Research Article

Challenges and Opportunities for Women's Political Leadership in Tigray Region Post-1995

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Abstract: In Ethiopia, women's leadership was not constitutionally recognized under the past two regimes, and gender issues were highly marginalized. However, following the 1995 Constitution, various gender-related provisions were drafted and implemented, including the introduction of quota systems and affirmative action. Additionally, different pressure groups and advocacy organizations, such as the Ethiopian Women's Association, Tigray Women's League, Tigray Women's Association, and women's affairs offices, were established to promote women's rights and participation. This study was conducted to examine the challenges and opportunities of women's political leadership in the Tigray Regional State after 1995, with a focus on Tigray regional bureaus. The objectives were to assess the challenges hindering women's participation in political leadership, investigate the government's role in empowering women and enforcing policies in practice, examine the role of women's organizations and associations in promoting equal political involvement, and identify opportunities to enhance women's leadership participation. To address these objectives, a qualitative research method was employed to capture the in-depth views and experiences of participants. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions, while secondary data were drawn from regional policies and strategies. The findings reveal that, although some progress has been made, women remain underrepresented in political leadership and decision-making positions, particularly at higher levels. Their limited participation results from personal, psychological, socioeconomic, cultural, political, and structural barriers. Moreover, despite clear policy directions, gaps persist in implementation. The study recommends strengthened efforts by women's organizations, government bodies, the regional ruling party, and other stakeholders to enhance women's political leadership participation.

Keywords: Opportunity and Challenge, Political Leadership, Tigray Regional Bureaus, Women, Women's Political Leadership.

1. Introduction

Political participation is often referred to as "political engagement" or "public involvement of individual women and men in decision-making" [1]. Women's political participation is considered one of the most important issues in the social and political sciences and a precondition for development through women's participation in leadership and decision-making positions. Political participation is a meaningful manifestation of social life and cannot be investigated in isolation from other aspects of life [2].

Historically, women were excluded from political participation and decision-making processes. Even in Athens, the birthplace of democracy, women were denied voting rights and leadership roles [3]. Leadership has long been associated with masculinity, and societal conventions continue to exclude women from top leadership positions [4].

Globally, women remain underrepresented in political and managerial leadership despite international commitments such as the 1995 Berlin Conference. Women have gained access to education and employment; however, they continue to face discrimination, glass ceiling effects, and socially accepted stereotypes that question their leadership abilities [5].

In both developed and developing countries, leadership remains male-dominated, and women often face greater disapproval when occupying leadership roles due to prevailing gender role expectations [6] [7]. African women are particularly marginalized because of patriarchal systems, cultural barriers, and unequal access to education and decision-making opportunities [8].

In Ethiopia, women constitute nearly half of the population but remain disproportionately underrepresented in political leadership and decision-making positions [9]. Although constitutional provisions guarantee women's equal rights, their actual representation in leadership remains limited due to structural and cultural barriers [10].

Some progress has been made in women's leadership participation in Ethiopia and the Tigray region; however, this progress does not reflect women's population size. Glass ceiling effects, weak institutional commitment, and socio-cultural constraints continue to hinder women's equal participation in political leadership [8] [11].

At the global level, women's participation in socio-economic and political arenas remains low, including in sub-Saharan Africa, where women hold fewer than 10% of parliamentary seats [12]. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality in Ethiopia and the Tigray region, women remain marginalized in key decision-making positions.

In many institutions, women's leadership participation is largely symbolic, serving quota requirements rather than providing real decision-making authority. Preliminary observations show that out of seventeen top governmental bureaus in the Tigray regional state, only three (17.6%) are led by women.

Furthermore, limited research has examined women's political leadership in the Tigray region after 1995. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining the challenges and opportunities of women's political leadership in the Tigray regional state after 1995.

2. Literature Review
2.1. Concept of Leadership

Leadership is a process in which a person inspires others to accomplish goals and implement objectives by influencing a group of people who become committed to fulfilling common goals [13]. Leadership is a broad concept with different types and styles, and female leadership is one of these styles. From a feminist perspective, women's leadership is understood as the right to equal opportunities with men [14].

Leadership is also a core element of national development and is always understood contextually within specific configurations of power, authority, and political culture. Fayomi and Ajayi define leadership as an interaction among group members in which leaders act as agents of change by influencing others' motivation and competencies [15]. Leadership involves guiding, influencing attitudes and behaviors, designing goals, and encouraging people to achieve common objectives [16].

Globally, leadership and decision-making positions are largely controlled by men and perceived as masculine. Although women demonstrate strong leadership performance, societal norms often associate leadership roles with men, while women are assigned domestic responsibilities, limiting their participation in leadership and decision-making positions.

2.2. Concept of Gender and Gender Equality

Gender refers to socially constructed divisions of roles, responsibilities, and opportunities between women and men that vary across cultures, religions, and societies and change over time [17]. Gender is learned through socialization and reflects social relationships between women and men shaped by historical, cultural, religious, and economic factors [18].

In many developing countries, significant gender inequality persists in education, employment, health, and political participation. Women experience limited access to opportunities and benefits compared to men, particularly in low-income countries, resulting in high levels of gender inequality [19] [20].

2.3. Women's Political Leadership

Women's political leadership refers to the active participation of women and men in political life through voting, political engagement, leadership roles, and decision-making processes [21]. Equal participation of women and men in political leadership is a prerequisite for political development and enables women to address societal issues through representation.

Historically, leadership has been viewed as masculine, resulting in gender-biased practices that privilege men. According to Eagly and Karau, women's underrepresentation in leadership stems from perceptions that female gender roles are incompatible with leadership roles [7]. Consequently, women are often evaluated more negatively than men, even when performance is equal, leading to the persistence of the "glass ceiling" in top leadership positions.

Despite progress in women's education and professional participation, women remain underrepresented in political and executive leadership, particularly in Africa and Ethiopia [22] [23]. Patriarchal norms, cultural expectations, and domestic responsibilities continue to limit women's leadership opportunities.

Research indicates that women often adopt participatory and relationship-oriented leadership styles, characterized by collaboration, communication, and interpersonal skills, which contribute positively to decision-making and governance [10]. Increased representation of women in political leadership enhances diverse perspectives, addresses social problems such as poverty, and promotes balanced decision-making processes [24].

2.4. Political Leadership of Women at the Global Level

Women's status in politics reflects the degree of equality and freedom they enjoy in shaping and sharing power [25]. Globally, women's participation in education and labor markets has increased; however, their representation in top political leadership and decision-making positions remains limited, especially in developing countries [26].

Although women's political representation has gradually improved, women still occupy a small proportion of elected and executive positions worldwide. Gender quotas and affirmative action have been recognized as effective mechanisms to accelerate women's representation in leadership and promote gender equality [27]. Nevertheless, persistent gender gaps indicate that women continue to face structural and cultural barriers in political leadership.

2.5. Women's Political Leadership in Africa

In many African societies, leadership has traditionally been associated with masculinity, reinforcing the belief that men are more suitable leaders than women [28]. Patriarchal social systems, cultural barriers, and unequal socioeconomic conditions contribute to the continued underrepresentation of women in political leadership and decision-making positions [29].

Women's limited access to education, economic resources, and political networks further constrains their leadership participation. The African Women's Protocol seeks to address these challenges by promoting equal representation of women and men through affirmative action and supportive measures, recognizing gender equality as essential for democratic governance.

2.6. Women's Leadership Position in Ethiopia

Historically, women in Ethiopia have been marginalized due to patriarchal systems, cultural stereotypes, and male-dominated political structures [30]. Although women actively contribute to social and economic life, their roles are often undervalued, and their participation in leadership and decision-making remains limited [31].

Despite constitutional guarantees of gender equality and Ethiopia's commitment to international conventions such as CEDAW, women continue to face disparities in education, employment, income, and political representation [32]. Cultural norms, gender stereotypes, and limited access to leadership networks hinder women's advancement to executive positions.

Since 1995, women's participation in political leadership in Ethiopia has shown gradual improvement; however, representation at top leadership levels remains low. Structural barriers, patriarchal attitudes, and unequal access to resources continue to constrain women's full participation in political leadership and decision-making processes.

3. Methodology
3.1. Description of the Study Area
This study was conducted from November 2017 to April 2018. The Tigray Regional State is located in the northern part of Ethiopia. The region shares common borders with Eritrea to the north, the State of Afar to the east, the State of Amhara to the south, and the Republic of Sudan to the west. The Tigray Regional State covers an area of 50,086 km² across northwestern and northeastern Ethiopia, and its total population was estimated at 3.695 million according to the national census (2000). Furthermore, the region is located at a latitude and longitude of 13°29′N and 39°28′E, with an elevation of 2,084 meters above sea level.

This study was conducted in the bureaus of the Tigray Regional State. These regional bureaus are located in the capital city of Tigray, Mekelle, and consist of approximately 17 bureaus, including the Bureau of Culture and Tourism, Education Bureau, Civil Service Bureau, Water Resources Development Bureau, Justice Bureau, Bureau of Sport and Youth Affairs, Bureau of City Development, Trade and Industry Bureau, Women's Affairs Bureau, Health Bureau, Public Relations Bureau, Agricultural Bureau, Labor and Social Affairs Bureau, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Bureau, Science and Technology Bureau, Bureau of Finance and Economic Development, and the Bureau of Construction, Roads, and Transportation (KPMT International, 2010).

3.2. Research Approach and Research Design
1) Research Approach
This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore women's participation in political leadership in depth. This approach was chosen for its utility in assessing subjective attitudes, opinions, and behaviors through the understanding of words, making it suitable for exploring complex social phenomena. It allows for an in-depth analysis of the respondents' perceptions and experiences regarding the issue at hand. Furthermore, the research utilized explanatory methods to identify causal factors behind the phenomenon, as well as descriptive methods to describe the situation in detail and objectively.

2) Research Design
A case study method was utilized as the research design, as it was deemed appropriate for demonstrating the existing situation within the study area. Rather than relying on large samples to examine limited variables, the case study method involves a detailed investigation of a single case or manifestation, such as a specific organization or community. This design facilitates a penetrating study of a specific phenomenon within its real-life context.

3) Data Type and Data Sources
The research utilized both primary and secondary data sources:
- Primary Data: Collected directly from male and female individuals holding various leadership positions (low, medium, and top levels) within regional bureaus and other relevant bodies.
- Secondary Data: Gathered from books, articles, journals, reports, and other written documents relevant to the topic.
- Primary Data Collection Instruments
- Key Informant Interview: Conducted with individuals possessing first-hand information and experience, such as bureau leaders and political activists. Participants were selected purposefully to ensure the collection of in-depth data.
- In-depth Interview: Utilized semi-structured, open-ended questions to obtain accurate and detailed information from workers at various leadership levels.

- Focus Group Discussion (FGD): Involved series of meetings with homogeneous groups of participants. Discussions were held with both male and female participants from different bureaus to generate qualitative data through participant interaction.

Secondary Data Collection Document analysis was employed as a tool for gathering secondary data. This involved systematically evaluating regional policies, strategies, annual plans, and packages. This method served to complement and validate the data collected through the primary instruments.

3.4. Sample and Sampling Technique
1) Sampling Technique
This study employed a dual sampling strategy to ensure data validity. First, purposive sampling was utilized to select participants. This method was chosen to identify informants with deep knowledge and specific experience regarding the issue under investigation, thereby providing optimal insights. Second, simple random sampling (specifically the lottery method) was used to select the government bureaus for the study. This random approach was adopted because the bureaus share homogeneous characteristics regarding their objectives, work culture, and gender equality policies, thus minimizing selection bias.

Regarding sample size, the research adopted the principle of data saturation. In qualitative research, the number of participants is not rigidly fixed at the outset; rather, data collection continues until a point of redundancy is reached, where no significant new information emerges from additional participants.

2) Sample Size
The sample size included representatives from various relevant regional bureaus. From the total number of available bureaus, a specific subset was randomly selected to participate. The study participants consisted of employees holding leadership positions at various levels—low, middle, and top management, who possessed adequate work experience. Additionally, the sample included representatives from organizations specifically dedicated to women's issues, as well as female political activists selected purposefully to enrich the data.

3.5. Target Population
The target population for this study was focused on individuals relevant to the research objectives within the specified geographical area. Given the constraints of time and resources preventing a study of the entire staff, the scope was limited to men and women holding structural or leadership positions within the selected bureaus, as well as members of specific women's associations selected purposefully.

3.6. Method of Data Analysis
Data analysis was conducted using a qualitative method that is descriptive and interpretive in nature. The process involved summarizing raw data obtained from the field and then describing it in a structured narrative form. The objective was to translate subjective data into logical explanations and provide a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study.

3.7. Ethical Considerations
This research adhered to established ethical standards to protect the rights and well-being of participants. Measures taken included providing clear information about the purpose and procedures of the study, and ensuring that participation was voluntary through informed consent. Furthermore, the confidentiality of identities (anonymity) and the privacy of respondents were strictly maintained, and data collection was conducted in locations that were safe and comfortable for the participants.

4. Finding and Discussion
The data were gathered based on guiding questions designed in accordance with the specific objectives of the research. Accordingly, the data were collected in relation to the status of women in political leadership in the Tigray Regional State, focusing on: past experiences, comparisons with women's struggles for equality and their proportion in society; the political framework and its implementation in promoting women's participation in political leadership, including an overview of the framework, its implementation, and the government's commitment to its enactment; obstacles encountered by women in participating in political leadership, such as political, cultural, psychological, socio-economic, and

structural challenges; political framework–related difficulties and complications affecting women's empowerment; women's organizations (women's leagues, women's affairs offices, and women's associations) and their roles in women's political participation; affirmative action and women's political participation; and the quota system and sustainable women's political leadership.

4.1. Demographic Information of The Informants

The demographic information of the informants involved in this study was collected to provide basic background data on the fifty participants. Of the total fifty participants, twenty four took part in in depth interviews, nine participated as key informants, and seventeen participated in focus group discussions.

At the time of data collection in 2018, the ages of the informants in the in depth interviews, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions included both women and men. Sixteen percent of the participants were between 25 and 30 years of age, fifty percent were between 31 and 45 years, and thirty four percent were aged 46 years and above.

Regarding sex distribution, twenty one participants or forty two percent were men and twenty nine participants or fifty eight percent were women. In terms of educational background, none of the participants held a diploma. Fourteen participants or twenty eight percent held a bachelor's degree, thirty-five participants or seventy percent held a master's degree, and only one female participant or two percent held a PhD at the regional bureau level.

Furthermore, all participants had work experience of more than one year.

4.2. Women's Political Leadership Status in Tigray Regional State before and after 1995

According to participants from the key informant interviews and FGD 2, women's leadership in the Tigray region is increasing compared with the Haile Selassie and Derg regimes. During the previous regimes, women were highly victimized in all aspects. They were excluded from political positions and were deprived of the right to vote and to be elected. In addition, normative patriarchal social practices and male chauvinism created a perception of women's inferiority in the minds of women themselves. Women were assigned responsibility for home based domestic activities such as childcare, and as a result, they were denied access to education and job opportunities. Therefore, it is evident that the past governments were governments of men, by men, and for men (Informant 3, 2010; FGD 2, 2010).

On the other hand, under the current government of Ethiopia, women have acquired the right to equal participation and decision-making positions. As this has increased over time, women are now participating at low, medium, and top levels of leadership.

Data obtained from in depth interviews indicate that women's political leadership and participation in decision making in Tigray have increased over the past few decades. This improvement is attributed to the constitutional protections provided by the Ethiopian Constitution in general and the Tigray Regional Constitution in particular. Women's rights to equal participation are stated in various articles of the Constitution, as well as in policies, packages, and proclamations aimed at increasing women's involvement in executive, legislative, and judicial organs (In depth interviewee 3, 2010).

Furthermore, women currently have the right to equal treatment before the law, the right to legal support, and equal access to education and job opportunities. Therefore, the past and present situations of women's equal rights in leadership and decision-making positions are incomparable, as the current government has progressed from almost no inclusion to a relatively improved condition (In depth interviewee 6, 2010).

As further evidence, participants from in depth and key informant interviews explained that the government has provided political opportunities for women. In the political arena, women are strengthening their potential. Although women's participation is still concentrated at low and medium levels of political leadership, this participation creates opportunities for women to enhance their political knowledge. In addition, women receive support through training and educational opportunities, with priority given to women. As a result, progress has been observed in women's political participation over the past few decades (In depth interviewee 1, 2010; Informant 3, 2010).

For example, women's participation in the Tigray region accounts for fifty percent at the regional congress level, fifty percent at the woreda congress level, and thirty three point three percent at the woreda administrative body level (Women's Participation and Decision Making Positions in Tigray Region, 2009).

Moreover, the involvement of women in leadership and decision making positions in the Tigray region is generally improving. This inclusive progress began with constitutional provisions, followed by the design of policies, strategies, proclamations, and packages. These measures have created

opportunities for women to participate in leadership on an equal basis with their male counterparts. However, beyond the written legal and political frameworks, practical implementation still shows significant gaps. Government officials also lack clear mechanisms regarding how, when, and through which processes women's empowerment should be achieved, and there is no effective monitoring mechanism in place (In depth interviewee 8, 2010; In depth interviewee 5, 2010).

Similarly, documents obtained from the Tigray Regional Civil Service Bureau in 2010 indicate that women's political leadership and participation in decision making remain disproportionately represented.

To support this discussion, the following table presents the number of women in core political leadership positions in the Tigray Regional State.

Table 1. Representation of Women in Tigray Regional Bureaus

No	Position	Total	Men	Women	Women (%)
1	Top leadership	193	162	31	16
2	Medium leadership	314	247	67	21.3
3	Low leadership	926	685	241	26
4	Woreda administrator	54	43	11	20.4
5	Imperative organization (መሰረታዊ ውዳበ)	587	388	199	33.9
6	Cell (ዋህዮ)	812	589	223	27.4

Source: Tigray regional and zone administrative staff document 2010.

4.3. Women's Leadership Status in Relation to Their Struggle for Equality

In the Ethiopian women's feminist movement in general, and the Tigray people's armed struggle from 1975 to 1991 in particular, women participated equally with their male counterparts. Women also struggled significantly for the establishment of peace, development, and democratic systems, and to build a sustainable democracy.

During the TPLF-led armed struggle, approximately 34% of the participants were women. Women's leadership participation was highly evident during this period. They struggled alongside men to achieve equality, sacrificing their blood and lives for peace, democracy, development, and equality (Veale, 2003).

As participants from in-depth interviews and key informant interviews explained, during the armed struggle, women had a very significant voice. However, currently, their influence is not advancing at the same pace as during the armed struggle, and they are often excluded from key executive decision-making areas. In addition, women's participation is sometimes regarded as a gift rather than as the result of their struggle for democracy and equality (In-depth interviewee 6, 2010; Key informant 2, 2010).

After the establishment of state power in 1991, women's equal rights in social, legal, economic, and political participation were formally recognized in the 1995 Constitution. The Ethiopian Constitution of 1995 (Art. 35) and the Tigray Regional Constitution of 1995 (Art. 36) recognized women's equality with men in all aspects of life, acknowledging past discrimination. This recognition was further supported by the implementation of affirmative action and a quota system to enable women to compete with men.

Similarly, policies, strategies, guidelines, and programs were designed to empower women to participate in socio-economic and political aspects of life on an equal basis with men (Informant interviewee 2, 2010).

4.4. Women Participation in Relation to Their Number

According to the Central Statistical Agency, women in the Tigray region account for more than half of the total population. However, their participation and decision-making power in politics do not reflect their proportion in the population. According to participants in in-depth interviews, women are disproportionately represented in political, economic, and legal leadership positions in the Tigray Regional State (In-depth interviewee 5, 2010).

As a result, although women constitute a large portion of the population, key political positions remain dominated by men. Similarly, a participant in an in-depth interview explained that women's political participation in the Tigray Regional State, in relation to government policies and structures for

political empowerment and their practical implementation on the ground, remains unsatisfactory (In-depth interviewee 6, 2010). Table 2 presents the statistics of men versus women in Tigray regional bureau administration.

Table 2. Gender Distribution of Administrative Positions in Tigray Regional Bureaus

No	Name of Bureau	Bureau Leader	Assistant	Manage		Percent (%)
				Male	Female	
1	Bureau of culture and tourism	M	F	5	2	28.5
2	Bureau of construction road and transport	M	F	8	1	11
3	Bureau of science and technology	M	F	8	4	33
4	Bureau finance and economic developments	M	M	7	2	22
5	Bureau of justice	M	M	6	1	14
6	Bureau of civil service	F	F	6	3	33
7	Bureau of women`s affairs	F	F	2	5	71
8	Bureau of TVET	M	M	4	4	50
9	Bureau of youths and sport affairs	M	F	7	2	22
10	Bureau of public relation	M	F	8	1	11
11	Bureau of worker and community affairs	F	F	2	5	71.4
12	Bureau of safety	M	M	8	2	20
13	Bureau of agriculture	M	M	8	1	14.3
14	Bureau of education	M	M	6	1	20
15	Health Bureau	M	M	8	1	11
16	Bureau of water resource development	M	M	6	1	14.3
17	Bureau of city development, trade and industry	M	M	6	1	14.3

Source: Tigray regional bureau`s document of executive and their level of position, 2009)

As Table 2 indicates, the level of women's participation in top political leadership positions in the Tigray regional bureaus is very low, and women are underrepresented. Women hold leadership positions in only three out of seventeen bureaus (17.6%) at the top level, and eight out of seventeen bureaus (47%) at the assistant level. In addition, on average, women constitute 27% of the total management positions in the region. Based on this analysis, it appears that the inclusive government office strategies and policies are not being implemented effectively on the ground.

Furthermore, according to in-depth interview participants:
"In Tigray regional state because of women's leadership and decision-making power is limited in number there is a lack of responsiveness in the government bodies to talk about women issue. This is because; most of the time women issues are addressed by women and men at different level as policy. Therefore, the reason for women un-equal representation in politics is because women could not be the right person to solve their problem, instead men`s passed decision on the behalf of women for solving their problems. Furthermore, depending up on the participant, in Tigray region, women leadership representation in government office is for the sake of formality" (in-depth interviewee, 1, and 7, 2010).

Man, dominance persists partly due to a lack of confidence among women in overcoming challenges and participating equally. According to the interview data, women's underrepresentation is rooted in psychological factors developed during their upbringing, often leading to feelings of inferiority. Culturally, women are primarily perceived as homemakers. From childhood, women are socialized into traditional perspectives that often portray them as inferior to men, positioning men as leaders and women as followers (In-depth interviewee 4, 2010).

Data obtained from focus group discussions indicate that backward psychological understandings of both women and men negatively affect women's political involvement. Women's psychological inferiority leads them to remain silent in their struggle for equality in leadership, to accept the male-dominated political system as the norm, and to believe that men are inherently the right individuals for leadership and decision-making authority. The inequitable perceptions of men toward female leadership can manifest in various ways, including overemphasizing minor mistakes by women, biased selection for leadership positions or nepotism, male chauvinism, and male psychological attitudes that hinder women's political leadership (FGD Interviewees 1, 2010).

4.5. Government Policy and Gender Equality

According to the Ethiopian Women Development Package (2009), the Ethiopian government in general, and the Tigray regional government in particular, are highly committed to designing policies and strategies to support women's equal participation in political leadership and decision-making. The government creates opportunities and gives attention to women to participate in leadership at all levels, from the lowest levels in private and public sectors to parliaments. It also promotes a conducive environment for competent participation, provides capacity-building trainings, designs and implements structural adjustment policies from the household to higher levels, and establishes male partnerships at the office level for support and follow-up.

To increase women's political representation, the government has established mechanisms to monitor the effective implementation of policies and strategies, thereby creating opportunities for women's participation. These mechanisms include: (a) supervising and monitoring policies, strategies, constitutions, proclamations, programs, packages, and gender-related issues to assess how they benefit women; (b) controlling the implementation of women-related constitutional and legal frameworks and promoting accountability structures; (c) arranging trainings to address personal and organizational challenges faced by women; and (d) creating safe and democratic environments to foster influential women's associations while countering backward attitudes toward women's political leadership and decision-making (ibid).

According to an in-depth interviewee, the issues causing women's underrepresentation in the Tigray region are addressed through policies, strategies, and various programs. The government attempts to resolve these issues using different mechanisms, prioritizing women's needs in every developmental agenda. Women's issues are discussed continuously, and the government responds to their needs (In-depth interviewee 3, 2010).

Additionally, the government actively investigates the underlying problems faced by women and incorporates solutions into its political structures. These structures take gender-related issues into consideration, and the government implements strong measures through policies, strategies, packages, and the Constitution to support women's participation in social, economic, and political decision-making (In-depth interviewees 4 and 2, 2010).

However, to further increase women's political involvement, the government lacks effectiveness in addressing strategic women's needs. Similarly, the government has been unable to fully uphold women's political rights in practice, treating women's participation in leadership and decision-making as a gift rather than as a human right and compulsory responsibility. Women's underrepresentation is also linked to the insufficient implementation of empowerment measures and the lack of programs to build women's self-confidence, as most government initiatives focus primarily on practical needs. Furthermore, the government does not consistently reward effectively implemented policies and strategies, nor does it take strong measures against those left unimplemented (Informant interviewee 4, 2010).

4.6. Women's Organizations and Their Role

Women's organizations play a critical role in women's socioeconomic and political empowerment. Independent women's organizations are essential to securing their participation in the political arena. Therefore, this movement encourages and supports women in obtaining legitimate spaces in governance and works to enhance the effectiveness of women in formal political leadership roles.

Data obtained from focus group discussions indicate that all women-related bureaus in the Tigray region are working progressively, particularly in addressing temporary problems faced by women. However, they have not achieved sustainable capacity building or long-term improvements in political participation (FGD Interviewees 1, 2010).

Most women's bureaus focus on providing legal support when women face challenges. While they advocate for women's issues, they do not work on raising awareness to enable women to address their problems independently. Their work often addresses temporary problems rather than aiming for systemic change or sustainable solutions to gender-based challenges. These organizations also do not effectively follow up on the implementation of regional politico-legal frameworks (FGD Interviewees 2, 2010).

Data from key informant interviews show that Tigray women's bureaus aim to protect the rights of their members and women in general through organizational structures and competencies. However, they face challenges such as a lack of determination, a low number of women members compared to the total population, limited work on strategic women's issues, weak connections with diversified and professional organizations, and poor implementation of supportive policies and programs. This results in gaps affecting multidimensional women beneficiaries (Informant Interviewee 2, 2010).

Additionally, women's organizations often exist only nominally. Although they share the common goal of empowering women socially, economically, legally, and politically, they sometimes unintentionally reinforce oppression (In-depth Interviewee 7, 2010).

The women's league is responsible for minimizing women's social, cultural, economic, and political challenges and enabling women to participate in leadership and decision-making. Its primary objective is to increase women's political participation in collaboration with the leading party, the TPLF (Informant Interviewee 1, 2010).

According to key informant interviews, the women's league faces several challenges. The most critical problem is a shortage of qualified women leaders. In the Tigray region, the women's league executive body initially had only one member; it has now increased to two at the regional state level. At the zone and woreda levels, there is also only one leader in each. In addition to human resource limitations, financial constraints hinder their ability to conduct awareness campaigns and strengthen their influence. The women's league also faces logistical challenges, such as the lack of vehicles for transportation to monitor activities at the ground level. Overall, the league struggles to receive sufficient attention from responsible authorities to expand its potential (Informant Interviewee 1, 2010).

5. Conclusion

Women's participation in economic, social, and political activities is essential for sustainable development in any state. The trend of women's participation under the current government shows positive improvements, particularly in the regional council. Policies and strategies supporting women's involvement in political activities incorporate gender issues into programs and plans. The region provides equal opportunities for men and women to participate in political leadership based on performance, quotas, and affirmative action. Nevertheless, compared with their population ratio, women's participation in political leadership at the regional level remains very low.

Despite legal and policy frameworks promoting gender equality, government and official commitments to implementing these policies effectively are still limited. Factors such as women's educational level, skills, the lack of continuous evaluation and monitoring, and societal awareness regarding the benefits of women's equality hinder effectiveness. In the study area, the primary challenges limiting women's political leadership are cultural, psychological, socio-economic, structural, and political.

Cultural factors are the most prevalent barrier, associated with societal perceptions that women lack the ability to lead and should focus on domestic work. Socio-economic factors also hinder participation; women without access to productive resources or ownership of goods often cannot consider political engagement. Women with low education typically have low incomes, resulting in economic dependence on husbands.

Political factors present another challenge. Despite political commitment, legal support, and institutional arrangements, deeply rooted attitudes and low capacity make effective participation difficult. Structural factors also impede women's leadership; political structures do not adequately consider women's triple roles during policy design and implementation. Promotional systems for men and women are identical, failing to account for historically disadvantaged groups such as women. Furthermore, the TPLF political structure does not fully address gender issues in political leadership.

The study also highlights opportunities for women's participation in political leadership and existing interventions, including capacity-building programs, public awareness campaigns, quota systems, gender mainstreaming, and affirmative action. These measures effectively increase the number of women in political leadership positions.

From the key findings, it is clear that incorporating women's perspectives at all levels of decision-making is essential to achieving equality, development, and peace. However, without coordinated efforts by the government, political parties, and stakeholders to address the challenges identified, achieving gender equality in political leadership remains impossible.

Few Recommendations:

1) The researcher advises the government, women, and women's organizations to address economic problems, dependency issues, patriarchal cultural practices, ineffective monitoring and evaluation systems, quota and affirmative action implementation, male-biased policies, and the absence of women in leadership nominations. These measures can promote equality-based development at the state level.

2) The researcher recommends that the leading political party (TPLF) implement quotas and affirmative policies not only in measurement criteria but also in evaluation and performance systems; otherwise, women will continue to lag behind men in leadership.

3) The researcher advises government bodies to ensure policies and strategies are cross-checked by executive agencies after implementation, assessing strengths and weaknesses, and addressing patriarchal attitudes among officials. These steps can advance realistic gender-based equality.

4) The researcher advises concerned bodies to implement gender policies practically rather than only at the policy level, to achieve strategic change and produce effective women leaders in a short period.

5) The researcher recommends special focus on creating awareness among women to achieve equality with men, both theoretically and practically, without fostering dependency. This approach will enhance women's leadership outcomes.

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