Higher Education: Pathway for Women's Appointment to Decision Making Positions in Public Administration in Zambia

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ABSTRACT

The success of development efforts depends on making women full and equal partners in all matters of the economy. Higher education, to be certain, by itself, is not a panacea, but is a necessary condition for the advancement of women in society. Through higher education, the journey towards participation in decision making power begins. Access to education is considered an important determinant of women's appointment to decision making positions in public administration. This is because women's increased education is positively associated with autonomy of decision making in different sectors of society. As such, women's decision making power increases when they are empowered with higher education. The main objective of this study was to explore the influence of higher education qualifications on women's appointment to decision making positions in public administration. The sample size was 25 respondents who were interviewed from various ministries in Lusaka. Both secondary and primary data were collected for the study. Primary data was collected using semi-structured interviews and secondary data from various documents, reports as well as electronic documents. The research design used was case study and using a non-probability sampling technique, purposive sampling and snow ball sampling methods were used. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings of the study reviewed that despite women acquiring higher education qualification in Zambia, their appointment to decision making positions in public administration has not been achieved fully. And factors such as horizontal and vertical segregation were found to be challenges that affect their appointment to decision making positions hence the reasons why the numbers of women being low. Therefore, the study recommended that the government should realize the importance of women's appointment and participation by enacting and implementing laws, policies and regulations. Women also should be empowered with training and upgrading of skills to better participate in decision making.

Keywords: Women, higher education, decision making, public administration

INTRODUCTION

Education is considered a significant determinant of the development of any nation. Education is a fulcrum around which quick development of economic, political, sociological and human resources of any country resolves. According to Ghazala and Khalid (2012: 51), it is a contributing factor to egalitarianism and social transformation in any society. Education is one of the most important predictors usually, in fact, the most important predictor – of many forms of social participation – from voting to associational membership, to chairing a local committee. Education, in short, is an extremely powerful predictor of civic engagement (Putnam, 2000). Therefore, women's education plays an important role in improving the quality of the whole nation such that the neglect of their education is also related to the underdevelopment of productivity.

Higher education, to be certain, by itself, is not a panacea, but is a necessary condition for the advancement

of women in society. Through higher education, the journey towards participation in decision making power begins. It is undeniable that the social function of women's education is that cultural and scientific knowledge can promote the development of women's understanding of various issues that affect not only them but others as well. Higher education can enhance women's awareness of political participation and improve the quality of participation. It can also promote the development of social material production. And because of this the number of higher learning institutions has seen an increase over the past years. According to Herz and Sperling (2004), the role of higher education as a powerful instrument and mediator of social change has been highlighted. A major finding is that participation in higher education enables women to impact on a number of discriminatory practices simultaneously and thereby effect change for the better. In other words, women who are educated are more likely to be listened to; their views are increasingly respected which means that they are able to make a contribution to society. This is like an upward spiral, resulting in greater opportunities for women's participation in all aspects of life.

Globally, higher education is regarded as a significant instrument and means of social change (Ashraf, 2004). Higher education represents a critical building block of social, economic and political inclusion which in turn represent the pillars of first-class citizenship. By providing women, a group whose voices had historically sung sotto voice in mass politics (Phiri et al., 2023), with greater access to higher education, national law makers used public policy to significantly increase the probability that women would participate as full and equal members of the polity (Rose, 2018). Since independence, the contributions of investments made by various governments in higher education has been substantial. Though we recognize that African countries differ significantly from one another in characteristics that influence how higher education may affect economic growth. The policy environment for example, which is important for allowing the fruits of higher education to benefit an economy, varies across countries. Important to note is that higher education provided to women would mean independence in decision making and economic dependence.

The Fourth World Conference on women, held in Beijing in 1995, recognized that women's literacy is key to empowering women's participation in decision making in society and to improving families' well-being. Higher education no doubt widens the mental horizons and releases from the ignorance and superstitions and makes a person aware about rights and improve decision making capacity. Thus, women's increased education is positively associated with autonomy in their decision making. In this vein, many developing countries have implemented policies to increase educational opportunities and expand the supply of educational institutions at all levels. The literature shows that these efforts have had greater impacts on girls than boys, and have led to a reduction in gender disparities in education globally (Evans & Yuan, 2021; Nsana & Daka, 2023). Looking at the Zambian set up, current data on higher education reveals that in 2021, 46,053 students graduated from both public and private universities in Zambia. Out of the total number of students who graduated in 2021, 27,523 graduated from private universities, while 18,530 graduated from public universities. Further, 31,116 were males while 14,937 were females, representing 67.6% and 32.4% of males and females, respectively as shown in the table below.

Number of graduates in public and private universities in Zambia, 2021

University type	Male	Female	Total	Percentage (%)
Public	9,363	9,167	18,530	40
Private	21,753	5,770	27,523	60
TOTAL	31,115	14,937	46,053	100

Source: HEA, 2021

Women's higher education is an advantage when it comes to them occupying positions of decision making

whether in the public or private sectors. This is because women's employment is more selective and mainly driven by more education, thus ensuring the increased importance of higher education for positive social and labor outcomes particularly for women. Women's participation in decision making especially in public administration has received many views globally. The numbers of women occupying most decision making positions in this sector is low. In modern times, higher education facilitated women's entry into gainful employment, which has really helped them bring about a change in the economic power structure of a family in favor of women (Patil, 2016; Chibvembe et al., 2023). Globally, despite their increased education and work experience, women are not accessing senior positions in the public or private sectors in the number expected (UNESCO, 2011). This is more evident when it comes to high level decision making positions, especially at government and state levels (DAW, 2005). Women have lower quality jobs compared to men in public administration. However, women exposed to higher education fare significantly better than those unexposed. On the other hand, both exposed and unexposed men are more likely to be in top management compared to women in the corresponding group.

Access, equity, women participation and empowerment have been an issue of deliberation all around the world. Women, despite having hypothetically equal access to universities alongside men, have not been able to bring any change in their social position and status through education.

Historically, women have been relegated to the private sphere, while men were allowed to roam the public. Moreover, women's work in the home had been deemed as the defining part of their existence, freeing men from any homebound obligations, which enabled them to focus on their professional careers. This anticipated concept, which evolved mainly as a consequence of the industrial revolution, still limits women today (Stivers, 1990; Sianga et al., 2024). Women initially struggled to enter the workplace, access appointment to work in organizations, and earn a living by working in the public sector (Nasser, 2018). After years of debates and signing of declarations, eventually, women were allowed to enter the public service, but this was at the cost compromising work-life balance and facing gender inequality, as gender equality and neutrality were non-existent, leading to the public service as largely gendered organization (Acker, 1990; Phiri et al., 2020). Even when advancing to leadership roles, women faced discrimination that carried negative consequences and deterred public administration progress (Yaghi, 2018).

Decision making is a phenomena that has to explain how and why individuals engage in actions that may conclude in deleterious outcomes (Scott & Bruce, 1995; Kalumba et al., 2023). The increased participation of women in politics and in public administration is a result of the gender policies adopted in Europe. Thus, as Jayal (2005) noted, the level of development of countries is now measured by the level of women's representation and participation in local governance. A balanced representation of women and men at all levels of decision making, guarantees better governance because women attach great importance to the quality of context between people and are less individualistic than men. Despite proof of the significance of getting women in decision making roles however, women's participation continues to be undercut for a variety of reasons. Therefore, for women decision makers to be effective, strategies for increasing women's representation must go beyond mere access and address the barriers to effective participation.

In Africa, women seeking leadership roles come up against several biases such as stereotypic tendencies, sexism, corruption and hostility (Bennett, 2010; Daka et al., 2020). Women face several forms of discrimination in the public service. Not only are women concentrated in public sector jobs that are characterized by caritas (for example nurses, teachers), they are also punished financially as work that is regarded as natural to them does not have to be adequately compensated (Stivers, 1990). However, some women continue to overcome barriers and advance to leadership roles and others more prominent public administration roles with great success (D'Agustino, 2017). Further, some women have broken social norms and taken up positions in fields where men usually dominates, proving that women can perform different roles at various levels in public administration. These changing roles and new developments in public

administration are indications that some women have shattered the glass ceiling and overcome some forms of discrimination (Nasser, 2018).

There is great realization that seeking women's representation and participation on various social and public policy issues is important to enhance their confidence in governing institutions (Haque, 2003). Women continue to be significantly underrepresented and play lesser local government decision making roles than men (Cornwall & Goetz, 2005). Further aggravating the situation is the fact that women are also underrepresented in institutions and processes that inform and influence decision making at the national level. Although women make up 50.5% of Zambia's population as well as the majority of voters, they remain systematically underrepresented especially when it comes to being appointed to decision making positions in public administration. Despite the country signing up to regional and international conventions, the situation of women remains unchanged. And there has been a growing concern in the recent past among all key stakeholders in the country on the lower levels and number of women's participation (Ministry of Gender, 2018). It is clear that women's academic achievement and roles in society are hardly acknowledged or recognized and in public administration, women in top positions are very few as compared to men. As such, the UN posits that:

"Good governance and democracy require inclusive leadership and representation.

While men and women are equally responsible for achieving gender equality, a larger number of women in office can influence gender responsive public policies and institutional policies.

Women have a right to be equally represented and consulted in decision making

(Report of the Sec-Gender, 65th Commission of status of women, 2021).

Thus, this study, after realizing the emerging trends in public administration and the initiatives of various governments to empower women through higher education, attempts to explore the role that higher education qualification has on women's appointment to decision making positions in public administration. It addressed the following research questions: (i) to what extent does higher education qualification influence women's participation and appointment to decision making positions in public administration; (ii) how is the representation and what positions do women occupy in public administration; (iii) what challenges do women face and how do these affect their appointment to decision making positions in public administration; (iv) which strategies have been proposed to enhance women's participation and appointment to decision making positions in public administration?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of studies have been undertaken on women's representation in decision making positions. For example, Malik and Courtney (2011) employing survey instrument collected data from 1290 female students and 290 female faculties from 10 public universities of Pakistan regarding women's higher education and their empowerment. They found women's higher education benefited them in terms of economic independence and better social position not only within the family but in society too. Moreover, findings revealed 62% of female faculty had complete control over their income. Similarly, a study conducted in the Indian context which is socially and culturally similar to Pakistan, found women who possessed university education were more empowered and considered themselves more autonomous in their decisions and choices (Sridevi, 2005). Thus, from these studies, it can be perceived that women possessing higher education enjoy several socio-economic benefits such as decision making abilities as well as access to financial resources.

The mission of higher education is to provide extensive knowledge, insight and innovation, all of which are

the heart of a successful society. Namdev (2017) studied the impact of education on decision making ability of women. He found that decision making ability of educated women is more than uneducated women and decision making ability of working women is more than educated non-working women. It shows that decision making ability of women is largely affected by education. It can be concluded that a person can be shaped in thinking, behavior and interaction in the line with the expectation of the society through undergoing the process of education. In another study by Halakerimath and Danappagoudra (2018), the researchers found that there is empowerment of women through education in the areas of Hubi-Dharwad. The sample size was 50 women. The data collected were tabulated, analyzed by using percentage, index and correlation methods. The findings of the study concluded that higher education improves the social participation of women in society. Further, it enhances the decision making and resources management skills of women.

Sharing the same view as researchers above, was Panchami (2017), who argued that literacy alone cannot help women in self-dependence but higher education helps women to become more capable. The author further highlighted that higher education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence. The descriptive study collected data from secondary sources and listed out the challenges faced by women in pursuing a higher level of education. Further the author suggested widening the scope of higher education and also for universities to play the role of empowering agents of higher education.

A memorandum submitted to Parliament by the Zambia Association for Research and Development (ZARD) on the status of women in decision making revealed that gender inequalities were noticed by the low representation of women in political and administrative governance. It established that Zambia had not achieved the 30% representation in most decision making bodies, except in the Judiciary. At the time of the research, out of 35 Permanent Secretaries, only 7 were women, while there were no female Deputy Permanent Secretaries. It recommended that a quota system be put in place as an affirmative action in order to increase women's participation (ZARD, 2011). To explain this, Stivers (1990) notes that while at the ground level, most public servants are female, at the top level, women are scarce. Moreover, women who enter the highest echelons in public administration, are facing a different work environment than men. Because of their female status, women are closely watched as to how they behave, dress, talk and make decisions. They face criticism if they appear as too masculine (for example, Hillary Clinton), but also if they are deemed too feminine (which is commonly associated with being weak).

Hejase et al. (2013) in their study explaining female leadership in Lebanon, found that women still encounter a variety of obstacles in their careers, and the authors refer these obstacles to male stereotyping and discrimination. Moreover, the authors uncovered that in cases where women succeeded on reaching managerial positions, they become further subjected to continuance comparisons with their male counterparts regardless of their skills. Similarly, Bensimon (2003), in his study found that some women work their way up from the grassroots and through the party structures, which gives them both experience and legitimacy. While many of these 'proxy women representations' remain politically marginalized with little impact on gender equity issues, others become competent political agents in their own right through the process of political socialization that began as soon as they enter the political arena, gain experience and, in many cases, face gender discrimination. Bensimon's study was helpful since it helped identify the way women in Zambia work their way to the top.

Sam (2015) examined the correlation between a combination of men and women in government and economic development with gender-neutral service and the changing role of men and women. Sam's research findings suggested that programs for gender equality at the local, regional and international levels led to women's advancement in the Caribbean. Also, female leaders appeared to empower other women in the workplace and society, and in some Caribbean countries have led to young males' marginalization, with

women leaders likely to be administrators then political leaders (Sam, 2015). Sam's research findings provided context for women in leadership in Saint Luwa setting. Also the researchers on initiatives for the development of women in public administrators included Schacter (2017), who examined the role of gender in delivering leadership training for female public sector administrators and suggested that attention to gender in leadership training leads to better performance. Hence, leadership training should focus on gender equity and equality to achieve better performance.

Researchers such as Nasser (2018) also examined the effectiveness of gender based interventions. Nasser conducted a study to examine trends and the impact of policies for gender equality in the public service and on gender gaps in the Arab states. The research findings indicate that women participation in the Arab states is dependent on social, cultural and economic factors. Nasser reported several obstacles to women's advancement in public administration; however, partnerships and synergies at the regional and international levels facilitate women's participation in decision making. Similarly, Shah (2016, p. 68) asserts that 'gender has remained a powerful factor in defining women's role and status in all spheres of activity across societies and cultures'.

The journal on Recruitment and Promotion of women to decision making positions, a perspective on Omani women in management in the Sultanate of Oman, established major driving force behind women that successfully made it to top management positons. Some of these driving forces were family support, academic success and personal determination (Salma, 1999). However, much as this study is appreciated, it did not give relevant data on the percentage of women representation in decision making positions for the sector that was sampled. This would have provided a benchmark for comparison with the current research. Therefore, the literature review section has shown that certain factors influence the appointment and participation of women to decision making positions and although a number of studies have identified importance of higher education and also obstacles women face and these focus mainly on politics. Therefore, the current study highlighted the importance of higher education for women and how it is a pathway for their appointment to decision making positions particularly in public administration.

METHODOLOGY

According to Creswell (2012), a research methodology comprises the procedures which are followed by individual researchers to find answers to the research problems which they have identified. This study used the qualitative research approach. The main reason for using this research approach was because qualitative method provides deeper understanding of the issue being investigated, honoring the voices of the participants. As highlighted by Chivanga and Mongai (2020), the application of qualitative research methodologies entails researchers placing themselves within the contexts of the events, occurrences, or phenomena which they are investigating. Thus, the research design that was used in this study was the case study design; used to describe an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred (Yin, 2014). It involves careful and in-depth investigation of a particular unit or event under study for purposes of understanding factors that contribute to low participation of women in decision making in public administration.

To decide the sample for the study, a non-probability sampling method using purposive and snowball sampling methods was used. Selection of the sample was made deliberately based on predetermined criteria based on the research objectives. Thus, purposive sampling technique provided breadth for researchers to determine when information is stopped and resumed (Sukardi, 2003). The study used both secondary and primary data. Secondary data included any documents available through public websites and that individuals provided to supplement basic information or to provide context for their organization or programs. Primary data was collected mainly by semi-structured interviews which included field notes, recordings and transcriptions of each interview and they were central to the investigation and they drove the analysis with

field notes and other documents providing contexts. The interviews were designed to be flexible and to be responsive to the needs of the participants who had varying levels of education, age and awareness. A total of 25 respondents were interviewed from different ministries and data collected in the study was analyzed using thematic analysis. Therefore, primary data generated through these women's narrations offered deep insights into the complex phenomenon of gender and decision making in public administration.

Data analysis is a process of inspecting, cleansing, transforming and modelling data with the goal of discovering useful information, informing conclusions, and supporting decision making (Brown, 2014). To analyze data, all interviews were recorded and transcribed and based on critical review, the data were analyzed to identify similarities, differences and emerging themes to inform findings and recommendations. Data analysis by thematic analysis involved classification of words and phrases that emerged from the interviews and related to the same content into major themes (Bryman, 2008). The idea was to allow the actual prevailing pattern, themes and phrases of the research findings to emerge from the data, rather than be controlled by factors predetermined prior to their collection and analysis. Despite limited time, the interviews allowed the collection of a wide range of responses; that were considered sufficient to determine conclusions for the study. The study reached saturation after similar trend was observed in all the responses and thus allowed the researcher to analyze the data.

Further, to explain the foundations that formed this study, it is important to look at the philosophical frameworks involved. The study involved human phenomena and so it used qualitative research which employs a variety of systems of inquiry such as ethnography, grounded theory, action research studies, narrative research and phenomenological research (Ugwu & Eze, 2023). Qualitative research was used to examine the attitudes, feelings and motivations of the sample. Thus, it is an interpretivist methodology that provides a way of identifying in-depth information about a subject especially concerning under researched areas, sensitive topics or groups that are hard to reach (Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010). This study used phenomenological research to help us understand the significance of the experience of women and how they felt about their appointment to decision making in public administration. Further, phenomenological research is characterized by descriptive research design. The study employed the case study design and according to (Yin, 2004) case study is used to describe an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred and involves careful and in-depth investigation of a particular unit or event under study. This design helped us understand the role that higher education qualification plays in the appointment of women to decision making positions in public administration.

This study used the method of interpretive phenomenological analysis (Dahlberg et al. 2008) to get to the heart of decision making contexts women are subjected to while in public administration. The study sacrifices breadth for acute depth and so engages with a purposive limited sample of respondents. According to Alase (2017), as a qualitative research approach, interpretative phenomenological analysis allows for multiple individuals (participants) who experience similar events to tell their stories without any distortions and/or prosecutions. Interpretative phenomenological analysis is a tradition (or approach) that interprets and amplifies the 'lived experience' stories of research participants; however, for those stories to make-sense interpretively, the interpreter (researcher) of the stories must have a true and deeper understanding of the participants' 'lived experiences'. The phenomenological interview sitting with the participants stretched over a few months with multiple sitting that lasted 45 minutes to an hour.

RESULTS

Data for this study was collected and analyzed using codes given to each type of respondent. Those women in decision making where coded WD1, WD2, etc. For those respondents who were referred to be interviewed in various ministries, they were given the codes R1, R2 etc. These codes helped the study identify which responses were given by a particular individual. The sample included both men and women

categorized as 5 women in decision making positions and 20 others who were referred in the sample. The table below shows the sample with their background characteristics.

Background characteristics

	Characteristic	Male	%	Female	%	Total
1.	**Gender**	10	40	15	60	25
2.	**Age**					
	30-39	1		1		
	40-49	6	40	10	60	25
	Above 50	3		4		
3.	**Education**					
	Bachelor's degree	4		5		
	Master's degree	6	40	9	60	25
	PhD	0		1		
4.	**Experience**					
	1-2 years	2		3		
	3-5 years	2	40	2	60	25
	Above 5 years	6		10		

Source: Field research

(i) Role of higher education

The study wanted to explore the role that higher education qualification has on women in particular to their appointment in decision making in public administration. Varied responses were given by participants. Most of them indicated that education has mainly two factors; that is enabling and inhibiting factors.

R15, WD3: education is enabling in decision making and is an important factor in policy making because you need to have some kind of knowledge or skills to be hired for work.

WD5, R17: having higher education background qualifies one to get the various opportunities over others.

Lack of access to formal education was the most significant inhibiting factor on the part of education for women. Factors such as educational access and life circumstances were said to inhibit women's access to education. When asked what benefits accrue to women in acquiring higher education, participants said that education has made them benefit greatly.

R12: Higher education qualification influences the knowledge, consciousness, personality, performance, attitude and skills of women such that lack of educational qualification prevents women from attaining

decision making positions.

R13: education helps close the gap between men and women in terms of pay.

On whether higher education qualification was a prerequisite for women's appointment to decision making, many participants agreed that for one to be appointed to the level of decision making in any organization, they require higher level of education.

(ii) Women's appointment to decision making

In the context of this study, women's participation in decision making was operationalized as those women occupying positions of decision making at both strategic and middle level management, such as principal and heads of departments in public administration. Zambian public administration institutional arrangement structure from the national, provincial, district and sub-district level comprising different heads of people and appointment. It is important to observe the evolution of women in positions with power of decision and their concentration in higher, medium or low levels of management in order to establish if in public administration, women are well represented, if they occupy positions from the superior levels of management which suppose high power of decision or if they only represent in a large number in the inferior levels of management. Thus, the study wanted to examine the gender representation of women in decision making by ascertaining the level of their representation from the various ministries. Findings showed that men dominate public administration in Zambia as shown in the table below.

Gender representation in the public service in Zambia

POSITION	TOTAL	No. OF MEN	% OF MEN	No. OF WOMEN	% OF WOMEN
Permanent Secretary	56	43	76.6	13	23.2
Deputy P. Secretary	12	10	83.33	2	16.67
Directors	349	241	71	103	29
Heads of Department	2319	1597	68.9	722	31.1

Source: PMRC 2021 (document made available during field work)

When asked about the criteria used in appointing women to decision making positions in public administration, findings indicated that the minimum required qualification is a bachelor's degree.

R2, WD3: most top decision making positons are political appointments such as Permanent Secretary and criteria is not known.

R9: the criteria known to everyone in this organization is academic qualification starting from a bachelor's degree. In some instances, some positions require administrative abilities and experience which may be regarded as key in the appointment to that position.

When asked if women were given equal opportunity as men in decision making, various participants highlighted that both men and women were given equal opportunity while others still indicated that women were considered next after men. Responses were as follows:

R16: men dominate the public sector and are more frequently selected for top positions because, some argue, they are perceived to be more willing to work longer hours and supervise others. Men are willing to work far from home.

R9: both men and women may be given a position but women would turn it down because of fear of

working far from their families.

(iii) Challenges faced by women in decision making

The study sought to find out if at all gender affected women's appointment to decision making positions and what obstacles they face in public administration. Findings showed that women not only experience barriers and discrimination in accessing senior leadership positions, but also, once they get to those positions, they face a number of complex challenges. From the findings, institutional or organizational cultures are influenced by gendered norms, which are usually unarticulated, unwritten, and sometimes unconscious, and therefore hard to identify and address. These affect the way women are treated in these organizations and findings indicated that:

R6, WD4: gender affects appointment of women to decision making positions because there have been instances where a position may fall vacant and advertised and both men and women apply for it. Issues arise when it comes to appointing them in that men may be considered first even when both possess the qualification needed for that position.

WD3, R11: women have to prove themselves that they can do it and deliver while for men the case is different.

(a) Institutional challenges

Horizontal segregation

Women in public administration face horizontal segregation which is a situation when women are treated differently than men in terms of payment, promotions, and professional evaluation when it comes to accessing decision making positions. Another aspect that shows this type of discrimination is the separation of occupations in feminine and masculine fields.

WD4, R6: there are less opportunities for women in decision making because when assessing candidates, men are considered first because they are willing to work anywhere.

Vertical segregation

Vertical segregation was another obstacle that women face in decision making in public administration. It refers to the fact that women are underrepresented in positions with high power of decision or in upper management of organization and over represented in medium and low management positions.

R3, R13: there is no adequate recognition for women especially as all decisions they make are barely noticed. Women have to prove that they can work twice as men in order to move upwards.

(b) Societal challenges

Generally, the findings of this study places the cultural milieu which children are taught as they grow up as the foundation of gender differences in perceptions and attitudes formation towards work and career as well as appointment of women to decision making positions.

R12, R15: the way we socialize our children has led to the low number of women in decision making because society regards women as care takers and so cannot handle decision making positions.

R19, R12, and R5: because of societal factors, women are appreciated more for their outward looks and good character than for their intellectual skills and competence.

WD3, R13: society expects men to be in the forefront and women as followers and this has led to lower numbers in public administration.

(c) Personal challenges

It was found from the findings also that at a personal level, factors such as lack of confidence and fear of public office are deterring women from taking decision making positions.

R2: women lack self-confidence to participate in decision making.

R20: they underestimate their abilities and perceive themselves as less skilled to handle decision making positions. Because of this, their ability to actively and effectively play a role in decision making is reduced.

Overcoming challenges

Participants were asked to suggest how the obstacles can be reduced or overcome. Most of them responded and said that there was need for women to be trained.

R10, R17: training for women would help eliminate these gender biases.

(iv) Strategies to enhanced women's appointment

Experts interviewed within the study emphasized that the key values of public administration must be clearly defined and common for all institutions and those employed in public administration, thereby establishing a single public administration instead of a fragmented one. To find out what strategies are in place to enhance women's appointment, findings indicate that:

WD1, WD2: the institutions have deliberate strategies such as encouraging women to apply for positions of authority.

Respondents were also asked to suggest any recommendations to their institution as a way of increasing the number of women in decision making.

R17, R20, R3, WD4: recommend women to have further trainings to help them manage decision making positions.

WD1, R16, R13: need for deliberate checks on all institutions to know the number of women holding decision making positions around the country as this would help know how the country is doing with closing the gender gap.

WD2: recommend political will on the part of the appointing authority and also serious implementation of protocols that champion women affairs.

R5, R15: there is need to ensure that the selection process is representative of both men and women.

DISCUSSION

(i) Influence of higher education on women's appointment to decision making positions

From the results of the study, many participants highlighted that higher education for women is an important factor that opens up avenues for them in society. Higher education is a vital tool for equipping women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence they need and aids in the reduction of inequalities and the

improvement of their family status. According to Rathgeber (1995), evidence suggests that higher education has a positive impact on the development and social change of a country. It adds to the self-esteem of women and encourages them to participate in public roles. Thus, higher education, in this way, challenges and reinforces existing gender structures, however, an increased access of women to higher education is generally not fully reflected in labor markets, families or societies.

From the findings of the study, it was found that women have attained higher education though not at the same pace as their male counterparts. The British Council (2022) agrees with this finding and indicated that gender equality issues impact and are reflected in higher education systems worldwide – with unequal access to higher education in many countries, fewer resources and opportunities available to women, the existence of violence against women affecting students and staff, and sustained underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in higher education institutions. Therefore, despite women succeeding academically, it is more challenging for women to succeed in their future careers. Similarly, in Zambia, Mwanza (2015) indicated that the uneven access to education between boys and girls is still a major problem where girls that complete school are less than 40% of boys. When girls are not educated on the same level as boys, it has a huge effect on their future and the kinds of opportunities they get.

Lack of access to formal education was seen to inhibit women's appointment to decision making in public administration. Most participants indicated that women are sometimes not willing to further their education because of familial responsibilities. Women mostly were unwilling to make sacrifices by going for further training at the expense of their children. For example, supporting the findings, in the Asian cultural context, some women negatively believe that taking up leadership roles would consume more of their time, resulting in reduced time to be spent with the family (Kim & Kim, 2018), which may jeopardize conjugal and family relationships (Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016). Similarly, in a developing world cultural context, some women reject leadership positions due to their responsibilities towards their families (Derks et al., 2016). The adoption of this attitude is occasioned by cultural stereotypes which assume that regardless of working in organizational leadership as men, women still retain a significant proportion of household duties (Kelleher et al., 2011).

(ii) Gender representation of women in decision making in public administration

Women's appointment to decision making positions is essential for women's interests to be incorporated into governance. Women have the right to participate in decision making, to engage in society, vote in elections, be elected to government office, serve on boards, and make their voices heard in any process that will ultimately affect them, their families and communities. Namdeo (2017) was of the opinion that women get better recognition in society when they are able to participate equally in the decision making process and can express their views. Women earn attention from everyone through the power of expression and the ability to solve problems with their views and ideas.

Public administration is an important institution as it is the largest employer of women. According to GEPA (2019), in many countries, public institutions continue to be male-dominated and patriarchal, perpetuating harmful, and sometimes violent attitudes and practices. Although there is no global baseline on women's participation in public administration, existing research from UNDP shows that women are underrepresented, especially in leadership and decision making roles. The available data suggests that women make up on average 45% of public administration, yet there is high variation of women's participation across countries, ranging from 3% to 77%. The overall share of women in public administration is highest, on average, in OECD countries (55.1%), and lowest in the Arab States (35.9%). However, when looking at the share of women in decision making positions in public administration, the highest average share is found in Latin America and the Caribbean (43.4%) and the lowest in Africa(25.1%). Moreover, just 20% of countries have reached parity (50%) in the share of women in decision making positions of public administration.

The Zambian society is slowly changing in terms of the perceptions that people have towards women in their appointment to decision making in public administration. According to the UNICEF (2019), gender equality means that women and men, and girls and boys, enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities and protections. It does not require that girls and boys, or women and men, be the same, or that they be treated exactly alike. Therefore, findings from the study showed that despite many efforts to eradicate inequalities between men and women in decision making, women have remained underrepresented in positions of power. Men dominate key ministries and sectors such as defense, finance, while women dominate care ministries and sectors like health, community development. When looking closely within the public sector, women are given to head care departments like human resources while men are heading departments like finance, planning.

The Zambian public sector is still characterized by a small number of women working in managerial positions which are podiums of decision making processes. Moreover, the contribution of these few women in decision making processes is very limited as the public service is still male dominated. Supporting the findings, Elfadhila and Kurniawan (2020) found that women were willing to perform subordinate roles as support staff to the male leaders and earn much lower pay than their male counterparts. They operated within the lower ranks of the public service with little to no power, while men held all the prominent positions, dominant and influential role in public administration. Thus, men were leading the organizations, made the decisions, developed the hierarchical structures, systems and processes, and established gendered organizational images, relationships and cultures to foster their dominance in public administration. In this vein, it is important to observe the evolution of women in positions with power of decision and their concentration in higher, medium or low levels of management in order to establish if in public administration, women are well represented, if they occupy positions from the superior levels of management which suppose high power of decision or if they only present in a large number in the inferior levels of management.

(iii) Challenges faced by women in decision making in public administration

Women play an important role in decision making in public administration but many factors slow or hinder them. As indicated from the findings of this study, a key role of women in public administration is negotiation to ensure equal opportunity for all. Therefore, women are needed in all sectors. It was seen from the findings of the study that women's participation and appointment to decision making positions in public administration is important. This is because inclusive decision making is necessary in terms of both legitimacy and good policy outcomes. According to Nasser (2018), balanced total employment among women and men is important but it is equally important to have women dispersed throughout all the different sectors of administrative governance, as well as equitably represented in all levels of decision making. Public administration, at both the central and local level, generally reflects the orientation and character of domestic politics. Thus, in patriarchal and exclusionary societies, women, youth and minorities are often excluded from the public administration. For instance, it is common in many countries to observe a higher proportion of women in lower-levels of the public administration.

The lack of female representation in public administration reveals occupational gender segregation. At an institutional level, women faced two main challenges being horizontal and vertical segregation. Horizontal segregation shows that women predominantly occupy leadership positions from inferior levels of management (e.g. head of office) and men are concentrated in positions with high power of decision (Moldovan, 2016). Whereas vertical discrimination refers to the fact that women are underrepresented in positions with high power of decision or in upper management of organization and over represented in medium and low management positions (Nastala, 2019). And these were found to be glass walls and glass ceilings respectively. This was consistent with the works of Yaghi (2018) who uttered the same views when he said that discrimination and barriers exist in different forms of public sector organizations and these discriminate against women.

While findings of the study showed that societal factors largely affect women's participation and appointment in decision making in public administration, Ryan et al., (2016) added that since stereotypical male characteristics are similar to the stereotypical characteristics of strong leaders, a selection bias could prove to be beneficial to men and detrimental to women. However, Sabharwal (2015) criticized this and said discrimination and stereotypes have less to contribute to the ceiling when compared with factors such as past experiences and assignments, type of occupation, geographical mobility, work/life responsibilities and willingness to serve in supervisory roles. Therefore, factors such as type of occupation may hinder or affect women's appointment as well.

Findings from our study indicated that women have various personal challenges when it comes to their appointment to decision making positions in public administration. Participants highlighted lack of confidence as a major cause that inhibited women's participation and eventually appointment to decision making positions. Kasier (2009) had the same views and mentioned that women's lack of self-awareness makes them have low level of self-confidence. Thus they fail to perform when appointed to decision making positions. The qualitative data seemed to tie up well with some studies (Achola and Aseka, 2001) which suggest that some women are not assertive enough, while others do not want power, lack self-confidence and rarely apply for decision making positions.

Findings from the study revealed that there was need for public institutions to intervene and help reduce and overcome obstacles that women face at an institutional level. According to the UNDP (2022), change in organizational culture in public administration agencies was needed. Findings also indicated that institutions needed to develop programs that were going to help women by reducing challenges they faced in the institution. For example, Selzer et al. (2017) examined the role of women in leadership development as a strategy for preparing and equipping women for leadership positions. The leadership development programs consisted of courses on leadership skills enhancement, gender bias, supporting women's identity at work, coaching and mentorship and resulted in women empowerment and advancement to leadership roles. Therefore, just like our findings, Selzer et al. (2017) found that effective training is needed on the personal, interpersonal and organizational level as they are interrelated and interdependent.

(iv) Strategies to enhance women's appointment to decision making

Various interventions have been put in place for the numbers of women to increase in public administration. At a national level, constitutional, legal, and policy frameworks should guarantee gender equality not only in the case of women's political representation but also in the case of public service organizations. However, the UN's 2017 report on gender equality noted that most African governments in general struggle to achieve gender equality due to weak policy implementation and poor institutional capacity, which have negatively affected the possible gains that may have been achieved via the quota system and related forms of policy instruments. African governments should therefore build their capacity to adequately implement, monitor, and evaluate progress made in implementing policies, laws, and programs to advance women's career progress in all sectors (UNESCO, 2017).

In Zambia, many of the national gender equality laws enacted to date focus on equal participation in decision making generally or in politics specifically, and they often provide for temporary special measures. However, not all gender laws explicitly address women's equal participation in public administration and not only have some included strong implementation mechanisms. Thus, there was need to enact gender specific laws with regard to decision making in public administration as this would increase the representation of women. Another and related outcome of unreprinted public administration is poor policy making. If policy makers do not include a broad spectrum of the populace, then societal interest as a whole would not be included in the policy process. There is an input deficit in policy making. The quality of decisions making suffers, resulting in poor policy outcomes, service delivery and public sector

organizational performance (Johnston Miller & McTavish, 2014).

CONCLUSION

Higher education is a vital tool for equipping women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence they need and aids in the reduction of inequalities and the improvement of their family status. For a long time now, there has been persistence underrepresentation of women in public administration as both secondary and findings from the study have revealed such that across the globe there is variance in the representation of women in decision making in the public sector. From the findings of the research, it was found that women have attained higher education though not at the same pace as their male counterparts. However, public administration especially in Zambia has been seen to be gendered for a long time now affecting many operations of public administration. According to Acker (1990), historically, gendered substructures formed the structure of public sector organizations, which were hierarchical and male-dominated with very few women. Women operated within the lower ranks of the public sector with little or no power, while men held all the prominent positions, dominant and influential roles in public administration.

Public administration creates barriers for women to maintain their status quo where factors such as glass fences, or glass ceilings are used to undermine women and their advancement to decision making positions. As such, identifying women's roles in public administration could provide insights into the areas into which aspiring female public service leaders can advance and help build their confidence and provide support knowing that other females have succeeded in these fields. This study therefore concludes that there is need to enact gender specific laws with regard to decision making in public administration as this would increase the representation of women. There is need for Zambian Civil Service Commission to report regularly on the number of women nominated to decision making positons, the total number of positions held by women and the total number of women appointees. Further findings concluded that there was need to embark on promotion, recruitment and selection criteria that will enhance gender equality in decision making in public administration.

This study further concludes by formulating and proposing a framework that is going to help in increasing the numbers of women in public administration. With this framework it is hoped that the cause of the low numbers of women will tackled and gender parity in public administration will be achieved.
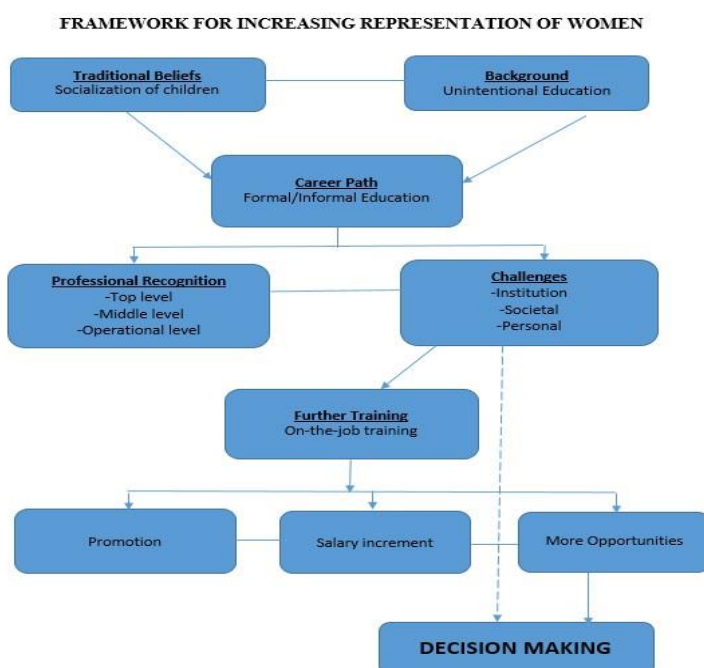
Source: Researchers framework

From the framework above, we can see that the traditional beliefs expressed in the way children are socialized plays a great role in how someone will choose their career path. As much as children have that unintentional education (primary and secondary) as they grow up, the outcome of the socialization and type of secondary school subjects they got interested in affects their future career choice. Further when they enter the higher education system, whether formal or informal education, this will also affect the type of job and entry level they will have. From there also, because of traditional beliefs and initial education plus career choice, the person will face challenges that hinder or obstruct them from being appointed to decision making positions. Once they are recruited by the organizations, they may see the need to attend further training which will give them opportunities such as promotion and salary increment which will enable them have the needed requirement for higher positions in decision making. Another suggestion is a change of the type of education and training that women take on. Education whether primary or secondary shapes the way a woman will perceive their career. In this vein, to help women, education institutions need to encourage women to take up those subjects and courses that will allow them cross any barrier concerning their job specification.

At an institutional level, this framework will help stake holders to examine issues in terms of where women are placed, that is either macro, meso and micro levels so that it will be easier to determine the level which various issues concerning decision making should be addressed. By so doing, the institutions will determine which elements are within the control of the individual or institution in terms of effecting change, as well as those elements beyond the control of those carrying out the mandates. At the micro level, such matters are related to the national policy governing activities in the country which includes legislation and regulations. Thus, the policy holders should look at how various policies influence activities in public administration and at what level. This will help reflect the awareness of inequalities between men and women that exist and what levels are affected more. At the meso level, focus is still on institutions and how they influence national policy. Factors such as women and men having equal access to employment and services are considered. Also is there equal treatment in terms of pay and benefit guaranteed to both men and women or there is occupational segregation as the study findings indicated. The analysis should focus on how to identify their specific needs and priorities relating to their context, and examine the extent to which gender roles, relationships and cultural issues are key. Therefore, the ability of women to be appointed and make a difference may also be a function of what factors propelled them to public office. Findings of this study propose that there is need for change of mind set both from society and organization to tackle the various challenges that inhibit women and thus reduce or completely eliminate the barriers that affect them from being appointed.

This study was limited to the various ministries in Lusaka in Zambia. Therefore, the implication was that it provided evidence to promote gender equality and positive social change, especially where women hold positions in stereotypically masculine areas, encouraging more women to policy formulation and decision making roles. And to achieve this, the important role that higher education has on women was emphasized. The study recommends that there is need for social transformation – need to change the way society thinks about women because if the dominant ideology in institutions remain male-biased, transformation is unlikely to take place. Secondly government should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming in all policies and programs so that before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men respectively. The study also recommends that institutions should come up with deliberate policy to encourage women to go for further studies. And finally that recruitment policies, processes and mechanisms require careful consideration using a gender equality and gender parity perspective.

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