

Full Length Research Paper

A common notion of “more women, less men” in politics and governance system: Does it make any difference?

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The need for mainstreaming gender in development was recognized by the global community since the early 1970s after realization of the important role which women just as their men counterpart can equally play in development. Nonetheless, there has been conflicting discourses on the concept of “gender equality” and the whole debate of “gender mainstreaming”. This paper draws on a critical perspective to critique the approaches taken by many governments in developing countries to promote gender equality by having more women representatives in politics and governance system. A critical perspective in this paper examines how gender facts are constructed particularly in Tanzania and whose interest they ultimately serve. Based on the critical perspective presented in this paper, it is obvious that, the challenge to improve the status and productivity of women in developing societies is not the matter of “head count” but “gender awareness” to both women and men in all levels in a given society. The paper concludes by arguing that, an increased focus on awareness will have significant impact on future strategies for working with gender perspectives in development within different societies in Tanzania and other developing countries.

Key words: Governance, Gender, Gender mainstreaming, Gender awareness, parliament

INTRODUCTION

The need for mainstreaming gender in development was recognized by the global community since the early 1970s when the United Nations organized the first World Conference on Women held in Mexico in 1975. This came into account after realization of the important role which women just as their men counterpart can equally play in development. Five years later in 1980, another conference took place in Copenhagen and thereafter in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985. These conferences produced the best researched documents which were a road-map for gender awareness and women empowerment. This was a venture by the United Nations to call for the assimilation of women into the development process by all governments. It is from this milieu, the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in September, 1995. The Beijing Conference drew together about 5,000

representatives from 192 countries, together with some 30,000 women and men representing 3,000 non-governmental organizations around the world. The main focus of this conference was to review results of previous initiatives and to design new approaches for the implementation of the action plans on the areas of concern (Chiriga in McFadden, 1998). This conference engineered the concept of bringing gender issues into the mainstream of society as a global strategy for promoting gender equality. The conference further emphasized on the gender equality as a primary goal in all aspects of socio- economic development of the society.

Nonetheless, there has been conflicting discourses on the concept of “gender equality” and the whole debate of “gender mainstreaming” especially in developing societies. On the other hand, many feminists believe that gender mainstreaming is a good strategy to enhance gender equality. While this paper acknowledges the “gender gap”, the central argument is on the “approaches” used by governments and gender activists

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in addressing or bridging this gap. The central argument in this paper is whether these approaches make any difference in addressing gender issues and concerns facing most of developing societies today.

Though different perspectives and cases are reviewed to support the central thesis of this paper, the authors focus on Tanzania as a unit of inquiry. Based on the selected case study, the paper addresses the following two critical questions: Does a large number of women in the parliament or rather governance system make any difference to women or gender issues especially at the grass-root level? What should then be done to transform power relations between men and women as a way of achieving gender equality in developing societies? What is strongly advocated in this paper is that, the challenge to improve the status and productivity of women in developing societies is the matter of “gender awareness” both to women and men in all levels of society.

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

This paper draws on a critical perspective to critique the approaches taken by many governments and gender activists in developing countries to promote gender equality by having more women representatives in politics and governance system. As also discussed by Mgonja and Makombe (2009), a critical perspective in this paper examines how gender facts are constructed and whose interest they ultimately serve. As a whole, this critical approach seeks to reconstruct what Gramsci (1971) called “common sense” propositions which are product of historical processes that leave the individual in a particular relationship with social groups. For Gramsci, critical thinking should not merely oppose but become part of people’s understanding of their own conditions, bringing about a new common sense. It does not only challenge knowledge and practice, but also construct new knowledge about what exists and what ought to exist on the basis of transformed relations of power within and among different groups in the society.

Research methodology is a way to systematically address the research problem (Oliver, 2004). Most scholars craft a research methodology so as to increase their confidence that the conclusions they make about the social and political world are valid. The most important of these conclusions are those concerning causal relationships where the object of a methodology is to increase confidence in claims that one variable or event, *x*, exerts a causal effect on another, *y* (Hall, 2003). Authors of this paper used documentary research and official statistics to study the concepts “gender equality” and “gender mainstreaming” in bridging gender gaps in developing societies. To explore the relationship between selected study variables, authors decided to focus on three time periods of parliamentary politics in Tanzania: 2000 to 2005; 2005 to 2010; 2010 to 2015.

CONCEPTUALIZING GENDER AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING AGENDA

While gender has become very famous to those working in the field of politics and development, its utility and relevance has been highly contested (Baden and Goetz, 1997). Razavi and Miller (1995) argue that, although gender discourse has filtered through to policy making institutions, in the process actors have re-interpreted the concept of gender to suit their political needs. In general, gender can be referred to social constructions between men and women that are learned through socialization processes, changeable over time, and have wide variations within and between cultures (Mgonja and Nsimbila, 2003). It is part of the broader socio-cultural context that embraces social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men, girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2001).

Hussein (2004) argues that, in nearly every society there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. For instance, United Nations came out with data in 1980 which indicate that women throughout the world account for 2/3 of all working hours but receive only 1/10 of the world’s income and own less than 1% of world’s property. Similarly, Dawn (1995) explored the fact that, women world-wide produce ½ of the world’s food, constitute 70% of the world’s 1.3 billion absolute poor and own only 1% of the world’s land. In Tanzania, the women’s movement that is, Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP) explores a number of hindrances in gender at the policy-making level in Tanzania. TGNP argues that by the late 1990s the wave of economic liberalization and globalization processes in Tanzania had led to increasing economic marginalization of women. Hence, while gender, by definition, refers to social constructions between “both” men and women, this kind of gender discrimination is what sets women in a more vulnerable position compared to their male counterparts.

On the other hand, gender mainstreaming evolved from earlier call for the ‘integration’ of women in development dating back to the 1970s (Baden and Goetz, 1997). According to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2001), gender mainstreaming is a globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality that signifies a drive towards systematic procedures and mechanisms within governments and public institutions. However, as far as gender discourse is understood, the mainstreaming strategy is not exclusively related to women and their specific needs and concerns. It should also include initiatives for both men and women provided all initiatives

promote overall gender equality in a given social setting.

The United Nations Report of the Economic and Social Council (1997) defines gender mainstreaming as “the re-organization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that gender equality perspectives is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy making”. Based on this report, the mainstreaming agenda needs to be taken as a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres with the ultimate goal of achieving gender equality.

As the notion of mainstreaming gender issues in governance, politics and across the policy process is gaining momentum in many developing societies (Brawley, 2003), various feminist scholars such as Ampofo et al. (2004), Baden and Goetz (1997), Chow (2003), Mbilinyi (1992), Tamale (1999), just to mention but few, have consequently from time to time documented a lot of arguments, issues and contradictions with regard to gender mainstreaming. The central argument posed by many of these scholars is that empowering gender through the mainstreaming agenda is important to ensure that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities such as policy development, research, advocacy/dialogue, legislation, resource allocation, and planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects. Randa and Zahra (cited in Hussein, 2004) argues that empowerment gives control over or autonomy in the job practices and decision making; the ability to have things done and the power to mobilize or access to work empowerment structures such as resources, information, support and opportunity for job advancement. Indeed, to empower a woman means making a woman in all aspects of her life (that is, social, political, economic and cultural) realize her production and other values in the society (United Republic of Tanzania, 1995).

GENDER AND POLITICS: A GENERAL OVERVIEW

As pointed out by Haque (2003: 572), issues of gender and politics especially in terms of female representation are quite evident across the world. According to Haque, this may be due the emergence of various international legal measures set to prevent gender discrimination as well as ensuring that women’s equal rights and opportunities are well preserved. Some of these legal measures are: the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952), the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (1958), the Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1967), as

well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979). These international conventions parallel to the aforementioned United Nations conferences require all nations to ensure that attention to gender perspectives is an integral part of interventions in all areas of societal development, although in actual fact, the situation has not improved much in many parties of developing nations (Haque, 2003).

The World Statistic Survey (1995) underscores that, “in many countries women were granted the rights to vote and stand for election much later than men - who also happened to be the sole arbiters in the matter - and often in stages”. Women’ rights to vote and to stand for election started long time ago in some countries such as the United States of America (1788), New Zealand (1893), Australia (1902), Finland (then part of the Russian empire) in 1906 and Canada in 1917 (Women in Parliament: A World Statistical Survey, 1995). However, in most cases this privilege was only given to specific minority category of women based on certain level of income, education, race, religion etc. In the case of Sub-Saharan Africa, women’ participation in politics usually accompanied that of decolonization but in some cases matched with similar move in the country. The history of political rights for women started in Senegal and Togo (1945), Liberia and Cameroon (1946) and other countries followed thereafter. As shown in Table 1, most of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa granted the political rights to women in the last 40 to 50 years.

Based on the statistics from The Inter-parliamentary Union, prior to 1945, Austria was the only State to have an elected woman as the president of one of the Parliament’s Chambers. The same statistics show that from 1945 to 1997, only 42 States (18 in Europe, 19 in America, 3 in Africa, 1 in Asia and 1 country in the Pacific) out of 186 with a legislative institution had, at one time in their history selected a woman to preside over Parliament or National Assembly. On the other hand, the same statistics show that as of June 30, 2012, only 38 women preside over one of the Houses of the 189 Parliaments, 77 of which are bicameral. In general, the current status shows that women occupy only 13.9% of the total number of 273 posts of Presiding Officers of Parliament or National Assembly.

All in all, in many parties of the developing societies, it is still widely believed that women are not supposed to speak up or express their opinions in public (Tamale, 1999). While this is mostly embedded in cultural and religious beliefs, Tamale argues that “African patriarchal values” which demote women to the domestic arena of home and family, is a major contributing factor to gender disparities in Africa. According to Tamale, such view assumes that men are the anointed link between the home and the public world, thus ‘natural’ players in the game of politics. However as pointed out by Baden and Goetz (1997), the Beijing Conference in 1995 was

Table 1. An overview of women' political participation in sub-saharan Africa.

Year (s)	Countries (when granted the right)
1930-1935	South Africa -Whites (1930)
1935-1940	-
1940-1945	Senegal (1945) and Togo (1945)
1945-1950	Liberia (1946), Cameroon (1946), Niger (1948) and Seychelles (1948)
1950-1955	Cote d'Ivoire (1952), Ghana (1954) and Ethiopia/Eritrea (1955)
1955-1960	Gabon (1956), Benin (1956), Mali(1956), Mauritius (1956), Zimbabwe (1957)*, Burkina Faso (1958), Guinea (1958), Nigeria (1958), Chad (1958), Madagascar (1959), Tanzania (1959) and Gambia (1960)
1960-1965	Sierra Leone (1961), Burundi (1961), Rwanda (1961), Malawi (1961), Zambia (1962), Uganda (1962), Congo (1963), Kenya (1963), Equatorial Guinea (1963), Botswana (1965) and Lesotho (1965)
1965-1970	Zaire (1967)*, Swaziland (1968) and Zaire (1970)**
1970-1975	Mozambique (1975), Cape Verde (1975), Sao Tome and Principe (1975) and Angola (1975)
1975-1980	Guinea Bissau (1977) and Zimbabwe (1978)**
1980-1985	South Africa - Coloured and Indians (1984)
1985-1990	Central African Republic (1986) and Namibia (1989)
1990-1995	South Africa – Blacks (1994)

* Indicates right to vote and ** indicates right to stand for election; Source: Extracted from women in parliament 1945-1995: A World Statistic Survey.

definitely a global reflection of the extent to which gender issues entered the 'mainstream'. Tamale justifies this by explaining current changes in Africa where women are increasingly negating the metaphor of men domination and thus defying custom, culture, discrimination and marginalization to join formal politics.

According to the Millennium Development Goals Report, there has been a global awareness and essential measures to reassuring progress for women in the political arena. For instance, based on the data compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union on the basis of information provided by National Parliaments by June 30, 2012, Rwanda is number one with 56.3% of the parliament seats held by women whereas Tanzania is number eighteen with 36.0% of the parliament seats held by women. In fact, these figures, as seen in Table 2, put African countries well ahead of the United States, France, Japan and other developed nations.

In Tanzania, the government is enhancing women's political rights and incorporating gender issues in planning and budgeting, in order to strengthen the relationship between men and women. The Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children was established in 1990 aiming at empowering people to recognize their own ability to understand themselves and their environment. The vision of this ministry is to effectively change mind-set of communities to bring about gender equality and equity as well as children's rights. In recognition of women' rights, the government planned to increase special seats for women in parliament from 47 in 2000 to 2005 to 75 in 2005 to 2010 as well as to 102 in 2010 to 2015 (Table 3).

Moreover, as per the *Cabinet Decision No. 23 of 1996*, the number of women in decision making positions was to be increased through government appointments and other public structures. When he assumed power in 2005, the

current President, Jakaya Kikwete was praised for appointing the highest number of women ministers and deputy ministers the country has had since independence. The composition of his Cabinet just after sworn in for the first time as President in 2005 is shown in Table 4.

Following intense pressure from both the ruling party and opposition legislators, who had threatened to cast a "vote of no confidence" in the Prime Minister, Mizengo Pinda, if the ministers who were implicated on the report filed by the Controller and Auditor General (CAG) with abuse of office, embezzlement and dubious transactions would not be removed from their positions, President Jakaya Kikwete reshuffled his cabinet in May 2012 which comprised of 21 (70%) men and 9 (30%) women as full ministers as well as 20 (83.3%) men and 4 (16.6%) women deputy ministers. This time, however, the emphasis was more on having a dynamic team that will work indefatigably in the best interest of the nation and

Table 2. Percentage of legislative seats occupied by women.

Selected African countries	% of women	Rank (worldwide)	Selected countries in the North	% of women	Rank (worldwide)
Rwanda	56.3	1	Sweden	44.7	4
South Africa	42.3	7	Netherlands	40.7	8
Mozambique	39.1	12	Norway	39.6	11
Angola	38.2	15	Belgium	38.0	16
Tanzania	36.0	18	Germany	32.9	21
Uganda	35.0	19	France	26.9	36
Burundi	30.5	29	Australia	24.7	43
South Sudan	26.5	38	Canada	24.7	43
Malawi	22.3	56	United Kingdom	22.3	56
Zimbabwe	15.0	88	United States of America	16.9	79
Kenya	9.8	113	Japan	10.8	107

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>).

as well, to restore the “lost hope” by citizens.

MORE WOMEN, LESS MEN: DOES IT MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE?

While political participation is considered to be a cornerstone of democracy (Conway, 2005); it is regarded by feminists as an important tool for gender equality especially with women being equally represented in the political ground. Taking the case of Tanzania where 30.0% of members of parliaments (MPs) are women, one can quickly conclude that, the fact that women are there (in the legislature and government system); gender issues cannot be ignored in Tanzania and hence the system is “equal” in gender. However, Muigai (1999) reminds us that the term ‘equality’ in the context of gender does not refer to the anatomical immutable differences between sexes, but rather to “society’s creation of gender roles”. From this viewpoint, it important to understand that gender is institutionalized or rather imbedded in all social processes of everyday life and unless we address the core, we cannot address the inequality (Lorber, 1994).

As explained earlier in this paper, the central argument posed in this paper is that, when the government strives on having more women and possibly less men in politics and governance system, can this help to address gender abuses and disparities which in principle are imbedded in social norms and beliefs? Can we conclude that by having more women in the Tanzanian parliament and in the governance system then a poor woman down in a remote area of Tanzania is free from gender abuse?

Tamale (1999) raised some basic questions which reflect to the central argument in this paper: What exactly constitutes the representativeness of representatives? Do women regard female parliamentarians as their representatives? Do women parliamentarians perceive

themselves primarily as women’s representatives? If so, can they purport to speak for other women? Are they always representatives to the same degree? If not, what factors explain the difference? Taking Tamale’s questions into consideration we should ask ourselves whether mainstreaming gender in politics and governance system can truly make any difference to women, especially at the grass-root level.

In an article posted in the Guardian Newspaper on August 20, 2011, special correspondent who wrote on the dilemma of poor Tanzanian women asserts that “it is also unfortunate that the current policy and legal frameworks put more weight on political emancipation than ensuring economic survival of Tanzanian women bearing in mind that a hungry woman lacks confidence and ability to pursue her rights”. He argues further that, “...even the increase in the number of special seats members of parliament has not served the wishes of poor women” which according to him, the focus has probably been on “increasing numbers and not voices of the voiceless women”.

As Tamale found out in her research, though women are well represented in the parliament in Uganda, not all female parliamentarians can represent or are willing to represent the interests and concerns of women in the legislature. In most cases Tamale adds that each female legislator holds personal values and parochial interests that do not necessarily represent the views of their constituents, let alone their fellow women. Concurring with Tamale’s findings, this study made a survey in Tanzanian parliament which covered 40 women out 62 members of parliament. Findings show that, in between 2000-2005, only 25 members of parliament (62.5%) out of 40 were able to ask principle questions, while 15 out of 40 (37.5%) were completely unable to ask and participate in any discussion. However, out 25 members of parliament who could ask questions, only 15 of them (37.5%) asked questions related to gender and women

Table 3. Distribution of members of parliament by gender.

Category	Parliamentary term 2000-2005			Parliamentary term 2005-2010			Parliamentary term 2010-2015		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Constituency members	212	12	224	215	17	232	218	21	239
House of Representatives -Zanzibar	4	1	5	3	2	5	3	2	5
Attorney General	1	-	1	1	-	1	1	-	1
Presidential Nominees	8	2	10	4	3	7	4	3	7 ³
Special seats for women	-	47	47	-	75	75	-	102	102
Total	225	62	287	222	97	320	226	128	354
Percentage	78.47	21.53		69.59	30.41		64.0	36.0	

Source: Extracted from Parliamentary of Tanzania (<http://www.parliament.go.tz>). ³Note that in accordance with Article 66(i) (e) of the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania, President can appoint a total number 10 members of parliament. However, at the time of writing this article, he had only appointed 7 members.

Table 4. Tanzanian cabinet (key ministries) composition by gender in 2005.

Ministry	Full ministers		Deputy ministers	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Public service management	-	1	-	-
Foreign affairs and International cooperation	-	1	2	-
Finance	-	1	2	-
Planning, economy and empowerment	1	-	-	1
Education and vocational training	-	1	1	1
Higher education, science and technology	1	-	-	1
Justice and constitutional affairs	-	1	1	-
Community development, gender and children	-	1	-	1
Lands, housing and human settlement	1	-	-	1
Health and social welfare	1	-	-	1
Infrastructural development	1	-	1	1
Total	5	6	7	7
Percentage	45%	55%	50%	50%

Source: Extracted from Tanzania National Website (<http://www.tanzania.go.tz>).

empowerment.

The Tanzania Human Rights Report, 2007, published in January, 2008 indicates that despite

this wide representation, still the situation has not improved much in many parties of the country. For instance, many girls and boys are sent to work in

places far away from their familiar surroundings, where they have no social network and are entirely dependent on the employers. According to

this report, this practice opens the door for the possibility of abuse in their work environments (Legal Human Rights Centre, 2008: 76). In fact, it seems quite unclear to us and possibly to many others on the approach taken to address gender disparity or inequality in Tanzania and other developing societies. The United States of America, for instance, has only 16.9% of female members in their National Assembly (both houses), but we hardly find cases of gender abuses in the United States of America. This reminds us that gender equality is not possible unless both men and women change their attitudes and behaviour towards one another.

At this juncture, we can reflect on the question: What need to be done to transform power relations between men and women to achieve gender equality in developing societies? According to Hussein, despite all the efforts by the Tanzanian government, unequal gender relations portrayed at household and community levels are still replicated in the public sphere and in the formal employment sector. As pointed out in The Guardian of 20th August 2011, government and civil society organisations should refocus their strategies on gender equality by putting more weight on women's economic survival instead of political emancipation as a means to bridge the gender gap. As pointed out by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2001), gender systems are institutionalized through education systems, political and economic systems, legislation, and culture and traditions, hence, in utilizing any approach to bridge gender gaps, the focus should not be on individual women and men but on the system which determines gender roles and responsibilities, access to and control over resources, and decision-making potentials.

The Tanzanian experience gives an indication which High-Pippert and Comer (1998) also explores that, it is that act of 'being represented by a woman' rather than any particular 'benefits' (in this, case gender equality) that women derive from female representatives. This eventually does not make any difference in gender disparities especially at the grass-root level where the gap is alarming. We need also to understand that, while it is important to have women as part of the decision making arena, but to focus only on "headcount" as constraint to gender equality minimizes its importance. This takes us to what Waal (2006) cautioned on the "headcount" by arguing that headcount of women and men participation is not appropriate measure for gender equality since numerical targets can always hide as much as they reveal. Waal's central argument is that, you can have every higher position being filled with women, yet, ultimate beneficiaries become men.

On the other hand, Risman (2004: 431) reminds us that, "not only are women and men coerced into differential social roles; they often time choose their gendered paths". This can be proved from The MKUKUTA Status Report, 2006 which indicates that 60%

of women believe that wife beating is acceptable as compared with 42% of men (2006: 33). On the other hand, the World Health Organization study conducted in the regions of Dar es Salaam and Mbeya in Tanzania in 2005 revealed that 60% of women victims of domestic violence had never sought help because they believed that spousal violence was either normal or not serious enough to require assistance (World Health Organization, 2005). It is also important to understand that the concept of gender is not interchangeable with women, as it refers to both women and men, and the relations between them. Hence, promotion of gender equality should concern and engage men as well as women (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2001). If both men and women are aware of gender roles and take it more seriously, exploitation for both men and women will be minimal, hence, a pave for a meaningful gender equality.

Conclusion

As a whole, this paper agrees with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2001) that, "gender mainstreaming is not an end in itself, but a means to an end". The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2001) puts it very clear that "gender mainstreaming does not entail developing separate women's projects within work programmes, or even women's components within existing activities in the work programmes" (take for instance special seats, special pass mark for increasing girls enrolments to the universities and other initiatives set by the Tanzanian government). Based on the critical perspective presented in this paper, it is obvious that, the challenge to improve the status and productivity of women in developing societies is not the matter of "head count" but "gender awareness" to both women and men in all levels. However, it is very unfortunately that no much emphasis has been offered by feminists to this discourse of gender awareness.

Gender awareness is a state of "knowledge" of the differences in roles and relations of women and men, how this results in differences in power relations, statuses, privileges and needs in a given society. It surpasses a mere "representation". In fact, it requires that responsiveness be given to gender perspectives as an integral part of all activities across all levels within the society. Hence, the Tanzanian government and other key players such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), media and other women movements should thus focus on campaigns and public meetings for awareness creation. The mechanism for awareness can as well be incorporated in school curriculum from primary to the university level. An increased focus on awareness will have significant

impact on future strategies for working with gender perspectives in development within different societies in Tanzania and other developing countries.

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