership positions in Africa is limited (Kinuthia-Njenga, 2010).

Conclusion

As learned from previous studies, international documents, and national gender policies, women's participation in politics, in decision-making process, and leadership positions is essential to ensure sustainable development and democratic governance. Hence, women's right to political participation and public affairs is a universal right enshrined in the UDHRs. In line with this idea, this study revealed that there is no knowledge gap with regard to the right of women in political participation. Women's participation is believed to have a positive contribution to decision-making and their participation is considered valuable as of men. However, the electoral participation of women is largely limited to vote casting, and they found to be to the margin concerning participation as candidacy. The study also found out that women have no equal practical access to information regarding elections and different political issues in their locality.

It is believed that public understanding and view on women's capacity in knowing and managing a societal affair is a determinant factor for women's practical representation and participation in leadership positions and decision-making process. The study highlights a prevalence of negative views on the capacity of women in leadership roles. This adversely affects women's capacity to know and managing societal affairs. Due to these reasons, women tend to believe politics as well as leadership as men's business. The cumulative effect resulted in to think women to the lower level of governmental positions. Women's equal representation in leadership, politics and public life is believed to be indispensable in achieving sustainable development goals by 2030. But, the study revealed a very low representation of women in administrative positions and legislatures. The average percentage of women in leadership positions for the study area is 14.2%, given that 36.36% of women ministers at the national level. Therefore, the representation of women in administrative positions of local governments is very low, and the leadership role is a male-dominated one. The main criteria for the appointment or selection of leaders into the leadership positions are: educational background, experience, performance in previous leadership positions or careers, and commitment. In this respect, women fail to meet the criteria. In the local government legislature, women's representation is also low. The average percentage of women representatives in local government legislature for the study area is 33.75%. At the national level as of September 2021, 212 of 547 (38.8%) seats were held by women. However, both at local government and national government legislatures the gender parity is yet not achieved.

Limited access to information, domestic routine activities (raring children and managing the household), low educational status, and cultural influence are identified as the major reasons for low participation and representation of women in politics. Furthermore,

limitations from the local governments, in working to practically enhance women participation in local governance is one major factor contributing to the low representation of women in leadership positions.

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