

Factors responsible for political participation among rural women

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Participation means that people are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural and political process that affects their lives. Women are a major force behind people's participation in the life of society as they play a leading role in the emergence of groups, organizations and movements worldwide. Levels of political awareness of women are conditioned greatly by the political culture of the area, the approach of political parties towards them, and the quality of the local leadership. Political socialization is the gradual learning of the norms, attitudes and behavior acceptable to an ongoing political system. Political participation of women can be defined as the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in shaping and sharing of power and in the value given by society to this role of women. This paper attempts to throw light on factors which play a major role in political participation of rural women depicting the role of family, peer, education, party affiliation etc. The implication of this paper would be to recognize the contribution of rural women to politics and in the decision making process by identifying the factors that affect their participation in politics. It would help in strengthening the democracy by closing gap between the decision makers in government and social movements where women prevail.

Keywords: political socialization, rural women, political attitude

Participation is an essential element of human development whether it is economic, social, cultural or political field. The participation may be direct, as in community projects, welfare organizations or it may be indirect through elected officials and representatives. In the latter, the degree of participation will depend on the extent to which the election process makes the officials or representative bodies responsible for public opinion. Individuals may participate through non-governmental or statutory bodies. In the first place, there can be no true democracy of the people without equal participation of women and men in all spheres of life and levels of decision making (Karl, 1995). There are multiple contexts of women participation. These are:

- Participation as voters and candidates in elections
- Political attitudes such as awareness, commitment and involvement in politics and autonomy in political action and behavior.
- Their impact on the political process.

There is need for policies that involve empowering local authorities and communities to develop strategies that combine the empowerment of communities and rural women. The representation and participation of women in local governance is directly linked to the advancement of women. To ensure that the decisions that affect women's lives are taken seriously, women should not be passive bystanders in their own development but should be proactively involved to ensure that the socio-economic patterns that marginalize and keep them dependent are changed (Kurebwa, 2016). Despite having potential, and a growing interest among women in taking part in the decision making processes, women's representation and participation in local governance still remains very low in Zimbabwe (Ekou, 2006). The participation by women at local rural level is an excellent way in which women can break down the barriers. Still, in a country like India, women participate in voting, run for public offices

and political parties at lower levels more than the men. The level and forms of women's participation in politics is largely shaped by cultural and societal barriers in the form of violence, discrimination and illiteracy. Causal factors such as economic, religious, social and cultural also contribute to women's low political participation (Kassa, 2015).

Political socialization is the gradual learning of norms, attitudes and been acceptable to an ongoing political system (Sigel, 1965). It is a process by which a person acquires political values, attitudes, interests and knowledge of the political community. There are four aspects of political socialization. They are as follows:

- The development and any subsequent changes in a psychological identification with a party.
- The development of political interest
- The agents that help generate political interest
- Party identification in the form of status and role.

Family

The childhood experiences in the family strongly affect the formation of attitudes and behavior patterns of adults has long been held by social psychologists and more recently, political scientists who have studied the process of political socialization (Dennis, 1973). Family tends to be the most important source of political socialization as a person spends far more time as a child with their family and tend to acquire the family's habits, behaviors and attitudes. Parents who take an active role in politics and vote in every election often influence their children to vote and participate later when they become adult (Greenstein, 1969). Young people from homes where political conversations are rare and airing controversial viewpoints is discouraged, tend to abstain from politics as adults (Saphir & Chaffee, 2002).

School

The most important task of schools as agents of political socialization is passing on of knowledge about policies, programs and work of government to the student. The student who