Women in Decision-making: Investigating Roles and Challenges in Selected Governmental Offices at Hosanna City Administration

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Abstract

The process of decision-making affects both organization's administration and the lives of the society. Accordingly, this study has been conducted to examine the roles of women participation in decision-making and to investigate challenges on their participation. The study employed qualitative method. Whereas participants of the study were selected purposively, data were collected through interviews and analysed thematically. The study showed that interest articulation, building institutional trust and socialization, proper utilization and management of resources, enhancing the achievement of institutional goals, upholding institutional responsibilities, making rational decisions and fighting maladministration are important contributions of women in decision-making. On the other hand, the overburden of women, low access for leadership positions, backward socio-cultural attitudes and practices, lack of trust at household level and feeling of discrimination, feeling of inefficacy and lack of motivation, low educational status and insufficient institutional support were the main challenges on women's decision-making activity. Therefore, appreciating women's role in decision-making activities and working to ease up their challenges must be the timely actions of all concerned parties.
Keywords: women, decision-making, roles, challenges, Hosanna city administration

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1. Introduction

Decision-making is one of the heavily researched areas since it affects not only the direction, administration and structure of an organization but also the lives of the society (Al-Tarawneh, 2011). It is the process of choosing between two or more alternatives to accomplish one's purpose and hence become the main task of managers (Negulescu, 2014). Decision-making involves phases like defining the problem, determining requirements, establishing goals, identifying alternatives, defining the criteria, selecting decision-making tools, evaluating alternatives and validating solutions (Gorgulho, Tavares, Pascoa & Tribolet, 2015).

The activity of decision makers can be influenced by organization's policy and strategy, deciders' personality and other external constraints (Negulescu, 2014). The nature of the problem, the availability of resources, the cost, time pressure, decision-maker's risk perceptions, beliefs and attitudes also affect decision-making (Al-Tarawneh, 2011). On the

other hand, women's decision-making is conditioned by a country's legal rights and formal rules, women's political representation, family status, socio-cultural factors, political and economic systems of the present and the past, educational level, women's collective capabilities and organizational strength (Endale, 2014; Rey, 2005; Siemienska, 1999).

Local governments, especially in developing countries, are more important for matters having a direct impact on people's livelihood than national parliaments (United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 2014). Hence, the administrations of such local governments must be guided by the principles of fairness, accountability and equality to empower women in civil service workforces (Al-Tarawneh, 2011). Women's access to decision-making, which is the key indicator of gender equality, provides a balanced composition of society and enhances political legitimacy (Ukrainian Women's Fund (UWF), 2012). The active participation of women in political decision brings democratic growth, good governance and protection of human rights (African Union (AU), 2015; Kassa, 2015; O'Neil & Domingo, 2016). It also helps to revise gender discriminatory policies and laws and enables women to have a strong voice in the setting of development policies and programs (Foqahaa, 2011). Generally, since women represent nearly half of the world's population, their participation in decision is central for the overall development and refinement of the society (UNDP, 2014).

Feminist theory considers women's intervention as actors that daily makes enormous contribution to society. It suggested that women's participation in the activities of the public life helps to challenge the patriarchal institutional frameworks, structures, processes, norms and values that constrain the effective utilization of women's capacities for transformative change (Tucker, 2014). The theory also concerned with the marginality of women's presence and underscores the need for their fuller inclusion and effective participation in key decision-making to set and realize gender and democratic agendas (Nzomo, 2015).

Regardless of women's role in public administration and decision-making, discrimination against them has continued in different countries (Ronald & Norris, 2000). Throughout history, men have possessed rights over women to make decisions, laws and policies in all public and private spheres (Mahmood, 2004). Similarly, Dorey, Bentley, Roberts and Dobson (2004) stated that women's exclusion from political participation and decision-making has been inherited in human history. Many public administrations often characterized by patriarchal institution that perpetuate gender-biased traditions, attitudes and practices. Public

perceptions towards decision-making are male-centred and preferring women at lower level positions is still continued (Centre for Sociological and Marketing Research, 2012; O'Neil & Domingo, 2016).

As Kassa (2015) explained, women's participation in political decision is a recent phenomenon which has been recognized as a political right after the adoption of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights reaffirmed the UDHR principle on women's right in public and political life. The 1979 UNGA Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) moved a de facto equality by affirming the obligation of state parties to take affirmative action to accelerate the representation and participation of women in politics. The target of a minimum of 30 % of women in leadership positions endorsed by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1990 also reaffirmed in the 1995 Beijing platform for action (UWF, 2012). The 2003 African women's rights protocol asserted the principle of equal participation of women (African Union (AU), 2015). Moreover, many state government reform programs have prioritized women's participation in political leadership (UWF, 2012).

To speeding up the equality between men and women, the Ethiopian government has formulated a national policy on women in 1993. The Constitution of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) under Article 35 assures women's equal rights with men in every areas and the need for affirmative action to remedy the past inequalities that women suffered (FDRE Constitution, 1995). The country has ratified the UN Charter on Human Rights and CEDAW. However, women have faced a set of problems and are found in lower and disadvantageous positions in socio-economic and political status that marginalized them from key decisions (Emebet, 2011; Kassa, 2015; Taye, 2008). Although many Ethiopian women have played important political and leadership roles, only few are visible in literatures (Meaza, 2009). They have enjoyed little independence in making-decision on most public, individual and family issues (Bogalech & Mengistu, 2007). Ethiopia ranks 113 out of 129 countries in the Gender Gap Index in 2007 which shows the list in gender equality (Alemtseh & Kerebih, 2014).

Different studies have been conducted in relation to women's participation in politics and decision-making. A study by Taye (2008) showed that Ethiopian women participation in decision-making has been exposed to a set of multiple, cross cutting, and interrelated problems. Meaza (2009) revealed that structural barriers, unequal socio-economic

opportunities and inadequate access to mentors and support networks have contributed for disparities between men and women in decision-making. Endale (2014) indicated that educational status, commitment from top decision makers, experiences, attitudes of men towards women and women's level of confidence are factors that determine women's participation in leadership. A study by Alemtsehay and Kerebih (2014) showed that the problem of gender inequality in Ethiopia is still continued.

A study by UNDP (2014) revealed that gaps in the adoption and implementation of enabling legal and policy frameworks, discriminatory organizational cultures, weak gender mainstreaming, conflict situations and economic crisis are barriers on women's equal presence in public administration. A study conducted by O'Neil and Domingo (2015) showed that men continue to dominate some sectors and powerful positions in the society. A research conducted by Kossek and Buzzanell (2018) indicated that maternal confidence has an important influence on new mothers' intent to stay with their organization.

However, the above mentioned studies did not cover the roles that women contribute in decision-making activities. In addition, the investigation of aforementioned studies on the challenges that women practically faced in decision-making activities were not detailed. Therefore, considering such gaps, the objectives of the study were:
(i) To examine the role of women participation in decision-making in selected governmental offices at Hossana city administration;
(ii) To explore the major challenges that affect women's decision-making in selected governmental offices at Hossana city administration.

2. Research Methods
The study has employed a qualitative approach. This approach is important to address research questions that require explanation and to understand social phenomena in their contexts (Creswell, 2009). Participants of the study were officials of selected governmental offices, community elders and renowned individuals who were selected based on non-probability purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling helps to identify and select participants having rich information and better experience concerning the problem under study (Palinkas et al., 2013).

By considering the principles of data saturation, eight governmental offices were selected and interview (key informant interview and in-depth interview) was made with 18 participants.

Interview helps to collect data from participants having direct bearing with the research objectives (Ruhl, 2004). The collected data were coded and grouped into different themes and sub themes and were analysed thematically. Thematic analysis is important for accurate determination of relationships between concepts within the established theme (Alhojailan, 2012).

To ensure trustworthiness of the study, strategies of transferability, dependability, credibility and conformability were essentially considered (Anney, 2014). Accordingly, collecting data from different sources, undertaking thick description and audit trail, triangulation, code-recode techniques, feedbacks from participants, peers and experts and built rapport and trust with participants were procedures employed to assure the quality of the study. Likewise, all matters related to research ethics were considered.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Role of Women Participation in Decision-Making: Interest Articulation

The study indicated that with reference to decision-making, women are exemplary in realizing the interests of the community. Women decision makers are in a better position to understand the real needs of the community. As explained by the participants, women always relate decisions with the lives of the community. Interviewee 13 (personal communication, January 10, 2018) stated that:

> In decision-making process, women leaders are conscious about how their decisions affect the life of their family in particular and the life of the community as a whole. Since they do not alienate themselves from the community, their decision is vital in representing the real needs of the society.

In relation to this, Maseko (2013) explained that female leaders are more empathetic and are close in addressing social problems. Women's involvement in political decision provides a balance that accurately reflects the composition of the society and is a means to stimulate the overall development and refinement in the society (O'Neil & Domingo, 2016). Therefore, women's decision is vital in that it is in line with the wellbeing and benefit of the community.

3.2. Institutional Trust and Socialization

The study indicated that the participation of women in decision-making is valuable for institutional trust and socialization. Participants discussed that women officials are loyal in their work areas and their decision is legitimate which help institutions to restore trust and confidence. Regarding to this, Kassa (2015) elaborated that the involvement of women in political decisions is an instrument to heighten the legitimacy of political system. The study

also showed that, in public administration, women acted as members of a family which in turn results government institutions to socialize themselves with the community.

> Bringing women into decision-making is vital for many reasons. The most important one is their consideration of institutions as if their own home and hence treat employees as members of their family. Many female executives are acting as mothers care for their family members at home. (Interviewee 09, personal communication, January 08, 2018)

The participation of women in public administration ensures principles of fairness, accountability, justice and non-discrimination which enable institutions to create legitimacy and trust and to restore confidence (UNDP, 2014; UWF, 2012).

3.3. Proper Utilization and Management of Resources

The study showed that women's participation in decision-making is central for the proper utilization of institutional resources. Participants viewed that, women are more careful in using and managing the resources of institutions. Women are devoted and models in proper utilization of labour instruments in office. In this regard, Interviewee 17 (personal communication, January 16, 2018) stated: ''women are more sensible and wise in passing decisions about the use and management of organizational resources. They are cautious in handling financial resources and look office materials as if they are their own''. Hence, considering participants' discussion, women's involvement in decisions is representative for proper utilization and management of resources which is essential in public administration.

3.4. Enhance the Achievement of Institutional Goals

The study also indicated that the other important quality of women in decision-making is that they facilitate the achievement of institutional goals. Participants stated that female leaders make decision based on the rules and regulations which in turn enhances the achievement of organization's goal. Interviewee 14 (personal communication, January 15, 2018) explained that: ''women have better experience in making decisions based on the rules and regulations of the organizations that they are assigned in. They have a strong commitment to oppose decisions that violate the rules and regulations of institutions''. Similarly, Interviewee 08, (personal communication, January 04, 2018) stated that: ''women are realistic not only in making good decisions but also in implementing those decisions they made. They do not regret to implement decisions which they thought as genuine and just''. Regarding this, Al-Tarawneh (2011) elaborated that the participation of women in public administration and decision-making is the foundation by which national policies and programs are implemented. The reports of AU (2015) also stated that women's presence in decision-making can

accelerate the attainment of national development agendas. Hence, the involvement of women in decision-making is essential to realize institutional goals.

3.5. Uphold Responsibilities and Making Rational Decisions

The result of the study revealed that the participation of women in decision-making activities is valuable since they act impartially and rationally. Women make decisions in accordance with their institutional responsibilities and mandates. Interviewee 12 (personal communication, January 10, 2018) explained as: ''as far as my experience is concerned, most women officers are found in a better position in discharging their institutional responsibilities. They have experienced such habit at their home since they perform lots of household mandates''. Interviewee 05 (personal communication, January 01, 2018) also discussed: ''most of the time, women are rational and thoughtful in making decisions at office. They are not emotional in dealing with office problems and are rational in examining cases''. Concerning this, Maseko (2013) pointed out that women are more assertive and persuasive, have a strong need to get things done and more willing to take risks than men. Therefore, women's experience in upholding official responsibilities and making rational decisions are good lessons.

3.6. Fight Maladministration

The study showed that the presence of women in decision-making is instrumental to struggle malpractices and to prevail good governance in public administrations. Participants stated that women officials are models in serving clients of their institution fairly. Compared to men counterparts, women officials' involvement in unjust activities is rare. Interviewee 03 (personal communication, January 01, 2018) explained this as: ''women are exemplary in treating office members and clients impartially. They are committed to fight corrupt actions; are effective in time management and in handling conflicting interests. They show unreserved efforts to prevail good governance in institutions''. Concerning this, AU (2015) and Kassa (2014) described that the participation of women in political decisions is vital for the realization of good governance. Equally, Mahmood (2004) and UNDP (2014) indicated that the presence of women in decision-making process would results justice and enables to practice equality based laws and policies which are central expressions of good governance in public offices. The active participation of women in public management and political decision brings democratic growth and political legitimacy (Endale, 2014; O'Neil & Domingo, 2016).

Regarding to women's contribution in decision-making, feminist theory argued that responsive and accountable governance demands gender equitable participation and representation (Nzomo, 2015). The theory further stated that the full inclusion and effective participation of women in key decision-making is a pathway to set and realize democratic agendas (Tucker, 2014).

3.7. Challenges on Women's Decision-Making: The Overburden of Women

The study showed that women's overstretched mandates at household and community level impair their decision-making capacity. Effective decision requires decision makers to devote a significant amount of skill, knowledge and attention (Al-Tarawneh, 2011). However, as participants stated, women are not as free as male since they are responsible for many social tasks. Interviewee 18 (personal communication, January 23, 2018) explained as:

> Most of the time, we are busy in managing home activities like preparing food and caring children. We also spend enormous time in participating in different social responsibilities like marriage and weeping. As a result, sometimes, we women leaders have faced a lack of time to think, to analyse and evaluate things for decision.

Concerning to this, feminist theorists argued that women are expected to carry out the burden of representing and delivering all social welfare needs (Nzomo, 2015). Hence, the overburden of women in household and social affairs undoubtedly disturbs their contribution to office decisions.

3.8. Low Access for Leadership Positions

The result also showed that one of the challenges on women's decision-making is low access for leadership positions. In relation to this, Foqahaa (2011) explained that the weakness of women's participation in decision-making is linked to the total sum of what women and men attain within all spheres. Participants demonstrated that even though there are improvements, the number of women in decision-making position is lower than that of men. Most female workers are assigned at lower level decision-making positions. Unless women are assigned in top managerial positions, they are unable to pass key decisions. Moreover, since most decisions are made by the majority votes and the numbers of women executives are lesser than men counter parts, women's view may not be considered which in turn discourages their participation. Haregewoin and Emebet (2003) asserted that in Ethiopia women are not placed in key political positions. Women faced a double hurdle to power: in obtaining access to decision-making positions and to having influence within them (O'Neil & Domingo, 2016).

Therefore, we can understand that women's lower access in leadership positions negatively affects their decision-making activities.

3.9. Backward Socio-Cultural Attitudes and Practices

Feminist theorists argued that the barriers women encounter in political office can largely be understood within the context of the male centric cultural norms and values (Nzomo, 2015). In view of this idea, the study revealed that backward socio-cultural attitudes and practices are challenges on women's decision-making. At family and community levels, females are seen as supporters of males whereas males are seen as advisors and leaders of females. Such attitudes gradually make some females to be dependent on others when they hold public offices. Participants discussed that the way how parents grow their male and female children and the division of labor among them steadily affect women's decision-making. Interviewee 11 (personal communication, January 09, 2018) confirmed that:

> At household level, girls are seen incapable to perform some activities that boys can do. Husbands maintain the lion's share to decide most family matters. Furthermore, women are not allowed to be front runners particularly in leadership positions and to speak out in public areas. Inequalities are also common among men and women in performing social and political responsibilities.

In relation to this, Centre for Sociological and Marketing Research (2012) reported that public perceptions regarding women's presence in decision-making are male-centered where the distorted acceptance of men in higher level decision-making positions is maintained. Marshal (1984) also stated that other people's negative reactions to women in authority unconditionally undermined women's ability in decision. By and large, unless we recognize females' equal ability as males at grass root levels, women's decision-making capacity at offices will remain at risk.

3.10. Lack of Trust at Household Level and Women's Feeling of Discrimination

The study showed that at family level, some husbands are not willing to allow their wives to be assigned in decision-making positions. Husbands felt that if women are in leadership positions, they would be unable to manage their families and will not be loyal for them which will cause family dissolution. As a result, some women are reluctant to be assigned in decision-making positions. Here, Haregawoyin and Emebet (2003) and Kassa (2015) described that family work and perceptions are important determinants of women's participation in decision-making. Decision makers' family status is an important factor on individual's decision-making activities (O'Neil & Domingo, 2016; Siemienska, 1999). The study further revealed that some women are not interested to hold leadership and decision

making positions since these duties make them busy and hence affect their social lives. There are also assumptions that most political leaders are vulnerable to discrimination in their social lives. At this point, Marshal (1984) argued that lack of social network and absence of support affect women's participation in managerial positions.

3.11. Feeling of Inefficacy and Lack of Motivation

The result of the investigation showed that the other challenge towards women decision-making is related to women's own perception towards their ability and lack of motivation. As Al-Tarawneh (2011) demonstrated, the character of decision-makers, their risk perceptions and attitudes influence their decision-making activity. Participants illustrated that since some women felt that they are less capable than men, they remain silent and prefer to accept others view during decision-making.

> Despite women can raise constructive ideas on various public issues, some are not free to speak out their feelings and opinions. Sometimes, they let males to speak first and even prefer to be listeners since they believe themselves as incapable in doing so. (Interviewee 01, personal communication, January 01, 2018)

In relation to this, Jebessa et al. (2015) and Negulescu (2014) discussed that the activity of decision-makers can be influenced by their own personality and level of motivation. Thus, women's own sense of incompetence and lower motivation impede their decision-making.

3.12. Low Educational Preparedness

Feminist theory argued that education would help men and women to have positive attitudes towards each other (Nzomo, 2015). In view of this, the study revealed that women's low level of education is the other challenge on their decision-making since decision-making requires some level of knowledge and skill. Women's low educational level forced them not only to be assigned in lower decision-making positions but also to accept what other elites and orators said. Regarding to this, Alemayehu (2014) indicated that women's level of education affects their participations in leadership, good governance and membership to associations. Low academic qualification and lack of experience are contributing factors for low participation of women in decision-making positions (Jebessa et al., 2015; Marshal, 1984). Thus, women need more basic education to influence high-level decision-making.

3.13. Insufficient Institutional Support

The internal policy and strategy of organizations have an impact on decision makers' activity (Negulescu, 2014). Siemienska (1999) also stated that organizational strength is an important factor on decision makers' activity. In view of this idea, the study found out that the low support of government institutions is the other challenge on women's decision-making. As

participants stated, the action of government offices to empower female managers' decision-making capacity is not sufficient. Interviewee 08 (personal communication, January 04, 2018) confirmed the case as: ''government's effort to empower women in decision-making at any office is not enough. To realize women's active participation in decision-making, institutions must prepare capacity building trainings and supports. Indeed, empowering women in leadership and decision-making positions require strong commitment''. In relation to this challenge, feminist theory argued that there are various socio-political structures in the society that discriminate women (Etta & Asukwo, 2014). Feminist legal theorists further explained that in institutions there are some laws that discriminate and harm women (Tucker, 2014). Hence, it is obvious that institutions' low support weakens women's active participation in decision-making.

4. Conclusion

The result indicated that one of the contributions of women in decision-making is articulating the interests of the society. In decision-making, women are more sensible in keeping the wellbeing of the society. In most cases, decisions made by women are heard well and seen as loyal in the eyes of the community which in turn enable to maintain institutional trust and socialization. In decision-making, women are wise enough in managing and utilizing resources. The study also indicated that during decision-making, women are strict in respecting the rules and regulations and hence allow institutions to achieve and enhance their goals. The other important quality of women in decision-making is cautiousness in fulfilling their responsibilities. Furthermore, women are model in making reasonable decisions and impassive in examining cases. Since women have strong commitment only for equal treatment of workers and clients but also to combat malpractices, their contribution is useful for the prevalence of good governance.

In relation to the challenges on women's decision-making, the study showed that women suffer more due to the overstretch mandates at family and community levels. Lower access for decision-making position is the other challenge on their decision-making activities. The study indicated that backward socio-cultural attitudes and practices reduce women's active participation at office levels. The understanding and acceptance of gender equality concepts in the society is still low. Moreover, lack of trust at household level and feeling of discrimination challenge women's role in decision-making. The result further revealed that women's feeling of incompetence, low educational status and inadequate institutional supports are other factors that hinder women's activity in decision-making.

To end with, the findings of the study help to understand: first, the participation of women in decision making activities is essential to consolidate and institutionalized democratic principles in governmental offices. Second, though there are improvements, social-political and economic factors that impede women's decision-making are still continued. Finally, all stakeholders must work together to empower women's status in decision-making.

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