

Chapter 48

Critical Mass of Women Legislators and Oversight for National ICT Policy of Malawi

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses how the representation of women legislators may affect the oversight of national ICT policy. The article uses Critical Mass Theory (CMT) to explain the composition of the Media and Communications Committee (MCC) of parliament. The case of Malawi is analysed, which represented a low-income economy in Africa. The article uses electoral reports and legislative documents. The results show that women legislators in the MCC achieved a critical mass despite the decrease in the representation of women in parliament. The women legislators have the opportunity to support gender issues related to ICT legislations and national ICT policy oversight. However, the functions of MCC related to national ICT policy oversight were not aligned with the gender equity strategies. This may affect the priority of gender issues in the policy oversight. The article contributes towards literature on national ICT policy oversight in the context of developing countries.

1. INTRODUCTION

African governments and international development agencies are concerned with the political representation of women in parliament (Bauer, 2012; Bauer & Burnet, 2013; Krook & Zetterberg, 2014). Women represent the majority of the population in most African countries (Muhibbu-Din, 2011). However, the number of women in parliaments does not correlate with their population in many countries. There are few women in parliament as compared to men. For example, women represent 23.1% of the legislators in sub-Saharan Africa (IPU, 2015). The gap between men and women in parliament may affect the way solutions to gender issues are framed and executed at legislative and administrative levels. The gender imbalance in parliaments may also affect the composition of the various parliamentary committees that are crucial in policy oversight (Stapenhurst & Pelizzo, 2008).

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Legislators are responsible for debating and enacting laws; supporting the formulation of policies and oversight of the policies to ensure that the intended policy objectives are achieved in a transparent and accountable manner (Pelizzo, R., & Stapenhurst, 2006). Equal representation is necessary to ensure that legislations and policies addresses the interests and needs of men and women equally. Challenges for limited representation of women legislators has been widely debated in the context of African countries (see Bauer, 2012; Bauer & Burnet, 2013; Geisler, 2006; Yoon, 2004). Although there is growing literature on women representation in African parliaments, to the knowledge of the author, studies on the roles of women legislators in the oversight of national ICT policy remain scarce. Previous studies noted issues of policy oversight for the national ICT policy in passing (Duncan, 2015; Lance & Bassole, 2006; Ramilo, 2002). This leaves a gap in literature and the study is motivated to contribute towards an understanding the roles of women legislators in the oversight of national ICT policy.

The study was guided by the research question: How does the representation of women legislators in parliament affect oversight of national ICT policy? To answer this question, Critical Mass Theory (CMT) (Kanter, 1977) was used in the study to understand the representation of women legislators in MCC and their roles in oversight of the national ICT policy. The case of Malawi was analysed which represented an African country without a parliament quota. The country recently held general elections where there was support for women to participate in the elections (50-50 Campaign) (Kayuni & Muriaas, 2014). At the built-up of the elections, Malawi had the first female President which gave prominence of gender issues at the administrative and political level (Mbilizi, 2013). The national ICT policy was adopted by the Cabinet in 2013 and was being implemented.

The composition of women legislators in the MCC was adequate to influence public decisions related to gender in the oversight of national ICT policy. Understanding of the legislative role of women was important so that strategies for gender equality (lobbying, sensitising and mainstreaming) could aligned with oversight of the national ICT policy (Childs & Krook, 2008; Grey, 2002).

The rest of the paper is presented as follows. Section 2 presents literature review. Section 3 summarises the Critical mass theory. Section 4 outlines the research methodology. Section 5 summarises the results of data analysis. Section 6 discusses the results. Section 7 summarises the conclusions drawn from the study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents the literature review for the study and begins with discussing the representation of women in parliament. This is followed by the description of national ICT policy. The challenges of participation of women in parliaments are discussed followed by the summary of the context of the study.

2.1. Women Legislative Presentation

Women form the large part of the population in many African countries. The women play a crucial role in the sectors of the economy include agriculture, education, health and commerce. The women are also engaged in social and political activities in their communities. However, the representation of women in parliaments that aims at supporting participation in legislative and public administration does not correspond to the population of women. There still few women legislators in some of the African

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