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RESEARCH ARTICLE

FEMALE POLITICAL YOUTH ACTIVISM
A Study of the Motivation in Seke

Obediah Dodo
Bindura University of Science Education, Zimbabwe

Blessmore Mpofu
Bindura University of Science Education, Zimbabwe

Abstract: The study seeking to understand the participation of female youth in active politics in Zimbabwe was influenced by the desire in some of the female youth to participate actively only to face unending challenges socially, politically and economically. The study was conducted in the form of a survey using questionnaires administered to 200 participants purposively sampled in Chitungwiza's four residential Units with each contributing 50 female participants. Analysis of data was conducted using 'Framework', a qualitative analytic method which assisted to comprehend internal meanings of the participants' respons-es and presenting them qualitatively. The study established that while Zimbabwe has various instruments for the promotion of women involvement in politics, the political terrain is defined by several social, eco-nomic and cultural barriers. The study identified some of the factors driving female youth into politics and some hindering their participation. It was established that areas with higher levels of election-related per-secution are more exposed to politics and higher levels of wanting to participate in political developments. It was noted that female youth who had experienced violence are more probable than non-affected youth to turn out to be effective politicians and to realise the importance of elections.

Keywords: Female youth; Gender; Political activism; Political participation; Political problems

Corresponding Authors: Obediah Dodo, email: obediahdodo@gmail.com; Blessmore Mpofu, email: beekevy@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The study to explore women's motivation for participation in active politics in Zimbabwe was inspired by the enthusiasm in some women in Zimbabwe to get into active politics and yet they get no sincere and adequate support from both men and the political infrastructure available. The study was also influenced by the existence of Millennium Development Goal Number 3, which promotes gender equality and women empowerment and the Southern Africa Development Community Protocol on Gender and Development (SADC Gender Monitor, 2013). Despite the availability of legal instruments for the development of women politically, there remain social, economic, religious and political hurdles that affect women. Though this challenge is common in most developing democracies, it has been transferred to the Zimbabwean context with a view to understanding some of the prominent influences on the participation of female youth in active politics and possibly establish some of the challenges thereto. The study focuses on the period between 1990 and 2019. This is when Zimbabwe effectively began to implement some of the elements of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995 and the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) (UNDP, 2014). During the period, Zimbabwe had also adopted the 2013–2017 National Gender Policy (GoZ, 2010) and had started to experience the governance of its second republic. The study looked at some of the preceding literature in the same areas in local settings for a contextualized analysis. The study also hopes to create a founding database on the role and depth of female youth in active politics in Zimbabwe.

2. Background

There has been a persistent gender gap in political participation in Zimbabwe for many years. Even though women are more prone than men to vote, their likelihood to engage in other political activities like campaigns and signing community petitions is low (Yarwood 2015, 1-5; RAU 2018). This is more noticeable with young women who may be still in school and whose social and religious socialisation dictates that young women keep away from public activities. This gap in political involvement has substantial repercussions for women's citizenship, which is about the capacity to use a voice in politics and make that voice reach appropriate and responsible leadership. Involvement in politics is a strategic means in which young people can air their voices. However, from a traditional perspective, young women who stand before men and contest

against men in any field are considered immoral and less mannered (Idang 2009; Mwale and Dodo 2017, 107-118).

Africa has the world's highest rate of female representation in institutions of leadership and decision-making. Rwanda had the world's highest proportion of women in parliament in 2003. As of 2017, women in Rwanda constituted 64% of the country's parliamentary seats. In South Africa, Seychelles and Senegal, more than 40% of legislative seats are in the hands of women, while in Tanzania, Uganda, Mozambique and Angola, women hold over 35% of parliamentary seats (Ekman and Amna 2012, 283-300). There have also been nine female prime ministers in Africa since 1993 and Zimbabwe has had a female Vice President. It has to be noted that the promotion of women into political leadership is supported and guided by international conventions and policies like the following; UNSC Resolution 1325 (2000); UNSC Resolution 1820 (2008) (OECD, 2009); Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (WDR, 2012); the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) crafted Youth Strategy (2014–2017, called "Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future"; Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security (OSCE/ODIHR, 2014; UNECA, 2017) and Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act (Chapter 14:33) and the Zimbabwe National Youth Policy (GoZ, 2015).

In Zimbabwe, particularly, the involvement of women and young women referred to as female youth in this study has been low. However, with the advent of education, globalisation via media and social networks and campaigns for freedoms by civil society institutions (Thorson 2014, 203-16), of late there has been a change in women's perception of politics. This development has inspired more women to get into active politics. The growth in student politics and workers' unions in tertiary institutions of learning and the few industries remaining in Zimbabwe respectively have also exposed more female youth to active politics.

Previous studies show that there is a female/male ration of 3:5 in politically active youth in Zimbabwe (Badza 2008, 1–16; Yarwood 2015, 1-5; Dodo, Nsenduluka and Kasanda 2016, 208-219). The studies also show that there are few women in leadership and more in the areas of grassroots mobilisation, advocacy, and election campaigns. These figures are a direct contrast to the traditionally held view that women are always on the rear seat when it comes to decision-making and development initiatives. This explains why women quota system has caused a lot of noise and hype; it is an attempt at helping more women up the political ladder. The 2013 Zimbabwe Parliament had over 35% women representation and the threshold is being pushed up to take in more women (RAU, 2018). Meanwhile in the areas under study, there are no female youth in

formal political structures other than the regular women portfolios in the structures. What remains in this entire female youth involvement in politics is how politics is understood from a general view-point (Amna and Ekman 2014, 261-81). However, in this study, politics shall denote power-structured relationships; arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another and being able to influence an activity. It is about young females being able to take up active and conventional roles in political processes. This definition resonates well with Booth (2011); Ekman and Amna (2012, 283-300); Dalton (2013) and Banet-Weiser (2018) conception of politics. This definition is expected to capture the expected dictates of male/female power relations while also showing how women are treated in this entire power matrix.

3. Methodology

The research was conducted in the form of a survey using a questionnaire. The questionnaires were physically distributed to 200 sampled participants in Chitungwiza's four residential Units. The Units selected were A, C, F and K with each contributing 50 female participants aged between 18 and 35, which is Zimbabwe's age range for youth (GoZ, 2017). Physical administration of the questionnaires sought to ensure that the right participants received involved in terms of age and sex. There were more participants from the 30-35 years age cohort (118) because of the following; more women have been marginalised in various programmes and over a long time, that is where more women who are freed from family and social commitments are, more women who would like to assume leadership roles and they have participated more in politics and so understand it better. The 18-23 and 24-29 cohorts had 10 and 72 participants respectively. Participants were purposively sampled to ensure the inclusion of the most appropriate respondents. All the sampled participants were confirmed political activists in the youth wings of their respective political parties for a minimum period of two years. However, participants' specific political parties have been kept confidential for ethical purposes. To confirm the youth status of the participants, proper ages were ascertained by word of mouth. Their sampling was not based on membership to specific political parties but their activity. The purposive nature of the sample selection made sure the sampling conditions were satisfied across all variables and that female youth from varying situations and backgrounds were incorporated in the study. The basis for sample selection was not to pick a statistically representative sample of all female youth, but to guarantee variety of coverage in all crucial variables. The four Units were

also selected for their proximity to each other for convenience purpose and that there is a sizeable number of female youth who are politically active.

During the study, the definition of politics was never imposed. Instead, female youth were asked to consider politics in the broadest sense, in their own understanding, in-order to evade familiarizing them to more conventional philosophies of politics.

After data were collected, a set of verbatim transcripts were produced complementing completed questionnaires. Analysis of data was conducted using 'Framework', a qualitative analytic method developed at the National Centre for Social Research (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994). Framework analysis is similar to grounded theory. However, it varies in that it is better adapted to a study that has a pre-designed sample, a restricted time frame, precise questions and a priori issues that have to be dealt with. Framework analysis' major worry is to define and deduce what is happening in a specific situation (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994). The Framework helped understand the inner meanings of the participants' responses in the questionnaires and presenting them descriptively. Framework analysis was user-friendly throughout the analysis process in that it permitted the study to gather all the data before analysing at the end. In the analysis phase the collected data was scrutinised, recorded and arranged according to strategic questions and subjects.

The study sought to meet these objectives:

- Create a map of the matters and challenges that female youth have
- Explore ways in which female youth understand politics
- Investigate factors which have inspired female youth's engagement in politics.

The results of the survey were presented as per the created themes that allowed the use of figures and tables for clarification and ease of analysis.

Delimitation

The study was conducted in the town of Chitungwiza in Zimbabwe. While the town has 23 residential suburbs, the study specifically focused on four; Seke Units A, C, F, and K primarily because of their proximity to each other for easy administration and the fact that they share similar political and social characteristics. Each of the selected areas contributed fifty participants. Chitungwiza town is wholly residential and high density in nature. It is 25 kilometres out of Harare.

4. Theoretical framework

Participatory democracy is inspired by the theories of Rousseau and the philosophies of personal freedoms that were promoted by John Mill (Held, 2006). The theory of Participatory Democracy argues that citizens long to take part in political processes. However, some scholars like Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2005) argue that citizens would want to delegate some of their decision-making roles to the elected representatives. Participatory Democracy stresses the benefits of citizen involvement. With Participatory Democracy, citizens believe that delegating their obligations is prone to washing away their rights. Therefore, they do not believe in allowing the elected representatives to do everything for them. This is the same scenario confronting Zimbabwean female youth who feel discriminated and left behind in development, growth and leadership initiatives. They feel that for too long, the gender argument has been used at their detriment hence the need to find space in the mainstream politics.

The theory is relevant in that it exposes the situation of women in Zimbabwe and particularly the female youth who would also want to partake in politics. The theory outlines some of the drivers for people to engage in political processes. Indeed, this is what the study sought to explore.

5. Literature review

Democracy and Participation

Democracy as the political system has risen in relation to the notion of authoritarianism. In historical perspective, democracy means different things in different historical times. As a form of government, democracy is relatively old. It involves a structure of government that permits the citizens liberty to choose their desires (Peng, 2010). Despite the numerous differences in how democracy is viewed, it can be argued that there are two suppositions of democracy, which are equality and liberty (Rose and Shin 2011, 331-375). Further, there are least possible conditions which must be satisfied for a system to be considered democratic (Sloam 2007, 567: Peng 2010). In the case of Zimbabwe, the unconditional involvement of women in politics is one such condition.

Democracy puts emphasis on the fact that beliefs should not be forced on citizens, and specifies that freedom gives preeminence to political and moral values of reciprocity, equality and respect for the opinions of others (Rose and Shin 2011, 331-375). With regards to the desires of women in politics, there is an ideal form of democracy called consensus model. Consensus model is a form of democracy, which allows maximization

of chances to contribute in government decision-making and puts up democratic consensus on government policies (Peng, 2010). Democracy is also about unconditional inclusion of all citizens in governance through equality (Sloam 2007, 567; Rose and Shin 2011, 331-375). Equality between men and women implies getting opportunities and equal rights of women and men in policies and laws, guaranteeing equal right of entry to services and resources within families, communities and society. Equality takes with it equal rights to take part in all domains and at all stages of political and public life (Towns, 2010).

It should be noted that there may be different forms of participation. However, for this study, two types highlighted in the seminal studies of involvement by Barnes and Kaase (1979) are discussed. The scholars differentiated between conventional and unconventional involvement. Conventional participation involved actions conducted over formal conduits like campaigning and voting while others organised outside these means like demonstrations and picketing were considered unconventional. However, the difference has been narrowed by the changes in time and governance approaches.

Culture

Culture, as it is ordinarily known, involves an entirety of qualities and characters that are peculiar to a people to the extent that it identifies them from other peoples or societies. It is the patterned way of life common to a specific group of people that share a common descent (Idang, 2009). These unusual qualities may include the people's language, social norms, taboos and values. There is also the aspect of how society views respective participation of men and women in politics and in public (Mwale and Dodo 2017, 107–118). Culture is always changed and adjusted by people through links with and absorption of other peoples' cultures, in a process called assimilation. Culturally, there are some forms of behaviour, conduct and actions that are acceptable while others are generally condemned (Idang, 2009). Similarly, in the Zimbabwean context, there are some conservatives who disapprove of women who seek active political involvement (Mwale and Dodo 2017, 107–118). It is generally regarded as taboo and any woman who dares cross the line faces out-right condemnation.

Youth and Politics

According to the African Youth Charter, youth refer to people between the ages of 15 and 35 years (Mengistu, 2017). This definition recognises the development realities of Africa and describes youth in the context of Africa. Different countries including Zimbabwe (GoZ, 2017) define the youth differently and with equally diverse age rang-

es. Therefore, taking this 18-35 years age cohort appears more representative and comprehensive across Africa.

The youth are a politically active constituency in Zimbabwe. However, this does not distinguish the involvement of males and females as separate constituencies with equally different needs and aspirations. Nevertheless, the manner political parties and the government perceive female youth is non-inviting (Ojok and Acol, 2017). The long-created systems of power in Zimbabwe insistently ignore female youth from active political systems.

Researches (Hazan and Rahat, 2010; Rose and Shin 2011, 331-375; OSCE/ODIHR, 2014) show deterioration in political interest and commitment among the youth in general and female youth in particular. However, in the absence of dependable longitudinal data, long term implications to the politics in general are difficult to predict.

Some scholars assert that a new political generation is developing, with the youth snubbing conventional politics in favour of directing their focus and vigor to single issues like human and animal rights, environment and climate change among others (Caiazza, 2006; Sommers, 2007; Mascheroni, 2015). Dodo et al (2016, 208-219) say that there is an average ratio of 3:5 of females to males in active political circles in Zimbabwe as noted during the 2008 and 2013 election campaigns and the subsequent violence era of 2008. It has also been observed that political interest increases with age and responsibility (WDR, 2012). The same scholars contend that the reasons why female youth do, or do not, partake in political activities is not well researched and therefore unclear. However, some of the reasons for the lack of concern in politics include youth conviction that politics has no significance for them or their preoccupation with other matters (Loader, Vromen and Xenos 2014, 143-50). Other studies point to the intricacy of politics and the challenges female youth have in appreciating political life and processes (Stoker, 2006: Tomanovic and Stanojevic, 2015; Yarwood 2015, 1-5). Lack of female youth involvement in politics also results from other preoccupations and interests like as marriages, child bearing and jobs among others (Hausmann, Tyson and Zahidi, 2011; Klemmensen, Hatemi, Hobolt, Petersen, Skytthe and Norgaard 2012, 409-427).

Tangible youth involvement in different African countries differs. In various organizations, parliaments and councils, it is exceptionally restricted (Mengistu, 2017). This is the case with female youth participation. The non-inclusivity of the political parties' programmes is one of the central explanations for the limited involvement of the youth especially females in such significant spaces. According to UNDP (2014), the youth voter turnout of African countries show that female youth voters participate less than

male youth. This has been caused by the female youths' exclusion from mainstream political activities (UNECA, 2017).

Since Zimbabwe's political independence in 1980, policies that seek to involve youth in the decision-making process have increased enormously (GoZ, 2010). There are various efforts to involve female youth in the political systems. At the national and regional level, there are some initiatives to take on board youth' issues into developmental agendas (Ledriz, 2016). The adoption of the African Youth charter is one of the legal steps taken up by the AU in that regard. In Zimbabwe, there is a whole Ministry addressing women and female youth needs. Besides, there is also a quota system which deliberately favours women in the allocation of power and other opportunities (GoZ, 2010).

There has been growing worry that schools are not doing enough to teach children about political institutions and practices. However, in Zimbabwe, the Nziramasanga Commission recommended the teaching of courses around citizenship in tertiary institutions as a way of conscientising the youth on political processes (Dodo, Makwerere, Matavire and Parwada 2013, 700-707). Though there has not been any tool for measuring the impact of the teaching of citizenship courses in tertiary institutions, the functionality and efficiencies of student unions seem to testify part of the impact (Dodo et al 2013, 700-707).

Motivation for Women Participation

Since the liberation struggle of the 1970s, Zimbabwean women have been involved in politics though at a lower level than the male counterparts (Badza 2008, 1-16). With the passage of time and the advent of globalisation, most institutions and societies are beginning to appreciate the need for equality between men and women and equal political opportunities for both men and women. The involvement of female youth in politics according to Beaman, Chattopadhyay, Duflo, Pande and Topalova (2009) and Norris and Krook (2011, 53) is a fulfillment by local politics to conform to the international human rights framework, a call to reinforce democratic credentials and a wish to improve the representativeness of democratic institutions. According to Koffman and Gill (2013, 83), young females are portrayed as filled with economic and educational competence and highlight the part they play in bettering their countries' development prospects. Young females are gradually seen as civic and political actors. They are no longer depicted as terrible victims of political and social forces outside their control, but are also more and more viewed as lively contributors in public life (Harris and Lam 2019, 627).

Depending on the political, social, religious and economic atmosphere, women are motivated to join political trenches by different factors some of which are intrinsic while others are extrinsic. According to OSCE/ODIHR (2014), one of the factors includes the desire to improve a political party's public image and standing. Broadening a party's membership by taking in more women of varying backgrounds and ages can, consequently, assist build up a party's public reputation among crucial voting groups (Borovsky, Cherrabi, Alaoui and Doherty, 2010). Resultantly, some women take advantage of the party's desperation for membership by joining the structures and make the best out of the possible incentives available. Apparently, most political institutions that want more members tend to avail free facilities as promotional services. Further, engaging more women can assist counterbalance decreasing party membership (OSCE/ODIHR, 2014). There are also some women according to Johnson (2007, 380–405) and Krook (2009) who are inspired to join active politics by their need to improve political party boards and policy programs. This strategy can revitalize a party platform that may have gone out-of-touch with existing realities. This way, a political party turns out to be one whose policy platform shows novelty, comprehensiveness and responsiveness to contemporary and developing policy matters (Johnson 2007, 380–405).

In its study around women participation in politics, Amna and Ekman (2014, 261-81) and OSCE/ODIHR (2014) established that some women decide to join politics solely to reinforce political party electoral tactics. It is usually said that women take along particular areas of expertise to politics, particularly on social matters like healthcare, welfare and education among others (Booth, 2011, Dalton, 2013). This derives from the belief that most women are kind, patient and forgiving. Researches also show that the increased numbers of women in political offices can assist parties to contest more successfully, paying focus to significant policy matters that would have formerly been unnoticed (OSCE/ODIHR, 2014). In most politics, especially in Africa, women are used for mobilisation and entertainment purposes through social media (Ojok and Acol, 2017) because of their ability to sing. In some cases, they are required to provide with sexual services to the combatants and politicians (Badza 2008, 1-16). Banet-Weiser (2018) contends that girls are socialized away from recognised political activity though they may have interest and capacity to contribute meaningfully. Resultantly, young females have a tapered characterisation of politics, taking it mainly as an activity for the politicians and those with more power than themselves. This is further worsened by sexualisation of gender especially in the media (Koffman and Gill 2013,83).

6. Findings

All the 200 questionnaires that were physically distributed to all the sampled partici-pants were collected after two to three days of delivery thus achieving 100% response rate. The days of questionnaire completion were limited as a way of reducing loss of residue and trying to retain participants' interest in the study. The results from the questionnaires are thus presented as per the themes created from the analysis.

Fig 1. Participants' demographics

Age range	Unit A	Unit C	Unit F	Unit K	Total
18-23	4	1	3	2	**10**
24-29	16	28	11	17	**72**
30-35	30	21	36	31	**118**
Total	**50**	**50**	**50**	**50**	**200**

Conception of politics

All the 200 participants responded to the question that sought their understanding of politics. There was a vast difference in the participants' views even though they are from the same political community and most probably influenced by the same factors. Generally, there were six distinct conceptions of politics. 31% of the participants indi-cated a general view that politics was to do with the Government or the running of the country. 11% related politics to social services such as health, employment and educa-tion among others. They argued that people were driven into politics largely by poor delivery of such services (Ekman and Amna 2012, 283-300).

Seventeen percent of the participants defined politics as being associated with mon-ey, power and control. They indicated that people who successfully manage to get into politics usually use their financial power to manipulate the systems. 22% defined poli-tics as a means of representing views and realising hopes (Peng, 2010). They said that politics presented a platform where citizens could express their desires without unnec-essary bureaucracies. One participant (30-35 age group) said this;

When we present our views during political gatherings, we begin to see some light though some of the issues are not attended. What keeps our hope is the fact that sen-ior politicians keep promising us heaven on earth.

The other 18% said that politics is mainly about political parties seeking to gain pow-er so that they determine the direction of development and other social, economic, re-

ligious and political activities. However, 3% of the participants considered politics as exciting because it presented a chance for change. One participant did not define politics in a coherent manner hence it was discarded.

Political activities

Ninety-nine percent of the participants responded to the question on their understanding of political activities. The respondents pointed out that political action may comprise a variety of ways and means. Of the 197 participants, 66% indicated that political activities include signing petitions, taking part in demonstrations and protesting over government policies as earlier pointed out by Caiazza (2006). 30% others cited the following; joining political parties and lobbying, joining trade unions, or pressure groups. 4% of the participants described political activities as writing to the press, and protesting to local authorities and councils especially over service delivery.

Motivation for participation

On some of the factors that motivate female youth to participate in active politics in Zimbabwe in general and in the selected areas under study, all the 200 participants responded. From 21 participants (10%), there were voices that believe that governments are more democratic if there are women within its structures (Beaman, 2009; Booth, 2011). They stated that the involvement of women cements democracy and fosters growth and development.

Seven percent of the participants indicated that providing opportunities for women and men to participate equally in all political processes is a human rights requirement which unfortunately is ignored in most instances. They added that this is perpetuated by patriarchal forces that push for the recognition of men ahead of women in leadership processes. They added that female youth involvement ensured their influence in policymaking on matters of specific concern to different groups of women. This aspect is aptly highlighted by Booth (2011).

There were 23% of the participants who indicated the need for more female youth getting exposed to information about politics. 4% (18-23 age group) mentioned that they acquired an interest in politics because of discussions at home with their parents, while 20% indicated that they had developed interest in politics through courses at school or college that were relevant to politics (Thorson, 2014: 203-16). The other 49% from the 30-35 age group revealed that the wish to accomplish a community obligation was the main cause to arousing interest in politics. However, there were 81% who pointed out that exposure to politics was rooted on several factors.

Thirty two percent cited family background. The experience of growing up in a family where there is some level of political discussion and interest appear to influence female youth's interest in politics. 24% others cited peer groups and acquaintances while 17% believed political events and circumstances aroused their awareness and liking of politics. 8% cited the media as one of the main sources of information about politics and a major influence to their involvement. They also revealed that their involvement in different charitable activities, had also influenced their participation in active politics. This is akin to what previous scholars have established in other situations (Sommers 2007; Loader et al 2014, 143-50; Thorson 2014, 203-16).

The presence of women in political office, both elected and appointed, can increase the political system's legitimacy and, thus, public confidence in the system brings out cultural and traditional perspectives in politics (Krook, 2009; Booth, 2011; Mwale and Dodo 2017, 107–118). In that regard, 8% argued that they had decided to partake in politics so that they could fight for women's rights and ensure that some of the cultural practices that worked in favour of men only were reviewed.

In Zimbabwe, according to 62%, there are female youth who had formerly been apolitical who joined political discussions on social media. They added that a plethora of promotions on social media by both the government and civil society institutions (CSIs) had led to an increase in registration by youth to vote and many more female youths to become politically active. 46% others indicated that the social media had not affected them in any way politically besides updating them on the political developments prevailing in the country.

Thirty-one percent of the participants indicated that in their areas of residence, there were several cases of political violence and victimisation, which had to some extent inspired them to join politics with the intention of retaliating (Dodo et al, 2016, 208-219; Ajok and Acol 2017). It was also through the same violence that some of them had developed some endurance that they were ready to contest against some of the formidable men in the areas. 23 of the 31 participants pointed out that it was some of the women known for immorality and community violence who had the guts to join politics with the intention to either look for men or to find free 'loot' materially. According to these participants, it had become apparent that more female youth from these high-density areas were going to join politics given the levels of violence and immorality experienced in the local communities. Two participants (18-23 age group) said this;

Vasikana vemuno mu A *havatombonyare. Pfungwa dzechihure ndidzo dzinoita kuti vaite chivindi chinozovasvitsa pakusarudzwa kuita maleaders. Asi zvimwe zvacho zvinotoda kakusakwana*.

(Ladies in Unit A are shameless. Their immoral mentality drives them to engage in politics, which leads to their election into community leaders. Sometimes one must adopt an 'I don't care attitude')

(24-29 age group) *Ahh vanechivindi vasikana vacho. Ini handitombozvikwanise zve-kumira-mira pamberi pevanhu especially varume. Unomva waitwa pfambi. Asivamwe vacho zvavararamisa; vanotowana varume nechikafu ikoko.*

(Some of the ladies are bold. I cannot be seen standing in public especially before men. You can be mistaken for a prostitute. But some are making a living out of it; some have found boyfriends while others can loot from public facilities.)

Challenges to Women Participation

Although a few political parties have already introduced democratic and gender-sensitive procedures into the process of recruiting and selecting their candidates, including specific measures to increase the number of women selected, party leaders still tend to choose candidates using criteria that are not always merit-based (Krook, 2009). In the final analysis, more women face various challenges whenever they try to rise through political and leadership structures.

The study established that 42 participants (21%) were complaining against unequal access to and the distribution of party resources as a barrier to their active participation. Participants had a lot to say about the different structures and influences that turned them away from politics. Finding politics boring was a constantly mentioned cause for not taking politics seriously. 34 participants (17%) cited it in their question-naires. For some, (seven youth - 3.5%) the mere mention of the word politics was a deterrent as also noted by Yarwood (2015, 1-5). Fifty-three youth (27%) pointed out that it was commonly understood that female youth are preoccupied with other interests and activities, which dominate their lives, thus leaving little time to dedicate to politics. They pointed out that sometimes they should focus on marriage aspects and family demands even if they are not married. This view is driven by a conception that politics is for older, more responsible and men whose lives are affected by politics. One youth said this (25-30 age group);

Pachivanhu chedu, musikana wese anotarisirwa kuroorwa nerimwe zera. Nekudaro, kana musikana abvezera, anotarisirwa kuti adzikame oratidza hunhu kuitira kuti awane anomuroora. Pamwe pacho, zvisinei nekuroorwa, musikana anobatikana nemabasa epamba asi mukomana anenge achikwanisa kubuda achiita zvaanoda.

(Culturally, girls are expected to start preparing for marriage at some teenage period. This preparation involves modifying one's behavior and public conduct. In other instances, girls are expected to assume most of the household chores while the boy is

free to move around. The differences in these male/female situations lead to non-participation of the girl in politics.)

Ninety-two participants (46%) indicated that lack of information and understanding about politics and the supposed problems in trying to grasp such an intricate subject had also turned some female youth away from politics. To some extent, according to the participants, this situation had resulted from some female youth selecting to 'switch off' from information about politics, lack of trust in politicians who often failed to keep to their promises, and usually failing to account for their actions and decisions. Fifty-six participants (56%) revealed that they were less likely to take part in a range of political and public activities, like voting and attending political meetings citing gross abuse of some female youth by some male adults within the political circles as noted by Ekman and Amna (2012, 283-300); Thorson (2014, 203-16) and Amna and Ekman (2014, 261-81). This was contrary to earlier views that there are some youth who join politics solely to look for men. They indicated that female youth who refused to be abused were subjected to inhuman treatment by their male counterparts. According to these participants, staying away from some political processes was just a protest meant to register their displeasure.

7. Discussion

In understanding the explanations for the rise in political involvement among female youth, the study looked beyond traditional understandings of what inspires political involvement. The results show that traditional notions of politics are limited in their understanding of the influences that inspire female youth to get involved. Traditional conceptions explain the involvement of male youth in politics, but do little to develop our understanding of involvement among female youth. In fact, there is very little research around the involvement of female youth in politics in Zimbabwe. Female youth in this study were less expected to call themselves political in the traditional meaning, but are more probable than men to be motivated by a sense of wanting to make a difference. The study however failed to differentiate political from civic duties by female youth as globalization and human rights tend to interfere with conventional approaches to politics.

Over 99% of the participants had an idea about what entails politics. Their appreciation of what happens within political spheres is a clear testimony that generally citizens in areas characterised by poverty and a relatively high degree of political activity accumulate political knowledge gradually as aptly described in the theory of Participatory

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Democracy. From the study, the basic knowledge presented including the following definitions; government administration; being connected to money, power and control; means of representing views and realising hopes and political parties seeking to win power, show the levels of people's political literacy.

Ninety-nine percent of the participants showed a clear appreciation of what politics is all about as also pointed out by Peng (2010) and Booth (2011). The other three percent did not just respond to the question. However, for those who responded, their understanding of politics was evidence enough of their informed and voluntary participation. Participatory democracy is about citizens who actively contribute politically rather than leave elected politicians represent them. This is seen in some of the respondents. It is also testimony of the fact that the generality of the citizens have over the years acquired skills and knowledge around politics. This has resultantly inspired more female youth to participate actively in politics. Generally, the study established the following as some of the roles of female youth in politics in Zimbabwe; campaigning, participation at meetings, wearing political apparel, protesting publicly, blogging, posting, and other forms of social media use, violence, protective and preventive activities, voting, decision-making and membership mobilization.

Having female youth in the mainstream politics is fast becoming inevitable and choosing their exclusion is perilous to all sustainable development efforts. The study established that with the advent of globalization, there were various factors driving female youth into joining active politics. Some of the factors are like those identified by Sommers (2007); Booth (2011); Loader et al (2014, 143-50) and Thorson (2014, 203-16). In the same vein, most political parties are beginning to acknowledge reality on the roles played by the youth and genuinely embracing them into the ranks and structures. Over 80% of the participants pointed out that they had been influenced by various factors chief amongst them; family backgrounds, peers, school education system, historic political events, media, the need to revenge and advocate for transformation and the need to fulfil civic obligations. According to Booth (2011) and Mwale and Dodo (2017), these achievements were despite various patriarchal forces.

As argued by Loader et al (2014, 143-50); Thorson (2014, 203-16) and Ojok and Acol (2017), social media has become a powerful tool to reckon with in as far as political processes are concerned. This media of communication has impacted on various institutions with remarkable force that there have been drastic changes on the political front. With globalisation in our midst, social media is expected to continue affecting the involvement of female youth in the mainstream of politics. Besides, mobilisation, it also affects the processes like decision-making and election patterns among others.

There is growing evidence that young people's influence towards the dismantling of exploitative power structures in Africa is on the rise. The changes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and several other countries are evidence of the roles played by youth in that regard. In all these efforts, the involvement of women and female youth is abundant. However, the ascendency of female youth into leadership and meaningful political circles has been hampered by various factors as noted in the study. Some of the study findings resonate well with other previous studies by Krook (2009); Ekman and Amna (2012, 283-300); Thorson (2014, 203-16) and Amna and Ekman (2014, 261-81) and Yarwood (2015, 1-5).

The study to some extent acknowledges that challenges to gender equality are promoted in the statutes, charters and electoral programmes only. Female youth's political potential is generally infrequently recognized in party leadership and decision-making structures (WDR, 2012). Often, politicians do not walk their talk thus leaving out most potentially capable women from active political participation. Particularly in Zimbabwe and the areas under study, female youth are discriminated largely based on patriarchal belief systems and other conditions and operational ground rules that are insensitive to females. This sharply contrasts the dictates of the instruments and mechanisms: the Beijing Platform, CEDAW, Maputo Protocol, Zimbabwe National Youth Policy, UNDP Youth Strategy (2014-2017) and the UNSCR 2250 that are in place to promote active women involvement in politics.

The study established that areas with higher levels of election-related victimization have higher propensity to join politics and higher levels of wanting to vote and partake in other political processes. To investigate political engagement among female youth, it was noted that female youth who had experienced violence and suffering are more likely than non-affected youth to become effective politicians and to see the importance of votes as observed by Dodo et al (2016, 208-219) and Ajok and Acol (2017). The study therefore notes that seeing violence may be the primary influence behind the upsurge in political engagement, as seeing violence is significantly associated with more political participation.

8. Recommendations

In view of a serious dearth in information and studies in Zimbabwe on the non-participation of female youth in politics, it is imperative that there be an acknowledgement of the fact that youth and indeed females have an invaluable role in the governance of any country. It should also be noted that while females constitute the

majority demographically in Zimbabwe, patriarchal and other contemporary practices and systems continue to discriminate women from leadership, active political activity and meaningful decision-making processes. If these imbalances remain unattended, female youth participation in politics may also remain suppressed. Therefore, in view of the above observations, the study recommends various interventions and practices as a way of addressing the problem. Some of the interventions could include deliberate gender equality and empowerment educational processes in formal school systems, which ultimately build confidence in the females. Intensified promotion and advocacy through the media for the empowerment of females may also be another effective way of ensuring that females actively participate in politics in Zimbabwe.

The study recommends a practical and sincere application of statutes, laws and policies on women development and empowerment. Zimbabwe has various home-grown and other internationally domesticated conventions, laws and policies which seek to ensure the empowerment of women. Unfortunately, it is at administrative level that some of the instruments fail to see light of the day thus affecting the intended recipients. As a way around the administrative hurdles, the government could put in place a deliberate quota system on the involvement of females so that the competition for posts and prominence between males and females may be reduced. There is therefore need for political will and focused machinery to roll out the instruments. Regarding the noted slackening political will, the study also recommends that civil society institutions take it upon themselves to capacitate citizens so that at the end of the day, they demand accountability from the politicians and the government.

It has been observed that some youth join politics having been influenced by family backgrounds, some of which may be bad and saddening. In view of the above, it is recommended that socially, economically and politically, there be deliberate systems to address family challenges. These family challenges may be addressed by first and foremost looking at the functionality of the economy. There should be some political efforts toward resuscitation of the economy so that people including female youth get sustainable jobs. In the case of the youth who join politics to satisfy their civic feeling, the study also recommends that political parties and respective communities take a deliberate drive to support and encourage them through incentives. These incentives could be in the form of quotas or materially but recognize the failure of the previous quota system that was manipulated by men.

Political parties should develop a culture of affording female youth chances to show case their potential without stereotyping or attaching immorality to females who show enthusiasm to participate in politics. This could start by reviewing patriarchal practices from a social stand-point. Equally, the study recommends a deliberate education of

females on their need to partake in politics and how they contribute economically and socially from their involvement in politics. Such education programmes could be introduced in churches, social clubs, and as they attend to maternity services in health institutions among others.

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AUTHORS' INFORMATION:

Obediah Dodo Ph.D lectures at Bindura University of Science Education, Zimbabwe. He has published over seventy journals and books in the area of conflict resolution, youth violence and youth politics.

Blessmore Mpofu is an undergraduate student at Bindura University of Science Education, Zimbabwe. He is studying Peace and Governance.