ROLE OF AFRICAN WOMEN LEADERS IN INSPIRING WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN LEADERSHIP: AN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT: *This paper seeks to analyze the various contributions of these African women in positions of global authority and the parts they play in influencing fellow women to aspire and take up leadership positions. The paper adopts library instrument of research from documented materials such as books, periodicals, journals and reports. Findings show that, across the world, women make up about half the population yet they never come close to holding fifty percent of the positions of power in any government. The paper concludes that, without a doubt, women in Africa have risen to various positions of power and leadership both within the private and public sectors of governance and indeed are proving their mettle in their various spheres. Although successful African women leaders have very intimidating résumés, very little records of mentoring and personal development of fellow women exist. The paper recommends that, specific and critical measures should be taken to enable women's full participation in decision making, policy formulation as well as access to all organizations of the society. Successful women should mentor and develop fellow women, which is necessary in order to support and encourage the leadership traits in younger women.*

KEYWORDS: African Women, Leadership, Inspiring, Women Participation, Women Achievement, Personal Development

INTRODUCTION

African women have made considerable gains in the political, economic and social development of the continent but despite their efforts they are still widely marginalized within the corridors of power. It is an undisputed fact that women are primary care-givers all over the world but this is more so in Africa which is considered the Mother Continent, Mother Africa. This modern concept of Mother Africa, the cradle of humanity is imbued on its womenfolk demanding greater effort, sacrifice and commitment from the female gender where women are considered to be encompass nurture and thus they are expected to be ideal role models capable of mentoring, inspiring those they come in contact with along with the upkeep of their families as they take up roles in influencing policies and decisions especially as it affects their well-being. These prejudices, beliefs and habits have made it virtually impossible for women to hold leadership positions in Africa but a few women have chosen to defy these odds making a name for themselves. Notable women in Africa to achieve this are the subjects of this paper; South Africa's Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, the immediate past Chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission and the first and only woman ever to head the Commission. She handed over her post as A.U. Commission Chairperson to HE Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat of Chad in 2017. Another fascinating African female leader is the

recent past President of the Republic of Liberia and Africa's first female Head of Government, HE Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. She served as Liberia's President from 2006 to 2018. The influence of International Charters, Conventions and Protocols towards encouraging the participation of more women in both local and international politics will also be examined. Given the steadily increasing trend towards internationalization, the realities of the global village and the information highway, it is imperative to consider the importance of personal competence and adaptation as key leadership stimulants and gateways to greater participation of African women in leadership positions.

In spite of the unrivalled achievements of quite a number of African women, certain inherent challenges and militating factors have contributed to diminish the appreciation and impact of the efforts of these leading lights and women achievers on fellow women in Africa who earnestly aspire to be like them. This paper shall look at a few of the traditional challenges such as access to education, lower self-esteem, meager financial resources and higher unemployment than their male counterparts with a view to proffering solutions thereto.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Getting into and staying in positions of power is typically difficult for the African woman especially because of the roles traditionally expected of her. In the writings of Richard (2005), the African woman is first and foremost seen to be a wife and then a mother and as such she is often required to constantly fulfill the unending responsibilities of these fundamental duties. Those that are fortunate enough to attain a position of influence get bogged down by the incessant need to attend to the 'home front' while their male counterparts who view them as 'out-of-place' carry on with the business of leadership which they arrogate as their rightful prerogative (Reinisch, Ziembadavis and Sanders, 1991). The minority status of women leaders in politics is mirrored at the senior executive level in both private and public sector organizations. Although women today fill nearly a third of all management positions, the majority of them occupy jobs which may not measure equally in power, pay or authority to their male counterparts. The lack of female representation at the top of corporations is known as the "glass ceiling", an invisible yet impenetrable barrier of discrimination that keeps women from senior leadership positions.

In the argument of Stoeltje (1997), among well-known African women in ancient history are the Queen Mothers of Asante and Krobo through whom the Akan race in Ghana trace their descent. Matrilineal descent remains the basis for Asante social organizations. Others include; 7th Century Berber Queen Kachine of the Maghreb (Graham, 1902); 9th Century Magajiyas of Daura (Dierk, 2006); 16th Century Queen Amina of Zazzau (Smith, 2008) and 19th Century Nehanda of Zimbabwe (*Beach, 1998*). In the 1990s, for the first time in the post-independence period greater numbers of African women began to aspire to political leadership at the national and local levels. Although their impact was still minimal and the obstacles daunting, new female faces and voices began to be seen and heard. Until the 1990s it was unheard of for women to run for the presidency in Africa. Yet in the 1990s, Charity Ngilu and Wangari Maathai ran in the 1998 Kenyan presidential election. Rose Rugendo of Tanzania's party Chama Cha Mapinduzi sought her party's nomination in the 1995 presidential primaries as did Sarah Jibril in Nigeria in 1999. Although unsuccessful in these

bids for power, these women set an important precedent in their respective countries *(Katrak, 2006)*.

In the writings of Marcus (1995) the first female head of an African state in this century was Zauditu, a Candace (empress) of Ethiopia, who ruled between 1917 and 1930. Other female heads of state have included Dzeliwe Shongwe, Queen-regent of Swaziland, who ruled in 1982-1983, followed by Ntombi Twala, Queen-Regent of Eswatini, 1983-1986 and current joint head of state since 1986. Elizabeth Domitien was Africa's first female prime minister, serving in the Central African Republic 1975-1976. But it was not until the 1990s that women claimed national leadership visibility in greater numbers. Ruth Perry served as the Chairman of Liberia's the Council of State 1996 - 199 7. She was the first female non-monarchical head of an African state. In 1994, Uganda's Wandera Specioza Kazibwe became the first female Vice President in Africa. Sylvie Kinigi served as prime minister of Burundi from 1993 to 1994, and during this same period, Agathe Uwilingiyimana was Prime Minister of Rwanda until she was assassinated in office. Senegal also claimed a woman Prime Minister, Mame Madior Boye in 2001 – 2002 while Fatoumata Tambajang served as Vice President of the Gambia 2017 - 2018. In the 2019 Nigerian presidential elections, Dr. Obiageli Ezekwesili, a chartered accountant and a former Minister of Solid Minerals and subsequently Education in the Nigerian Federal Cabinets announced her candidacy for the office of President but later stepped down. By the end of the decade, the Ethiopian, Lesotho, and South African legislative bodies had female speakers of the house and Uganda, Zimbabwe and South Africa had female deputy speakers (Marcus, 1995).

Achievements

If women were going to make significant headway on economic and other fronts, they realized they needed to have a physical presence in legislatures and other political institutions. In the 1990s women in many African countries went on an unprecedented degree of mobilization of independent women's organizations to support women electoral candidates; train women leaders; carry out civic education; press for legal changes in the status of women and pushed for women's participation in the constitution-making process; lobbying parties to endorse more women candidates; and development of strategies to get more women into leadership. Although these activities were on the rise, women parliamentarians in many countries frequently found themselves lacking in civil society and non-governmental organization support, making it difficult to push a women's rights agenda (Henze, 2000). In the 1990s women began to form political parties of their own, partly because existing parties in the multiparty context had not adequately addressed women's concerns. In many cases women had a different political vision that was not accommodated in existing parties; and in some cases, the women wanted to build more broad-based multi-ethnic and multi-religious constituencies than was possible with existing parties (Behru, 2001).

According to Geisler (2014), Dr. Inonge Mbikusita-Lewanika started the National Party in Zambia in 1991; Margaret Dongo began the Zimbabwe Union of Democrats in 1999; while in Lesotho, Limakatso Ntakatsane formed the party, Kopanang Basotho. Likewise, in the 1990s Charity Ngilu and Dr. Wangari Maathai headed parties in Kenya; Ruth Rolland-Jeanne-Marie led a party in Central African Republic and Amália de Vitoria Pereira led an Angolan party. In Zambia, women from NGOs, churches and political parties formed a National Women's Lobby Group (NWLG) in 1991 as a non-partisan organization with the goal of increasing the

numbers of women in decision-making positions in government, parliament and political parties. The lobby encouraged women to stand for local government elections, worked to repeal discriminatory legislation, and conducted human rights training and civic education seminars for women (Munachonga, 2016).

By 1995 the organization had grown to 2,000 dues paying members. There were numerous other such non-partisan groups in Zambia promoting women's political participation. In 1996 the Women's Lobby financially backed 44 independent women candidates running in the parliamentary elections. Although only one of these women won a seat, its efforts no doubt encouraged the parties to put up more women candidates and as a result, 15 party-backed women won seats, bringing the number of women in parliament from 7 percent to 11 percent, i.e., 16 out of 150. Similarly, in Kenya, the National Committee on the Status of Women, a staunchly non-partisan organization provided assistance to women of all party affiliations in running for office in 1992 and 1998. They carried out civic education among women, giving them a better sense of their rights as citizens and the need to vote for candidates who would support women's interests. Their activities have included reform of laws that served as obstacles to the advancement of women and other activities that would strengthen women's presence in political life (Geisler, 2014).

Charity Ngilu had the backing of several of Kenya's women's organizations when she ran for the presidency. She indicated that she planned to draw on the strength of women's organizations to an even greater extent in 2002 to capture a greater proportion of the votes of women who made up 65 percent of Kenya's registered voters. In Zambia, Kenya and several other countries (Gordon, 1992), the reluctance of political parties to take steps to increase women's representation has led to serious discussions of the need to form a party led by women with broad based male and female constituencies. Generally, the proliferation of independent associations allowed women's organizations to expand their agendas to take on women's rights issues more forcefully and to fight for greater female political representation. The women's movement in Uganda, for example, has been able to publicly broach many different issues, ranging from women's representation in office, to domestic violence, rape, reproductive rights, sex education in the school curriculum, female genital mutilation, sexual harassment, disparaging representation of women in the media, corruption, and other concerns that have rarely been addressed by women's movements in countries where a ruling political party has dominated the movement (Geisler, 2014).

In the works of   Byrnes, Miller and Schaffer (1999), in several countries, the 1990s saw women's increased involvement in the constitution making process. Women were very active in the process of drafting the new South African Constitution, which guarantees women rights to equality, freedom and security of the person, freedom from violence, the right to make decisions concerning reproduction, and the right to security and control over one's own body. The Women's National Coalition lobbied hard to have the Women's Charter passed. The independent Women's National Coalition (WNC) had been formed in 1991 after much deliberation to unite women of all parties and political persuasions (Gordon, 1992).

Theoretical Framework

The theory of critical feminist leadership is being adopted in the research paper, which symbolizes the challenges women face in breaking the barriers of leadership. According to Watson (2016), winning women's equal access to jobs was a major accomplishment of the

women's movement of the 1970s; it has changed the role of women in public spheres profoundly. Yet women's inability to break glass ceilings and walls remains a puzzling and troubling phenomenon. The explanation that has implicitly gained most ascendance within the management and leadership arenas is that women evidently lack leadership skills or knowledge that training can fix. A counter proposal offered here is that it is overly-narrow, modernist conceptualizations of leadership itself that needs to be fixed, not women per se. Equally important is making feminism "speakable" again in the business world, business schools, and the field of management leadership. The liberal feminism that drove the women's movement in the 1970s needs to be re-examined in terms of postmodern feminist theories of oppression. The suggestions offered here focus on the enhancement of leadership excellence and the achievement of gender equality in leadership by understanding the systems that dis-empower women and other oppressed groups and then training men and women to work together to dismantle them.

The relevance of this theory to the topic under study is that, women in Africa have difficulty attaining leadership heights, but the two case studies in this paper and others have achieved that, but more work needs to be done to achieve equal opportunities for both women and men in Africa. This is can be done by weakening the systems that serve as a barrier.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In spite of the efforts by women leaders and women's organizations in many African countries, women have yet to see enormous payoffs in terms of elected officials and political appointments. Women often lack the resources, political experience, education and political connections to run for office. Popular perceptions often suggest that women's "proper" place is still in the home and "the other room" as put recently by a leading African politician, rather than in politics. Prohibitive cultural attitudes against women involvement persist amongst men and women (Barrett, 1998). These are reflected in voting patterns, media coverage of female politicians, and even in blatant attempts to suppress women's assertion of their political rights and views. In Uganda, for example, the 1996 presidential elections saw increasing incidences of intimidation and harassment of wives by husbands over differing political opinions. Throughout the country there were reports of women who were threatened with withdrawal of family support. Some were killed, beaten, thrown out of homes, and some had their voters' cards grabbed from them or destroyed (Barrett, 1998). One of the consequences of these experiences was that women did not turn out to vote in the parliamentary elections in such large numbers. But women themselves are also reluctant to run for office (both national and local government positions) for many reasons. Partly the reticence stems from cultural prohibitions on women being seen and speaking in public in front of men. Where these prohibitions are strong, men do not listen to women who take the podium or are active in politics in other ways (Barrett, 1998).

Campaigning and being a leader often involves travel, spending nights away from home, going to bars to meet people, and meeting men, all of which put women politicians at risk of being thought of as "loose women" or "unfit mothers." Not only may they find themselves and their families under attack or the subject of malicious gossip, but, husbands sometimes will forbid their wives from entering into politics. Some husbands are threatened by the possibility that their wives will interact with other men, others fear the social stigma directed

against their wives, or they worry that their wife's political preoccupations will divert her attention away from the home. It has been argued by Fatton (1989) that in Zambia most women who were active in politics claimed they experienced marital problems as a result of their involvement

Education has long been argued as one of the key solutions to ensuring women and girls gain equal access to political and socio-economic power in society. Women activists, policy-makers and well-known voices, like the award-winning Benoise singer Angelique Kidjo, have long campaigned and fought vigorously for the education of girls, achieving significant gains. However, inadequate funds, tradition and culture (in particular, strong cultural norms that favour the education of boys over girls, as well as early child marriage) continue to be some of the main causes of a lack of education for women in Africa. In 2011, UNICEF estimated that 31 million girls of primary school age and 34 million girls of lower secondary school age were not enrolled in school and according to statistics, one in four women globally are still illiterate, with most of them living in sub-Saharan Africa. It is reported that in 47 out of 54 African countries, girls have less than a 50 per cent chance of completing primary school (Fatton, 1989).

With women making up more than 50% of Africa's population, many advocates of gender empowerment question how the continent's current economic growth and outlook will be sustained, if the subjugation of women issues is still deeply and widely embedded. Without investing in the education of girls, or providing unrestricted access to political and economic opportunities, without social freedoms such as sexual and reproductive health rights, an entire half of the continent's population is left out of Africa's development agenda. This affects progress in turn and perpetuates poverty. Joaquim Chissano, former President of Mozambique and co-chair of the high-level task force for the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) argues that "Empowering Africa's Women Is the Key to Economic Wealth." He added, "Women and girls are Africa's greatest untapped resource, and it is they, not diamonds or oil and minerals, that will be the foundation for solid, sustainable and equitable progress" (Fatton, 1989).

He adds: "Expanding the freedoms, the education and opportunities for women hold the key to kick-starting inclusive economic growth. This is true the world over, and particularly true for Africa… we need to pay more attention to the situation of adolescent girls. More than a third of girls in Africa are married before reaching the age of 18 − often at the expense of their education, health and social aspirations. Adolescent girls are far more likely to die from childbirth-related complications than older women, and face greater risks of abuse and of contracting HIV" (Fatton, 1989).

Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma

H. E. Dr. Nkosazana Clarice Dlamini-Zuma is an undisputable trailblazer in the uplift and empowerment of women across the African continent. Her career as a struggle activist and politician is testimony to her indestructible and courageous spirit. She was born on 27 January 1949 in KwaZulu-Natal, a time when black women's career expectations did not go beyond domestic work. She, however, was not to be limited. She completed her high school studies at Amanzimtoti Training College in 1967. After a four-year gap, she started her studies in Zoology and Botany at the University of Zululand in 1971. She obtained her BSc degree and started her medical studies at the University of Natal, where her involvement with

the struggle began. Dr. Dlamini-Zuma became an active underground member of the ANC. She was also a member of the South African Students Organization and was elected as its deputy president in 1976. During the same year, she fled into exile, completing medical studies at the University of Bristol in the UK in 1978. After the 1994 elections, Dr. Dlamini-Zuma was appointed as Minister of Health in the cabinet of then President Nelson Mandela.

During her tenure, she de-segregated the health system and championed the radical health reforms which introduced access to free basic healthcare. In 1999, then President Thabo Mbeki appointed Dr. Dlamini-Zuma as Minister of Foreign Affairs. In this role, she actively championed South Africa's foreign policy which centered on the promotion of human rights, stability, peace, collective development and advancement of this continent. It was during her tenure as Minister of Foreign Affairs that peace and stability was achieved in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) for example, and that the African Union was launched in 2002. In 2009, she was appointed Minister of Home Affairs and brought about radical change in the department, which subsequently achieved a clean audit in 2011 for the first time in many years. In July 2012, H.E Dr. Dlamini-Zuma was elected Chairperson of the African Union Commission by the Heads of State in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. She is the first woman to lead the continental organization, including its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity. This was a major achievement in the sense that for the first time since the formation of the Organization of African Unity, which became the African Union, a woman and indeed a candidate of the southern region was successfully elected to this high post.

Regional Milestones

Although the victory of Dlamini-Zuma to chair the AU Commission did not come easy, she nevertheless strove to leave imprints of landmark achievements whilst she was in office. A few of her achievements are as follows:

Dr. Dlamini-Zuma drove and delivered 'Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want' which articulates a 50-year vision for a prosperous and winning Africa, at peace with itself and the world at large. Africa has never had such a compelling and comprehensive long-term strategic vision which addresses a mosaic of key issues such as education and skills development, innovation, research and development, science and technology, infrastructure and energy, industrialization, agribusiness and food security, as well as youth and woman empowerment. The 50-year planning horizon in Agenda 63 marks a long overdue paradigm shifts by Africa in planning, which is well established in countries like China. She initiated a continent-wide campaign to "silence the guns" by 2020. The fact that most of the UN peace-keeping operations are in Africa indicates the magnitude of the challenge still facing the continent.

Dlamini-Zuma has elevated the issue of education and skills development to a much higher level than hitherto. She has gone further to facilitate the setting up of centres of excellence in various parts of the continent to institutionalize collaboration among African countries. East Africa, for example, hosts the Centre of Excellence in Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Southern Africa hosts Space technology and West Africa has Agribusiness. She has also been an active champion of the need for Africa to benefit from its resources and products. Africa needs to build and continuously enhance its domestic capabilities to benefit its mineral resources and other products as part of a comprehensive

industrialization strategy that should lead to the creation of new industries and companies, which in turn should lead to the creation of massive jobs and prosperity for generations.

Deeply concerned by the dastardly acts of wanton destruction by the terrorist group, Boko Haram, in 2015, Dr. Dlamini-Zuma announced the decision of the Africa Union to call for a deployment of a 7,500 strong force to combat the menace in West Africa. She is quoted as saying, "The continued attacks in northeastern Nigeria and the increasing attacks in the Lake Chad Basin, along the border with Chad and Cameroon, and in the northern provinces of that country, have the potential of destabilizing the entire region, with far-reaching security and humanitarian consequences. No efforts should be spared". Her Excellency, Dr. Dlamini-Zuma is noted for doing exceptional life's work to the cause of freedom for the people of South Africa and the development and consolidation of the country's democracy in the quest to create a better life for all Africans.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

In her biography written by Bobby (2010), Sirleaf was born on 29 October, 1938. She was the 24th President of The Republic of Liberia. She served as Minister of Finance under President William Tolbert from 1979 until the 1980 coup d'état, after which she left Liberia and held senior positions at various financial and international institutions including the United Nations. She was one of the founders and the political leader of National Patriotic Front of Liberia, the warlord Charles Taylor's party. She placed second in the 1997 presidential election won by Charles Taylor. She won the 2005 presidential election and took office on 16 January 2006. She successfully ran for re-election in 2011. Sirleaf is the first elected female head of state in Africa. According to Bobby (2010), Sirleaf was born in Monrovia, and studied economics and accounting from 1948 to 1955 at the College of West Africa in Monrovia. She married James Sirleaf when she was 17 years old, and then traveled with him to the United States in 1961 to continue her studies and earned an accounting degree at Madison Business College, in Madison, Wisconsin. She later studied Economics and Public Policy with a Masters degree in Economics. Sirleaf then returned to her native Liberia to work under the government of William Tolbert, where she became the Assistant Minister of Finance. She served as assistant minister from 1972 to 1973 under Tolbert's administration. She resigned after getting into a disagreement about spending. Subsequently she was Minister of Finance from 1979 to April 1980 (Robinson, 1973). Sirleaf initially accepted a post in Samuel Doe's government as President of the Liberian Bank for Development and Investment, though she fled the country in November 1980 after publicly criticizing Doe and the People's Redemption Council for their management of the country (Bobby, 2010).

In the writings of (Kramer, 2005), Sirleaf initially moved to Washington, D.C., to work for the World Bank before moving to Nairobi in 1981 to serve as Vice President of the African Regional Office of Citibank. She resigned from Citibank in 1985 following her involvement in the 1985 election in Liberia and went to work for Equator Bank, a subsidiary of HSBC. In 1992, Sirleaf was appointed as the Director of the United Nations Development Programme's Regional Bureau for Africa at the rank of Assistant Administrator and Assistant Secretary General (ASG), from which she resigned in 1997 to run for president in Liberia. While working at Citibank, Sirleaf returned to Liberia in 1985 to run for Vice President on the ticket of the Liberian Action Party in the 1985 elections. However, Sirleaf was placed under house arrest in August of that year and soon after sentenced to ten years in prison for sedition as a

consequence of a speech in which she insulted the members of the Doe regime. Following international calls for her release, Doe pardoned and released her in September. Due to government pressure, she was removed from the presidential ticket and instead ran for a Senate seat in Montserrado County (Kramer, 2005).

The elections saw Doe and the National Democratic Party win the presidency and large majorities in both houses but were widely condemned as neither free nor fair, Sirleaf was declared the winner of her Senate race but refused to accept the seat in protest of the election fraud. After an attempted coup against the Doe government by Thomas Quiwonkpa on 12 November, Sirleaf was arrested and imprisoned again on 13 November by Doe's forces. Sirleaf continued to refuse to accept her seat in the Senate and when she was released in July 1986 she secretly fled the country to the United States later that year (Kramer, 2005).

The 1997, 2005 and 2011 Presidential Campaigns

At the beginning of the First Liberian Civil War in 1989, Sirleaf supported Charles Taylor's rebellion against Doe, helping raise money for the war. However, she later opposed Taylor's handling of the war. By 1996, the presence of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) peacekeepers led to a cessation of hostilities, resulting in the 1997 general election, which Sirleaf returned to Liberia to contest. As the presidential candidate for the Unity Party, she placed second in a controversial election, getting 25% of the vote to Charles Taylor's 75%. Sirleaf left the country soon after and again went into exile in Abidjan (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2010). Sirleaf once again stood for president as the candidate of the Unity Party in the 2005 general election. She placed second in the first round of voting behind footballer George Weah. In the subsequent run-off election, Sirleaf earned 59% of the vote versus 40% for Weah, though Weah disputed the results. The announcement of the new leader was postponed until further investigations were carried out. On 23 November 2005, Sirleaf was declared the winner of the Liberian election and confirmed as the country's next president. Her inauguration, attended by many foreign dignitaries, including United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and First Lady Laura Bush, took place on 16 January 2006 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2010).

In January 2010, Sirleaf announced that she would run for a second term in office in the 2011 presidential election while speaking to a joint session of the Legislature. Sirleaf garnered 43.9% of the vote in the first round, more than any other candidate but short of the 50% needed to avoid a run-off. Tubman came in second with 32.7%, pitting him against Sirleaf in the second round. Tubman called for a boycott of the run-off, claiming that the results of the first round had been fraudulent. Sirleaf denied the allegations, and international observers reported that the first round election had been free, fair and transparent. As a result of the boycott, Sirleaf won the second round with 90.7% of the vote, though voter turnout significantly declined from the first round. Following the election, Sirleaf announced the creation of a "national peace and reconciliation initiative," led by her Nobel Peace Prize co-laureate Leymah Gbowee, to address the country's divisions and begin "a national dialogue that would bring us together." She took presidential oath for her second presidency on 16 January 2012 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2010).

On 26 July 2007, Sirleaf celebrated Liberia's 160th Independence Day under the theme "Liberia at 160: Reclaiming the future." She took an unprecedented and symbolic move by asking 25-year-old Liberian activist Kimmie Weeks to serve as National Orator for the

celebrations, where Weeks called for the government to prioritize education and health care. A few days later, President Sirleaf issued an Executive Order making education free and compulsory for all elementary school aged children. In October 2010, Sirleaf signed into law a Freedom of Information bill, the first legislation of its kind in West Africa. In recognition of this, she became the first sitting head of state to receive the Friend of the Media in Africa Award from The African Editor's Union.

Sirleaf and Debt Relief Engineering

According to Agaba (2017), from the beginning of her presidency, Sirleaf vowed to make reduction of the national debt, which stood at approximately US$4.9 billion in 2006, a top priority for her administration. The United States became the first country to grant debt relief to Liberia, waiving the full $391 million owed to it by Liberia in early 2007. In September of that year, the G-8 headed by German Chancellor Angela Merkel provided $324.5 million to paying off 60% of Liberia's debt to the International Monetary Fund, crediting their decision to the macroeconomic policies pursued by the Sirleaf administration. In April 2009, the government successfully wrote off an additional $1.2 billion in foreign commercial debt in a deal that saw the government buy back the debt at a 97% discounted rate through financing provided by the International Development Association, Germany, Norway, the United States and the United Kingdom. The discounted rate was the largest ever for a developing country.

The country was deemed eligible to participate in the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative in 2008. In June 2010, the country reached the completion point of the HIPC initiative, qualifying it for relief from its entire external debt. That same month, the World Bank and IMF agreed to fund $1.5 billion in writing off the Liberia's multilateral debt. On 16 September, the Paris Club agreed to cancel $1.26 billion, with independent bilateral creditors canceling an additional $107 million, essentially writing off Liberia's remaining external debt. Sirleaf vowed to prevent unsustainable borrowing in the future by restricting annual borrowing to 3% of GDP and limiting expenditure of all borrowed funds to one-off infrastructure projects (Agaba, 2017). *Forbes* magazine named Sirleaf as the 51st most powerful woman in the world in 2006. In 2010, *Newsweek* listed her as one of the ten best leaders in the world, while *Time* counted her among the top ten female leaders. That same year, *The Economist* called her "arguably the best president the country has ever had." Sirleaf in 2012 attracted international attention for an interview regarding LGBT rights. Since assuming the position of Chairperson of the West African regional body, ECOWAS in 2015, Sirleaf has consolidated on previous gains while ensuring the following achievements (Agaba, 2017):

i. The adoption of the Macroeconomic Convergence Report by the ECOWAS Convergence Council,

ii. Establishment of the ECOWAS Monetary Institute (EMI),

iii. Adoption of methodological guides for the harmonization of Public Finance Statistics, Government Financial Operations Tables (TOFE), External Trade Statistics, Balance of Payment (BOP) and International Investment Position (IIP),

iv. Conclusion of the review of the Sahel Strategy document and its action plan to boost regional security,

v. Formulation of an ECOWAS Common Trade Policy (CTP) and ECOWAS Trade Development Strategy,

vi. Completion of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the signing by 13 Member States,

vii. Custom Union in the offing with the implementation of the CET by Eight Member-States,

viii. Free Movement of goods and persons boosted with the adoption of the ECOWAS Biometric Identity Card to facilitate mobility and promote security in the region,

ix. Drafting of a Regional Border Management Manual for use in immigration/security training institutions,

x. Launching of the Ecolink project, which aims to transform and improve key operations within the ECOWAS Community,

xi. The Systems, Applications & Products (SAP) component of Ecolink aims at improving the financial management systems and ensuring real-time information for effective decision-making in the Community Institutions,

xii. Promotion of strategic products for food security and sovereignty including combating cross-border livestock disease,

xiii. Renewed efforts to enhance the environmental governance, general environmental protection, capacity building as well as Sustainable resource management for development in the Member States,

xiv. Re-award of the contract for the construction of the Sèmè-Kraké Joint Border Post (Benin-Nigeria),

xv. Evaluation of tenders completed for the works, contract for final engineering designs for the rehabilitation of sections of the Enugu-Bemenda road between Nigeria and Cameroon and the construction of a Joint Border Post (JBP) and a Border Bridge at Mfum border,

xvi. Feasibility study for the extension of the West African Gas Pipeline Network concluded,

xvii. Development of Regional Power Market with the setting up of regulatory and economic environment,

xviii. Promotion of renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies and services,

xix. An ECOWAS Directive on Energy Efficiency Buildings (EEB) aimed at promoting energy efficiency in buildings in ECOWAS Member States has been developed by ECREEE,

xx. Establishment of a Regional Centre for Disease Control,

xxi.   Maintain and strengthen the actions undertaken to consolidate peace and security in the region,

xxii. Consolidating the implementation of the, Common Market, Trade Liberalization Scheme (TLS) and the Protocol on Free Movement of persons, goods and services.

Similarities

Without a doubt, the profiles of both Zuma and Sirleaf draw striking comparisons that speak volumes of unwavering forthrightness, rugged determination and profound sagacity for people oriented leadership. It is quite worthy of note that their respective rise to positions of power was fraught with challenges and draw-backs that threatened the very core of their career and sometimes their very lives. It is also very glaring that both women did not just stumble on leadership neither were they compensated in any form as a result of their gender but through requisite preparation, dedication and undoubting commitment to succeed, they 'clawed' their ways to power. While in power they both ensured that their styles of leadership were such that left indelible marks of development worthy of emulation by their successors.

Catalysts for Accelerated Participation of Women in Leadership Positions

The ways through which women contribute to the society as part of their own quota cannot be achieved without other strong variables. Women need to support leadership development, to take them to the next level of leadership. Some of these variables that aid in making sure women achieve are as follows:

i.   Visualize New Options: Women do not see pathways to leadership instead they see pathways towards traditional roles. Some women actually need someone to show them new options through role modeling and mentorship. Others need to be able to visualize how they can make a difference or how they can become role models for change. Social networking can address these needs and help women involve themselves in the daily activities of their community,

ii.   Mentorship & Guidance: Intentional interaction with other African women at the same level of influence is very difficult, and providing a space where women can interact with other professional women would offer opportunities to build relationships of support. One high level political leader stated - Older women are a source of strength. We need to create the next generation of leaders who can be mentored by these existing leaders, perhaps through internships opportunities,

iii. Advanced Leadership Training: Women need to learn specific, high level skills such as organizational management, leadership fundamentals, skill transfer, and accountability. Leadership coaching on how to be an effective leader and how to market oneself for promotion is needed to compensate for weaknesses in current training modules that focus almost exclusively on how to get elected but not on how to become effective once elected.,

iv.   Communication Skills: Proposal writing, speech writing, speech delivery, and self-expression are all key leadership skills. Women need to be able to communicate their visions to their families, communities and to the country as a whole in order to bring them to life,

v.   Financial Resources: Women need to learn how to create their own financial resources and garner financial support from their community. Greater access to funding would also help women expand their program work and enhance their ability to get elected,

vi.   Support: Families need to support women and girls in pursuing education and leadership opportunities. By freeing up the time needed to go to work and/or further their education, providing childcare is one way that families can do so,

vii.   Entrepreneurship: Self-sufficiency can start with self-employment. Women need to go beyond working for other people and start working for themselves. Not only will this help to progress woman leaders, it will also create new jobs and empower other women to do the same.

viii.   Creating a Bigger Vision: Women need to go beyond other people's visions and dream big dreams for themselves. One way of doing so is through studying advocacy at the highest levels of leadership.

Beijing Platform for Action

The Beijing Platform for Action imagines a world where each woman and girl can exercise her freedoms and choices, and realize all her rights, such as to live free from violence, to go to school, to participate in decisions and to earn equal pay for equal work.

The Beijing process unleashed remarkable political will and worldwide visibility. It connected and reinforced the activism of women's movements on a global scale. Conference participants went home with great hope and clear agreement on how to achieve equality and empowerment (O'Barr, 1997).

Since then, governments, civil society and the public have translated the Platform for Action's promises into concrete changes in individual countries. These have ushered in enormous improvements in women's lives. More women and girls than at any previous point in time serve in political offices, are protected by laws against gender-based violence, and live under constitutions guaranteeing gender equality. Regular five-year reviews of progress on fulfilling Beijing commitments have sustained momentum. Still, the Platform for Action envisioned gender equality in all dimensions of life—and no country has yet finished this agenda. Women earn less than men and are more likely to work in poor-quality jobs (Sayers and Kelly, 2001). A third suffers physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. Gaps in reproductive rights and health care leave 800 women dying in childbirth each day.

The 20th anniversary of Beijing opens new opportunities to reconnect, regenerate commitment, charge up political will and mobilize the public. Everyone has a role to play— for our common good. The evidence is increasingly in that empowering women empowers humanity. Economies grow faster, for example, and families are healthier and better-educated when women are empowered (O'Barr, 1997).

The Beijing Platform for Action, still forward-looking at 24, offers important focus in rallying people around gender equality and women's empowerment. Its promises are necessarily ambitious. But over time, and with the accumulating energy of new generations, they are within reach (Tagliabue, 1995).

African Platform for Action

The African Platform for Action is a synthesis of regional perspectives and priorities and a framework for action for the formulation of policies and implementation of concrete sustainable programmes for the advancement of women. It is developed in consonance with the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, the Abuja Declaration and the Kampala Action Plan were all put into consideration in its formulation. The Platform for Action aims to accelerate the social, economic and political empowerment of all women at all levels and at all stages of their lives under the guidance of the following principles (Rucker, 2013):

(a) The operating principle of the African Platform for Action is the integration of the gender perspective in all policies, plans and actions directed towards the achievement of equality, development and peace. The underlying assumption is that international instruments that have been developed for human rights should be applicable to all sectors of society. To this end, this African Platform for Action aims to establish/strengthen sustainable mechanisms including information systems at all levels for the promotion of legal literacy and the advancement of women;

(b) Equal partnership between women and men is the ultimate goal of the Nairobi Forward looking Strategies, the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and all other relevant regional and international policy instruments on human and women's rights;

(c) To this end, it is important to ensure a fuller and more active participation of women in policy formulation and decision-making processes of government;

(d) There is need to achieve/accelerate the economic, social and political empowerment of women at all levels, enabling them as citizens, on an equal footing with men, to participate at the level of decision-making, becoming active contributors to and beneficiaries of all aspects of national development;

(e) The imperative of a successful search for peace which is crucial for the African region cannot be overemphasized. Women and children are the major victims of ethnic and civil strife including religious extremism and in the ongoing process of conflict prevention, management and resolution, women should be closely and actively involved and consulted at the national, sub regional and regional levels;

(f) Priority action should be taken for protecting the human rights of girls and ensuring that they get nurture, care, education and opportunities for achieving their full potentials equally with their brothers.

Other regional milestones that have impacted upon the political, socio- economic and cultural status of women in Africa have included, inter alia:

(a) The Lagos Plan of Action and Final Act of Lagos (1980);

(b) The Kilimanjaro Programme of Action on Population and Self-Reliant Development (1984); (c) The African Charter on Popular Participation and Transformation (1990); Source of document: www.un.org Publié dans – Published on: www.wildaf-ao.org 5/38

(d) The Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community (1991);

(e) The Dakar/Ngor Declaration on Population, Family and Sustainable Development (1992);

(f) The Ouagadougou Declaration on the Education of Girls (1993);

(g) The Regional Conference on Women and Peace, and the Kampala Action Plan on Women and Peace (1993) which was adopted by the Council of Ministers of OAU at its sixtieth session held in Tunis in June 1994;

(h) Resolution CM/Res. 1550 (LX) on the preparation of the fourth World Conference on Women adopted by the Council of Ministers of OAU at its sixtieth session held in Tunis in June 1994;

(i) Resolution CM/Res. 1551 (LX) on population and development adopted by the Council of Ministers of OAU in July 1994.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Without a doubt, women in Africa have risen to various positions of power and leadership both within the private and public spheres of governance and indeed proving their mettle in their various endeavours. Going by their rather large population in Africa, a lot more women should be seen occupying leadership positions than are at present. Although successful African women leaders have very intimidating resumes, very little records of mentoring and personal development of fellow women exist. This is necessary in order to support and encourage the leadership traits in younger women.

While they continue to aspire to leadership positions in all spheres of governance both in the public and private sectors, yet in Africa, they are exposed to long standing discrimination and as such, specific and critical measures should be taken to enable women's full participation in decision making and formulation as well as access to all organs of the society.

In addition to emulating the sterling qualities of these leading lights, a few nuggets for rapid development of leadership qualities in African women were discussed. Future studies could investigate these suggestions in different contexts, considering the similarities and differences of the socio-political climates across Africa. Moreover, the suggestions could be clarified in order to gain more knowledge about the approaches which influence the success of women leaders. Also, attention was drawn to the opportunities inherent in several global Declarations and Platforms for Action for advancing women's rights and engendering empowerment for women. Domestication of these Agreements by the various African Nations will largely encourage the aspirations of our women to take up more positions of leadership.

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