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Women's Leadership and political participation

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ABSTRACT:

This paper is a review of leadership and political research, focusing primarily on women as leaders and their participation in politics. Women in leadership roles are at an all-time high. Still, stereotypes and lack of support impact their growth and influence, leading to blockages and needless challenges. Female leaders' continued growth in high-ranking roles calls for a movement of all genders to practice leadership styles that propel women in business for greater personal and organizational success. Women have taken leadership roles as social reformers and entrepreneurs but not as politicians or government officials. Women leaders remained unexplored by research scholars till the 60s. As women started to occupy influential positions in academia, organizations and politics; the feminine aspects of leadership drew attention from scholars. Women are even under-represented in politics. Women's make half of the population of every country in the world but still they don't get to participate even in 1/4th ratio in political events. Discrimination against women in the arena of politics must be eradicated and they should have the same chance as men to participate in politics. Women's modern day participation in politics begins with acquisition of voting rights. Although there are different patterns across the region, all countries may consider the strategies in this brief to stimulate women's political leadership.

KEYWORDS: *Challenges, discrimination, under represented, stereotypes, Electoral reforms, Anti-discrimination, male-dominated, under-representation*

INTRODUCTION:

Women's leadership and political participation are restricted from the local to the global level. In elected office, the civil service, the private sector, or academia, women are under-represented in both voting and leading positions. Both voting and leading positions in elected office, the civil service, the private sector, or academia are dominated by men.

Women face a lot of obstacles and challenges while participating in political life. Women's ability to run for office is still limited by structural barriers, such as discriminatory laws and

institutions. Gender-related capacity gaps make it less likely for women to have the education, contacts, and resources necessary to become effective leaders compared to men.

According to the 2011 resolution on women's political participation., "Women in every part of the world continue to be largely marginalized from the political sphere, that results in unfair laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, lack or low levels of education, improper health care and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women."

These obstacles have been overcome by individual women with great success, often to the benefit of society at large. The playing field should be level for all women to open up opportunities.

Most of the time aspiring female leaders are liked but may not be respected or respected but not liked but in order to succeed in life one requires to be liked and respected at the same time. Women's are mostly underestimated for their work and they lack support from family and friends.

Review of literature:

"The Political Representation of Women and Ethnic Minorities in Established Democracies: A Framework for Comparative Research" edited by Karen Bird (2014): This collection of essays examines the effectiveness of various policies and measures aimed at promoting diversity and inclusion in political representation. This book explains the detail on political representation of women in the society and what all challenges she is facing in order to participate in the political matters.

"Women and Leadership: The State of Play and Strategies for Change" by Barbara Kellerman and Deborah L. Rhode (2007): The book examines the under-representation of women in leadership roles in various areas, including politics, and proposes ways to rectify this imbalance.

There have been a lot of studies which show that women's contribute very little in the company's sustainable development. These days Companies are required to face a significant change in the current political, economic and social scenario, which requires the definition of policies and strategies strongly oriented toward sustainable development, becoming fundamental for long-term success and competitiveness. Female leadership has a significant role in this perspective.

This review provides a glimpse of the overall literature on women leadership and also the women participation in politics.

Factors Influencing Women's Political Participation:

Sociocultural factors:

1. Traditional Gender Roles: Male leaders are considered to be at an advantage compared to female leaders in terms of prejudices (Early, 1987) This role adjustment has an adverse impact on women's health and mental wellness.
2. Cultural Norms and Values: Cultural beliefs that women are incapable of leading society

hinder women's political participation. Women seeking political entry may face barriers if they value male leadership and perceive women as less competent in political matters.

3. **Family and Community Expectations:** The decisions women make to join politics are often influenced by the expectations of their families and communities. Pressure to conform to traditional gender norms and fulfill familial roles may discourage women from pursuing political ambitions, especially in societies where women's involvement in public life is not widely accepted. Politics involves round-the-clock duty, travel and contact with strangers, while women may also face sexual harassment by their male colleagues.
4. **Socialization and Education:** The socialization process shapes individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors from a young age. Educational systems and societal messages can either empower or constrain women's political aspirations by reinforcing stereotypes, promoting gender equality, or perpetuating gender biases.
5. **Access to Resources:** Socio-economic factors such as income, wealth, and access to education and information can significantly impact women's ability to participate in politics. Political engagement may be more challenging for women who come from marginalized socio-economic backgrounds because of limited resources and opportunities.
6. **Political Culture and Institutions:** Women's political participation can be affected by the prevailing political culture and institutional frameworks in a country. Women's political participation can be affected by the prevailing political culture and institutional frameworks in a country. Political party structures, electoral systems, and legal frameworks can either help or hinder women's access to leadership positions and decision-making processes.
7. **Media Representation:** Public perceptions of women's leadership abilities and political competence can be influenced by the media portrayal of them. Gender biases in media coverage, including stereotypes and double standards, can shape voters' perceptions of female candidates and impact women's electoral success.

To overcome sociocultural barriers to women's political participation, comprehensive strategies must be used to challenge discriminatory norms and promote gender equality in all spheres of society. These efforts may include promoting women's leadership roles in cultural and religious contexts, providing gender-sensitive education and training, implementing affirmative action policies, and fostering inclusive political environments that value diversity and representation.

Economic factors:

1. **Financial Resources:** Political participation is greatly enhanced by the availability of financial resources, which includes funding political campaigns, organizing events, and engaging in advocacy. Women often have less access to financial resources compared to men due to

factors such as the gender pay gap, limited access to credit and capital, and systemic inequalities in wealth distribution.

2. **Employment and Economic Status:** Women's employment and economic status affect their ability to engage in politics. Economically impoverished women may give more importance to employment and meeting basic needs than participating in political activities. Additionally, women in precarious or low-paying jobs may face challenges balancing work and political engagement.
3. **Time Constraints:** Women may have less time and energy available for political participation due to their disproportionate responsibilities in unpaid care work such as childcare, eldercare, and household chores. Balancing care giving responsibilities with political involvement can be particularly challenging for women with limited access to support systems and affordable childcare options.
4. **Education and Skills:** Women's political engagement may be hindered by economic disparities in access to education, particularly in situations where girls' education is not valued or invested in. Additionally, women's access to political leadership positions may be hindered by gender biases in educational and training opportunities.
5. **Political Economy:** The participation of women in decision-making bodies that deal with economic policies, including budgeting and taxation, can be restricted by systemic gender biases and male-dominated power structures. Economic policies that prioritize gender equality and women's economic empowerment can enhance women's political participation.
6. **Access to Information and Technology:** The ability of women to engage in political discourse and activism can be negatively impacted by disparities in access to information and technology. It may be difficult for women who don't have reliable access to the internet, digital devices, or media platforms to stay informed about political issues and connect with other activists and organizations.

To promote women's political participation, it is necessary to address economic barriers through multiple strategies that address systemic inequalities in resource access, opportunity, and decision-making power. These strategies may include promoting women's economic empowerment, implementing gender-responsive economic policies, providing financial support and training for women candidates, and fostering inclusive political environments that value diverse voices and perspectives.

Legal and institutional factors:

1. **Electoral Systems:** The design of electoral systems can have a significant impact on women's representation in politics. The number of seats assigned by proportional representation

systems, which allocate seats based on the proportion of votes received by each party, usually exceeds that of majoritarian systems. Electoral reforms that promote proportional representation or incorporate gender quotas can increase women's access to political office.

2. **Gender Quotas:** Legal or institutional mechanisms called gender quotas are intended to ensure that women are represented at a minimum level in political institutions.. Quotas can take various forms, including legislative quotas (requiring a certain percentage of seats to be reserved for women), party quotas (mandating parties to nominate a minimum number of female candidates), or candidate quotas (requiring parties to alternate male and female candidates on electoral lists). Gender quotas have been effective in increasing women's political representation in many countries.
3. **Constitutional and Legal Protections:** Constitutional and legal provisions that guarantee gender equality and prohibit discrimination based on sex are fundamental for promoting women's political participation. Constitutional guarantees of women's rights, such as the right to vote and stand for election, provide a basis for women's inclusion in political processes. Anti-discrimination laws and gender equality legislation further support women's rights and opportunities in politics.
4. **Political Party Regulations:** Political parties play a central role in candidate selection and electoral competition. Institutional rules within political parties, such as nomination procedures and party leadership structures, can either facilitate or hinder women's access to leadership positions and electoral candidacy. Internal party regulations that promote gender equality and diversity can help overcome barriers to women's political participation.
5. **Legal Protections Against Gender-Based Violence:** Due to laws, lack of support from police and judiciary, the socio-economic divide and current power structures violence against women in politics are increasing.

Addressing legal and institutional barriers to women's political participation requires comprehensive strategies that promote gender equality, ensure legal protection of women's rights, and foster inclusive political processes. Efforts to reform electoral systems, introduce gender quotas, strengthen legal frameworks, and support institutional mechanisms for women's political empowerment are essential for advancing women's representation and participation in politics.

Educational factors:

1. **Access to Education:** Availability of quality education is fundamental for empowering women and equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed to engage meaningfully in politics. Educational attainment, including literacy rates and levels of formal education, is positively correlated with women's political participation.

2. **Civic Education:** Civic education programs that promote political literacy, awareness of rights and responsibilities, and critical thinking skills are essential for fostering active citizenship and political engagement among women. Civic education curricula should include information on democratic principles, electoral processes, human rights, and women's political participation.
3. **Leadership Development:** Leadership development programs provide women with opportunities to develop the skills, confidence, and networks needed to pursue leadership roles in politics. Educational initiatives that focus on leadership training, mentoring, and networking can empower women to overcome barriers to political participation and advance their careers in public service.
4. **Gender-Sensitive Curriculum:** Educational curricula should be gender-sensitive and inclusive, addressing gender stereotypes, biases, and inequalities in teaching materials and classroom practices. Incorporating gender perspectives into educational content helps challenge traditional gender roles and norms that may limit women's aspirations and opportunities in politics.
5. **Political Socialization:** Encouraging open discussions, debates, and critical reflections on political issues in educational settings can help students develop a sense of civic responsibility and engagement from a young age.
6. **Access to Information and Technology:** Educational institutions play a critical role in providing access to information and technology, which are essential for political participation in the digital age. Efforts to bridge the digital divide and ensure equal access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) help empower women to stay informed, connect with political networks, and participate in online activism and advocacy.

Addressing educational barriers to women's political participation requires comprehensive strategies that promote gender equality in education, provide opportunities for leadership development, and foster a supportive and inclusive learning environment. Efforts to improve access to education, promote civic education, empower women through leadership training, and challenge gender stereotypes in educational curricula are essential for advancing women's political participation and representation.

Case Studies and Examples:

Women all around the world are discriminated against in terms of their basic rights. This means they often have very little opportunity to influence the processes and institutions which shape their lives. The under-representation of women in decision-making at all levels means that they are under-represented policy-making and their skills, experience, and knowledge are all under-utilized.

This gives rise to both gender inequality and the poverty faced by women and their communities on a daily basis. However, there are a lot of examples which show that women have found the daring and the opportunities to challenge the status quo and become active citizens and successful leaders in political, economic and civil institutions, with inspiring results. This book brings together lessons and experience in building up women's involvement from Oxfam GB and its partners. The book Women's Leadership and Participation depicts methodological approaches and learning points that address a variety of topics, including women's involvement in national elections to women's decision-making in community livelihood initiatives. Kamala Harris made history by becoming the first female Vice President of the United States in 2021. Prior to her vice presidency, she served as a United States Senator from California. Harris has been a prominent advocate for women's rights, criminal justice reform, and healthcare access.

Impact of Women's Leadership:

Women's leadership can have a wide range of positive impacts on various levels, including societal, economic, political, and organizational. Here are some key impacts of women's leadership:

1. **Representation and Diversity:** The presence of women in decision-making bodies such as government, corporate boards, non-profit organizations, and community groups contributes to greater diversity and representation. Women in leadership roles ensure that policy-making, governance, and problem-solving processes are inclusive of diverse perspectives and experiences.
2. **Policy Priorities:** Gender equality, reproductive rights, healthcare, education, and social welfare issues, such as gender equality, reproductive rights, healthcare, education, and social welfare, are often the top priorities of female leaders. Women's leadership can lead to the implementation of policies and programs that address the needs and rights of women and promote social justice and equity.
3. **Role Modeling and Inspiration:** Women leaders act as role models and mentors for future generations of women and girls, motivating them to pursue their dreams and overcome barriers to becoming leaders. Seeing women in positions of power and influence is beneficial in challenging gender stereotypes, expanding possibilities for women's careers, and fostering a culture of empowerment and ambition.
4. **Resolving conflicts and fostering peace:** Women leaders are essential in conflict resolution, peace building, and post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Women's participation in peace negotiations and decision-making processes helps ensure women's rights, needs, and perspectives.
5. **Economic Empowerment:** The contribution of women to economic growth, job creation, and

poverty reduction can be attributed to their leadership in business and entrepreneurship. Women-owned businesses and enterprises generate income, create employment opportunities, and drive innovation in diverse sectors of the economy, thereby promoting economic empowerment and gender equality.

6. **Health and Wellbeing:** Women leaders advocate for policies and programs that promote health, wellbeing, and safety for women and their families. They prioritize issues such as maternal and child health, access to healthcare services, reproductive rights, and violence prevention, leading to improved health outcomes and quality of life for women and communities.
7. **Democratic Governance:** Women's leadership enhances democracy through the promotion of inclusivity, accountability, transparency, and responsiveness to citizens' needs. Women leaders communicate with various stakeholders, encourage civic participation, and uphold democratic principles and values, all of which contribute to democratic systems that are more resilient and representative.

Women's leadership has many benefits and positive impacts on societies, organizations, and communities, driving progress towards gender equality, social justice, and sustainable development. Encouraging and supporting women's leadership is essential for building more inclusive, equitable, and resilient societies.

Barriers and Challenges:

Despite progress, women still face numerous barriers and challenges in leadership and political participation. The key barriers and challenges include the following:

1. **Sociocultural Norms and Gender Stereotypes:** Women leaders are discriminated against due to the perception that leadership is a male domain, perpetuated by deep-rooted sociocultural norms and gender stereotypes. Women's credibility and effectiveness in leadership roles may be affected by resistance, scepticism, and double standards based on gender.
2. **Lack of Access to Resources:** The ability of women to pursue leadership positions and participate in political campaigns is hindered by their lack of access to financial resources, networks, and opportunities compared to men. Financial barriers, including fundraising challenges and unequal access to campaign financing, disproportionately affect women candidates.
3. **Under-representation in Decision-Making Bodies:** Women remain under-represented in political institutions, corporate boardrooms, and other decision-making bodies, limiting their influence and voice in shaping policies and governance. Structural barriers, such as

discriminatory electoral systems, party politics, and male-dominated leadership structures, perpetuate gender inequalities in representation.

- 4. Gender-Based Violence and Harassment:** Gender-based violence, such as harassment, threats, intimidation, and physical attacks, is prevalent among women in politics and discourages them from participating in politics and exercising their political rights. The culture of fear and exclusion perpetuated by gender-based violence is detrimental to women's safety and democratic participation.
- 5. Limited Access to Education and Training:** Unequal access to quality education and leadership training hinders women's leadership development and political empowerment. Women's ability to compete in political arenas and advance their careers is negatively impacted by the lack of opportunities for skill-building, mentorship, and capacity-building programs.
- 6. Balancing Family Responsibilities:** Women often bear the primary responsibility for caregiving and household duties, which can create challenges in balancing family responsibilities with political commitments. The demands of care giving, including childcare, eldercare, and domestic chores, may limit women's time, mobility, and flexibility for political engagement.
- 7. Legal and Institutional Barriers:** Legal and institutional frameworks may contain discriminatory provisions, practices, and barriers that hinder women's political participation. Lack of gender-sensitive laws, electoral regulations, and support mechanisms perpetuate systemic inequalities and reinforce gender biases in politics and governance.
- 8. Media Bias and Stereotyping:** Women politicians often face negative media portrayals, biased coverage, and gender stereotypes that undermine their credibility, competence, and electability. Media bias and stereotyping perpetuate gender inequalities in political representation and contribute to a hostile environment for women in politics.

To overcome these barriers and challenges, it is necessary to work together to dismantle systemic inequalities, advance gender equality, and create supportive environments for women's leadership and involvement in politics.

Strategies for Improvement:

Improving women's leadership and political participation requires a multifaceted approach that addresses structural, cultural, and institutional barriers while promoting gender equality and empowerment. Here are some strategies for enhancing women's leadership and political participation:

- 1. Legal and Policy Reforms:** Implement gender quotas and affirmative action measures to increase women's representation in political institutions and leadership positions. Enact and

enforce laws that prohibit gender-based discrimination, harassment, and violence in politics and public life. Reform electoral systems to promote gender parity and inclusivity, including proportional representation and gender-balanced candidate lists.

2. **Capacity Building and Training:** Provide leadership development programs, mentoring opportunities, and skills training for women interested in pursuing political careers. Offer workshops and educational initiatives on political literacy, civic engagement, and advocacy to empower women to participate effectively in political processes. Strengthen women's networks and support groups to facilitate peer learning, collaboration, and solidarity among women leaders and activists.
3. **Promotion of Gender Equality:** Promote gender equality and women's rights through public awareness campaigns, advocacy initiatives, and educational programs. Challenge gender stereotypes, biases, and discriminatory practices that undermine women's leadership and political participation. Encourage men and boys to become allies and advocates for gender equality and women's empowerment in politics and society.
4. **Institutional Reforms:** Create gender-sensitive policies, practices, and procedures within political parties, government institutions, and public organizations to promote women's inclusion and advancement. Establish gender equality commissions, women's caucuses, and other institutional mechanisms to monitor progress on women's leadership and political participation. Ensure equal access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making roles for women within political institutions and organizations.
5. **Supportive Environments:** Foster inclusive and supportive political cultures that value diversity, representation, and inclusivity. Provide flexible work arrangements, childcare support, and family-friendly policies to enable women to balance their political responsibilities with caregiving and family commitments. Create safe spaces and mechanisms for addressing gender-based violence, harassment, and discrimination in political settings.
6. **Media and Communication Strategies:** Promote positive portrayals of women leaders in the media and challenge stereotypes and biases that undermine women's credibility and competence. Support women's access to media platforms and communication channels to amplify their voices, share their perspectives, and engage with the public. Train journalists and media professionals on gender-sensitive reporting and ethical standards to combat sexism and discrimination in media coverage.
7. **Community Engagement and Participation:** Engage communities, civil society organizations, and grass roots movements in efforts to promote women's leadership and political participation. Foster dialogue, consultation, and collaboration with diverse

stakeholders to identify and address the needs and priorities of women in political decision-making processes. Support community-based initiatives and campaigns that mobilize women's voices and empower them to advocate for their rights and interests.

By implementing these strategies in a coordinated and sustained manner, stakeholders can contribute to creating more inclusive, equitable, and democratic societies where women have equal opportunities to lead, participate, and shape the future.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, women's leadership and political participation are essential for advancing gender equality, democratic governance, and sustainable development. Despite progress in recent decades, women continue to face numerous barriers and challenges in accessing leadership positions and participating fully in political processes. These barriers are rooted in systemic inequalities, discriminatory practices, and entrenched gender norms that perpetuate women's under-representation and marginalization in politics and public life.

However, there is growing recognition of the importance of women's leadership and political participation as catalysts for positive change. Women leaders bring unique perspectives, experiences, and priorities to decision-making processes, leading to more inclusive policies, responsive governance, and effective solutions to complex challenges. Moreover, women's leadership contributes to greater diversity, representation, and legitimacy in political institutions, strengthening democratic norms and values.

To unlock the full potential of women's leadership and political participation, concerted efforts are needed to address structural, cultural, and institutional barriers while promoting gender equality and empowerment. This requires a multifaceted approach that includes legal and policy reforms, capacity-building initiatives, institutional changes, supportive environments, media and communication strategies, community engagement, and international cooperation.

By investing in women's leadership and political participation, societies can harness the talents, expertise, and contributions of half of their population, leading to more equitable, inclusive, and resilient societies for all. Empowering women to lead and participate in politics is not only a matter of justice and human rights but also a strategic imperative for achieving sustainable development and building a better future for generations to come. As we work towards this goal, it is crucial to uphold the principles of equality, dignity, and respect for all individuals, regardless of gender, and to ensure that women's voices are heard, valued, and represented in all spheres of public life.

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