

FACTORS IMPEDING THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH HIERARCHY IN LAIKIPIA-SAMBURU STATION, KENYA

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating factors impeding the participation of women in SDA hierarchy in Laikipia-Samburu Station, Kenya. The study explored patriarchal theory using qualitative descriptive survey design, targeting 1,080 pastors, church elders and departmental heads, lay members of SDA church in Laikipia-Samburu Station. The study employed proportionate purposive sampling procedure with sample size of 278 respondents. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics and document analysis. The study established that gender representation in church hierarchy in practice is not balanced. The study also established that SDA has no written church policy prohibiting ordination of women but after completion of theological training women are commissioned while their male counterparts are ordained and licensed. The study recommends that the SDA General Conference Sessions should revise Church Policies and alter Church Manual to allow women ordination which is a New Light in SDA church. This is because women ordination is not against the scriptures but the SDA church practice which can be revised to increase women participation in the leadership of church hierarchy. The results of the study might have implication to SDA church in addressing challenges facing women in its hierarchy and also contribute useful insights to the religious scholars. Government and other ministries might also use the recommendations of these results to formulate policies towards uplifting women in general areas of leadership and in achieving Sustainable Development Goals.

Key terms: Women commissioning, women empowerment, women in church leadership, women role in the church, women ordination.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA) was founded in 1863 by Joseph Bates, James White, Ellen G. White and J. N. Andrews; followers of Millerite movement who believed in William Miller's teachings. Their conviction was greatly strengthened by the message coming from the pen of Ellen G. White. She received the Holy Spirit which instructed her on the way God was supposed to be worshipped in America in December 1844 and October 1848. As time went on, they managed to get followers and formed a congregation of SDA church (Seventh Day Adventist Encyclopaedia, 1976). Just like other missionaries, the founders thought of spreading their church to other parts of the world. This is why between 1903 and 1905, they decided to send some missionaries to Africa (Floyd, 2000). Laikipia-Samburu Station is in Central Rift Valley Conference that was organised on November 24-25 2013 with 415 churches and 42,086 members. It comprises of nine Church Districts namely Nyahururu, Rumuruti, Kinamba, Subukia, Boiman, Ndaragwa, Maralal, Kapkures and Oljororok. The following three church Districts were purposively selected for the study: Rumuruti SDA Church District comprising of four churches namely; Rumuruti, Muhotetu, Koitabai and Simotuo; Kinamba SDA Church District has Sipili, Kinamba and Mwenje. Nyahururu SDA Church District is made up of Losogwa, Nyahururu Central, Kisima, Oljabet, Marmanet and Muthengera church (SDA, 2013).

Women face unique challenges today as they attempt to ascend to leadership positions in organisations and especially in religious arena. The explanation of the form a global context elicits varied reasons. Oduyoye (1995) for instance, points out that in Africa low-public attitude towards women's role in the society remains the chief obstacle to effective participation in leadership. In a patriarchal society, women's search for an enhanced status is subjected to the dynamics of power, authority, different influences, and social expectations that tend to undermine equality. As a result, the church in Africa operates in patriarchal domain, the low-rating perception of women as leaders tend to filter into the church. The expression of the challenges is seen with institutionalised and individual discrimination of women across all public sectors. Major responsibility for family life is perceived as the station of women while men take roles in the public (Oduyoye, 1995).

Gathogo (2008) observes that a Christian woman in Africa today, finds it difficult to ascend to senior position in leadership. She is surrounded by the church history, which enforces patriarchal values. Mwaura (2005) notes that women dominate the pews in the church although they are conspicuously absent from the power structures. Phiri (1997) notes that Christianity came to Africa as a male dominated religion (Phiri, 1997). Women participation in church hierarchy is clearly an issue that cannot be ignored.

Marianne (2013) in her dissertation points out that in SDA there is a clear distinction made by the Official Church working policy: between men and women in church hierarchy. Certain leadership positions such as Conference President are not held by women, result to the current debate on women participation in church hierarchy (Mariane, 2013). However, the church is expected to reassess and reconsider the participation of women in church hierarchy. SDA church trains men and women in same theological colleges. After training, SDA men are ordained as pastors, while women are not. SDA church therefore, does not allow women mobility in the church hierarchy. The study therefore investigated factors impeding the participation of women in SDA hierarchy in Laikipia-Samburu Station. The research question that factors impede the participation of women in SDA hierarchy in Laikipia-Samburu Station is therefore answered.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This study was guided by patriarchal theory by Iglitzin and Ross as the root cause of female domination. In the literature review, efforts were made to show its relevance in illuminating the participation of women in church hierarchy. Patriarchy is authoritative, oppressive and discriminatory male system. It is oppressive in social, political, economic and cultural environments. It is discriminatory in that it controls access to power, management of resources and benefits; and manipulation of public and private power structure. Patriarchy system originated from western European historical and sociological approach to development. This system assumes that European male is the universal reference point. Opposite of patriarchy system is matriarchy, which is an African concept. Matriarchy is a social organisation focused on power of women as mothers and the matrilineal ownership of home and wealth. Iglitzin and Ross (1976) Patriarchal theory suggested that within patriarchal society the roles of women and men were influenced by Patriarchal Ideology. The impacts of patriarchy ideology are reflected on economic, social, political as well as on religious sphere (Iglitzin & Ross, 1976).

Scholars have explored the role of women in religious institutions with the aim of understanding their leadership roles, and how the church members and the other church leaders perceive them (Connor, 2015; Leanne, 2016). Female church leaders have received positive reception and appreciation among church members, including male leaders. Moreover, female leaders have been found to perform equally as compared to their male counterparts in terms of effective leadership skills. The existing literature suggests that while men are more likely to be autocratic, women are more likely to be participative. Women leaders exhibit a higher concern with sustaining relationships compared to men who are more task-oriented (Ferrari, 2017). However, such differences are often depended on the context (Holten & Olof, 2015). For instance, in roles that require characteristics associated with women, women have a higher orientation with the tasks. Similarly, in roles that require characteristics associated with men, men show higher orientation with the tasks (Claudia, 2015). Additionally, the leadership style of women also depends on the number of women leaders in an environment.

Furthermore, women participation in church activities and other religious events is greater than that of men (Robbins & Francis, 2014). Nevertheless, the findings by the previous researchers reveal that women remain underrepresented in leadership positions despite their higher participation and policy changes in churches (Dzubinski, 2015; Kenaston, 2015). Therefore, exploring the phenomenon of having women as leaders in religious institutions, especially in African immigrant churches, is important in order to understand the current underrepresentation of this gender in church leadership positions. In this manner, the findings of this study may be used to promote improved awareness of readers and future researchers about the topic, which would consequently inform efforts towards addressing the underrepresentation of women in church leadership.

White identified women as the best to cater for the needs of other women. She equally noted that women have been successful in evangelisation. Ellen also pointed that women are the best in nursing the sick and recommended that Adventist women to continually train as physicians. This study discusses the impact of women ministries in societies in Laikipia-Samburu station. Despite the large scholarly work done on the participation of women in church hierarchy, little has been done in Laikipia – Samburu station of the SDA church, a gap that has been filled by the results presented in this study.

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In an effort to understand Ellen G. White position in regards to the appointment of women, her prophetic part and inclusion in the establishing and sustaining of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Ellen looked at the primary entries that were used to help women perceive what they instructed. Stress was laid on the consecration declaration which stated to a limited extent that, "women who have been sanctified ought to be selected to visit the unwell, take care of the youth, and clergyman and the poor people..." Ellen G. White called for more noteworthy contribution of women in work of the church. She supported variety of strategies to be for employed in mission work. In addition, she urged women to actively participate in the ministry of Jesus White, 1963). The study purposes to investigate women participation in church hierarchy in Laikipia-Samburu SDA Station, Laikipia County.

Marianne in her study focused on the personal experience of women working in church hierarchy in Trans European Division of Seventh-Day Adventist Church, she analysed pastors and church leaders experience their work for the church, where women were asked to describe their personal journey and calling to ministry, as well as their experience on the way women were perceived in Trans European Division of Seventh-Day Adventist church as pastors and church leaders (WHITE, 1993). Her findings revealed that Seventh-Day Adventist Church need to be more radical in applying the twenty-eight Fundamental Beliefs. She further argued that if the church was to experience growth and appeal to young people, living in a gender inclusive society, the church needed to include even more conscious manner, the woman voice in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church hierarchy (Mariane, 2015).

Simnanke in a Project Dissertation observed that responses to the statement relating to church governance, especially the dissemination of General Conference authorisation for the ordination of women as local elders was not favourable to participation of women in church hierarchy (Leabaneng, 2010). Equally during 1995 and 2012 General Conference majority of the delegates voted down the proposal to allow Divisions ordain women. SDA church has been slow in engaging with new thoughts for a relevant women's participation church hierarchy. This study creates an awareness of the great need to respond more fruitfully to women's participation in church hierarchy. Little is known concerning impact of SDA Women Ministries in the factors impeding the participation of women in SDA hierarchy in Laikipia-Samburu Station which were the gaps filled by the current study as are documented in chapter three of this thesis.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive survey design based on quantitative and qualitative data. The design is useful when a researcher needs to gather data on phenomena that cannot be directly observed. Its benefit is that it makes it possible to gather vast volumes of data from a large population in a highly efficient, simple and cost-effective manner, including using questionnaires. This research study was undertaken in three SDA Church Districts in Laikipia-Samburu Station namely; Nyahururu, Kinamba and Rumuruti. Laikipia-Samburu Station is part of Central Rift Valley Conference of Eastern Union in Kenya. SDA Laikipia-Samburu Station covered the civic counties of Laikipia, Samburu and Nyandarua by the time of study period. Administratively Laikipia-Samburu Station had nine church Districts with Nyahururu Central SDA Church as its headquarters in Nyahururu town.

The target population for this study was 1,080 ordinary members of SDA Church in Laikipia-Samburu Station. Pastors, church elders and departmental heads, lay members (men, women and youth). The study

used proportionate purposive sampling of 278 members to assess the specified groups namely; pastor, church elders and departmental heads, lay members; men, women and youth. Purposive sampling method was preferred because the study required specific data. Data for this study was collected through primary and secondary data sources. Primary data was collected through; questionnaires interviews and non-participant observation while secondary data was collected through document analysis. Qualitative data was analysed using content analysis technique. According to Hsieh and Shannon, content analysis is a research method for subjective interpretation of content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes and patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The researcher synthesised the data thematically according to the objectives of the study. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The main objective of the investigated was to investigate factors impeding participation of women in SDA church hierarchy in Laikipia-Samburu Station. This research shows that SDA structure existing today has not changed much from the missionary period. This structure has not been transformative; it has allowed men to participate in church hierarchy while women remain at lower levels. This study identified the need to change the male dominated systems and tailor-make them to suit the needs of women. In this way, more women would participate in higher levels of church hierarchy. This study established that gender representation in church hierarchy in practice is not balanced. For instance, although SDA constitution states that men and women have equal chances for participation; even in local church committee where women are majority men are dominant in administrative leadership. Results showed that SDA church leaders at lower hierarchy were women. Nevertheless, even in business committees where women stood a chance to be co-opted they were not preferred. Researcher's argument is that women should be co-opted when opportunities arise. In this way a more balanced representation is achieved.

This study established that SDA trains men and women in the same theological colleges. This study revealed that since the inception of Laikipia-Samburu Station no woman ever trained in theological studies. The researcher notes that this is an impending factor since SDA Ministers are theologically trained. This research also revealed that the major factor impeding participation of women in church hierarchy is the issue of women ordination. This research established that SDA has no written church policy prohibiting ordination of women but after completion of theological training women are commissioned while their male counterparts are ordained and licensed.

Therefore, women who are theologically trained have limited ministerial power in SDA church. SDA scholars proposing women ordination argue that General Conference Sessions can revise Church Policies and alter Church Manual to allow women ordination which is a New Light in SDA church. This study equally revealed that in SDA women ordination is not against the scriptures but the SDA World Wide Church insists that it must be a globally accepted practice.

Despite the fact that women ordination in the Seventh Day Adventist Church is still a mirage, the respondents in the current study strongly recommended that the church should seriously consider women ordination as one of the respondents observed that;

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Since the church trains both female and male pastors in the same seminaries under the same conditions and both qualify as pastors, women should be given the same ordination opportunities as men otherwise the women naturally feel left out in the hierarchy of church administration. This scenario depicts the church to be unfair and creates gender biased and insensitivity to gender inclusion yet before God everybody is equal KIR_011.

Women by number are the majority in the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Laikipia-Samburu Station and therefore are involved in many activities in the church. Respondents in the study view women ordination as the missing link in the Seventh Day Adventist Church mandate. One of the respondents observed that women ordination can accelerate the mandate faster;

When the church ultimately accept women ordination in its policy, more women will be the head of institutions (schools, universities and hospitals), spearhead evangelism in prisons, hospitals, schools and other institutions in order to attain this acceleration. More women will head departments at the station levels in preparation of making them also head such departments at the Conference, Union, Division and the General Conference Levels of leadership KIR_012.

Despite the never ending debate of women ordination in the Seventh Day Adventist Church, the respondents in the study had several recommendations. One of the women respondent recommendations was;

The future delegates of the General Conference of the SDA church should acknowledge that all are equal before God and therefore should pass a resolution of ordaining women. This will give the women the authority to function constitutionally and also based on the policy of the church in carrying out their responsibilities in the leadership hierarchy in the church. KIR_013.

The unity of the SDA as a church is the concern of the Laikipia-Samburu Station. Ordination of women being a contentious issue which can compromise the unity should be acted upon quickly for the survival of the church as one of the respondents observed that;

This issue of ordination of women indeed is contentious and can lead to cracks in the church whose outcome may be a breakaway congregation. In my view the earlier the church passes a resolution for the ordination of women the safe it is for the unity of the church. Since some conferences of the SDA church do not see anything wrong with ordination of women, let the remaining conferences join in to pass this resolution. In any case it is better to have fully ordained women in the church hierarchy than splitting the congregation into two KIR_014.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The main objective of the study was to investigate factors impeding the participation of women in SDA hierarchy in Laikipia-Samburu Station, Kenya and based on the research question; what factors impede the participation of women in SDA hierarchy in Laikipia-Samburu Station? The researcher

established the following as the main factors impeding the participation of women in SDA hierarchy in Laikipia–Samburu Station, Kenya; The SDA church structure has remained rigid and not transformative allowing men to participate in church hierarchy while women have remained at lower levels. In other words, gender representation in church hierarchy in practice is not balanced and not sensitive to women. The study also established that SDA church trains men and women in the same theological colleges yet women no woman has ever been trained in theological studies since the inception of Laikipia-Samburu Station, Kenya. The study further revealed that the major factor impeding participation of women in church hierarchy is the issue of women ordination. The SDA church has no written church policy prohibiting ordination of women but after completion of theological training women are commissioned while their male counterparts are ordained and licensed.

Recommendations: Based on the findings and the conclusions on the factors impeding women participation in church hierarchy in Seventh Day Adventist in Laikipia – Samburu station, Kenya, the study came up with the following recommendations to address the gaps deduced from the conclusions of the study; SDA church should conscientise its members on women participation in church hierarchy. This can be attained through organizing retreats, workshops and seminars to create awareness of the importance of women in church hierarchy. During these forums the church should invite experts in gender and theology as facilitators. In addition, women should be empowered to enhance its leadership potentials. SDA church women should go to the same theological colleges as men and thereafter be ordained and licensed as their male counterparts. This will enable them sit in committees and attend General, Union, and Local Conference Sessions where major decisions are made. Women will have opportunities to recommend and support amendment of the church policies and constitution. The wide hierarchical leadership of the SDA church has a responsibility to give support to the women. This can only be achieved through more involvement of the women the church leadership hierarchy so that women can have adequate platform for championing these activities.

The study recommends that Women ministries and Dorcas should be allocated enough funds to supplement donations to undertake its programmes effectively. The ministries should be facilitated with professionals to spearhead different programs. SDA church should consider opening more women ministries especially in arid and semi-arid areas like in Laikipia-Samburu station to reach the less fortunate in these areas. In addition, the church may reassess its constitution for amendment to include women in ministerial church hierarchy. The church may also employ mandatory percentage of women candidate or electoral quota in church hierarchy. This could result in visible potentials of both men and women in participation in church hierarchy. The study further recommends that women ordination in the SDA church should be allowed through the General Conference resolution during its *quinquennium* sittings.

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