CHALLENGES TO WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN KENYA'S FOREIGN SERVICE

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ABSTRACT

This research paper is a gender dimension study of the composite challenges of women diplomats in Kenya's foreign [diplomatic] service. Despite the appointment of women to higher echelons of Kenya's foreign service establishment, the challenges experienced in the course of undertaking their diplomatic assignments at Kenya Missions Abroad and headquarters have alluded the attention of Kenyan scholarship. The research examined the barriers to women's representation in the foreign service with reference to the challenges encountered in the course of their advancement of Kenya's foreign policy and diplomatic agenda. It is a description of the hurdles based on the experiences of senior and young women diplomats whilst undertaking diplomatic duties in the Foreign Service. The challenges are multifaceted comprising both societal and state-based [institutional]. Through the use of qualitative method combining primary and secondary sources of data, the study attempted to respond to the question: What are the challenges encountered by women in advancing Kenya's foreign policy and diplomatic agenda? Primary data was obtained from biographical analysis and anonymous interviews of female diplomats, while secondary data was derived from peer reviewed journals, government records and textbooks. The study found that work-family life integration; social demands of networking; inadequate allocation of funds to Missions; conflicting relations between political and career ambassadors; stagnation and bias in policy decision making and the dilemma of deployment to strategic and non-strategic stations undermined the intensity of diplomatic presence and furtherance of Kenya's national interests by Ambassadors and other women diplomats. However, the challenges were time specific, geopolitical and resulting from a combination of societal and institutional factors. The findings inform policy re-orientation towards gender mainstreaming in Kenya's Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an effective instrument in elevating Kenya's global presence. The study recommends among others, promotion of gender diversity and inclusivity in senior foreign policy decision making and professionalization of Kenya's foreign service commensurate with the 21st century dynamics.

Key words: **Women diplomats, Ambassadors, Diplomacy, Foreign Policy, barriers, challenges, Foreign Service, Diplomatic Service.**

INTRODUCTION

The appointment of women to high political positions has historically been a male-centric realm within a patriarchal structure. Allowing women in positions of power has traditionally been seen as threatening male-domination and a sign of self-weakness (McCarthy, 2009). Moreover, the image of a female leader in itself, conveys new values running in contravention to taboos, traditional conceptions and behavior modes. Some scholars have observed that such social conditioning or rather, gender conditioning [family-related matters] has been implicative on women's succession in foreign affairs. This is exemplified in diplomatic hierarchies where deeply seated attitudes override professional abilities of women

to serve as diplomats. In Africa for instance, despite enormous progress made by women in political leadership in some countries such as Rwanda (63.8%) and South Africa (42%) serving as models, the diplomatic gain has, however, been threatened by weak institutions and clouds of cultural practices (Onditi, 2019, p. 382). It could therefore be said that traditional, stereotyped attitudes to social roles, are the greatest obstacles to gender equality in the civil service and foreign relations. The unjustifiable 'gender-based' stereotypes have developed and become embedded over a long period.

While female leadership is gaining momentum in Kenya's Foreign Service [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], women diplomats have not been immune to the aforementioned realities and have faced several challenges and obstacles in the course of playing a more active role in the diplomatic [foreign] service. The dilemma to separate between private and public life compelling women ambassadors and other female diplomats [married and single] to balance between family life in addition to their ambassadorial or diplomatic jobs remain strong countervailing forces. Integrating family and career has in most cases, become an alarming and persistent problem for successive generations of women diplomats in Kenya's foreign service. In another narrative, patriarchal values, direct and indirect gender discrimination and traditional gender norms, chauvinism, working cultures that perpetuate higher expectations for women, and regulations impeding work-family balance constitute the major challenges for women in the diplomatic service (A. Alexander et al., 2018, p. 196). Emphatically, Fogarty and Rapport (Linse, 2004) remind us that women [diplomats] are extremely burdened in balancing career as they become more active with the high demands of foreign service assignments.

The study employed the feminist and critical mass theoretical perspectives. In comparison to other theoretical frameworks, feminist and critical mass theories appear particularly useful for the study as they offer a much closer account of the nexus between the impact of women in Foreign Service [viewed as a political institution] and the challenges encountered in advancing Kenya's foreign policy.

Women in Kenya's Foreign Service under Feminist and Critical Mass perspectives

Feminist Theory

The feminist analysis of gender, diplomacy, foreign policy, women in foreign service has been established within the various pioneering works of Judith Ann Tickner, Cynthia Holden Enloe and Christine Sylvester, Simone de Beauvoir, Marysia Zalewski amongst others, who saw the importance of gender and the role of women in the theory and practice of International Relations (Scheyer & Marina, 2019). Like other frameworks, feminist theory has encountered criticisms and dissent among its proponents over its diversified thinking (Tong, 2014), interpretation, application and division. Despite the division over many issues, Jaggar maintains that "feminists are united by a conscious commitment to ending women's subordination" (Hoffman, 2001, p. 49).

Feminist theory traces its roots to the second wave feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and the first half of the twentieth century [late 1980s and early 1990s], drawing on the experiences of marginalized and oppressed peoples, including women, in order to challenge and revision the state-centric [realist], epistemological and ontological foundations of the field of International Relations (Stöckmann, 2018; True, 2010a; Whitworth, 1994). Drawing from its origins, feminists argue that regardless of race, class or ethnicity, women are consistently defined as political outsiders whose participation in public life is conditioned upon their maternal roles. Feminist scholarship thus, rejects the anatomical nature of gender differences and strives to remedy the systemic gender-related inadequacies by providing insight into the ways in which gendered power hierarchies, privileges and institutions hinder attainment of gender equality, justice and bodily integrity, all of which are key impediments to global gender justice (Aggestam et al., 2018; Caprioli, 2004; Tickner, 2001; Williams, 2017). Against this background, evaluating women in the Foreign Service through a feminist approach can yield relevant epistemic knowledge about the advancement of foreign policy and identify the shortcomings and structural inadequacies of diplomacy and agencies that prevent the establishment of sound foreign policy agenda.

Sir Ernest Satow, in the 'Guide to Diplomatic Practice'(1979, p. 69), defined the role of diplomats as to: "represent the sending state, to protect its interests and those of its nationals, to negotiate with the government to which it is accredited, to report to the sending government on all matters of importance to it, and to promote friendly relations in general between the two countries". However, research suggests that the variation in the socio-cultural dynamics, historical contexts and political factors can have important ramifications in conditioning women's involvement and representation in politics, more specifically in international affairs (Schwindt-Bayer, 2010). For instance, a study by Sapiro (1983) in 'The Political Integration of Women', offers a feminist perspective on the complexity of women's political participation, which is applicable to the foreign service. Using data drawn from the Michigan Socialization Panel Study [1965-1973], the research suggests that women are constrained by resources, traditional gender expectations and socialized in a way to devalue their active political participation.

In the analysis of the role in foreign policy and barriers encountered in terms of gender as women, liberal and radical feminists: Enloe (2014), True (2010b) and Tickner (1993), conceptualized the aspect of 'hegemonic masculinity' by arguing that it creates a culturally idealized hierarchical gendered power distribution in diplomatic institutions. This unequal gender structure, which Simone de Beauvoir (1989) termed as 'women's sexuality and representation', contributes to conflict, inequality and oppression by subjugating women and affecting performance of their foreign service duties.

Critical Mass Theory

The concept of critical mass came to the fore in political science following the original contributions of Harvard Business School Professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter and Danish-Swedish Professor of Political Science, Drude Dahlerup. These seminal authors, despite later

misrepresentation in their literature, both point to diversity among women and the importance of individuals' firmness in acting on behalf of women as a group (Childs & Krook, 2009).

According to critical mass theorists (Gerald & Oliver, 2007; Lovenduski, 2001), women are unlikely to have an impact, and form strategic coalitions with one another in promoting feminine legislation [legislation related to women's issues], until they grow from a few token individuals into a considerable minority, or 'critical mass' [20%-30%] of all legislators and policymakers. Hence, increasing the number of women in politics or diplomatic circles accelerates the nature of policy formulation, but similarly creates roadblocks in policy actualization.

A growing amount of scholarly research has cast the validity of critical mass theory into doubt, by noting that adding women into policy making processes neither changes the process itself nor the outcomes owing to the resisting force of institutionalized, gendered power structures and practices (Grey, 2006; McGlen & Sarkees, 1993; Wright, 2017) more so, in the highly gendered contexts of diplomatic settings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The overall study employed the qualitative research approach to investigate the relationship between women in Foreign Service and challenges faced in foreign policy articulation. 'Qualitative method is the analysis of qualitative data such as text data from interview transcripts and is heavily dependent on the researcher's analytic and integrative skills and personal knowledge of the social context where the data is collected" (Bhattacherjee, 2012, p. 113). It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. Qualitative approach was deemed appropriate owing to its advantage of accessing the participants' perspective (Bridget & Lewin, 2004, p. 34) on their contribution to shaping foreign policy and the challenges encountered.

Research Design

The study relied on the case study method to examine the challenges of women diplomats within Kenya's foreign service in advancing Kenya's foreign policy. "A case study is a comprehensive study of a social unit and an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within its natural and real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Bhattacherjee, 2012; Kothari, 2004; Yin, 2018, p. 31)."

Target Population and Sample Size

The study targeted women diplomats in Kenya's Foreign Service who served at the Ministry headquarters in Nairobi and Kenya Missions Abroad. Forty eight (48) participants [including Ambassadors] were targeted for sampling on the basis of their expertise on the research topic, guided by what Morris (2015, p. 10) refers to as 'interview knowledge'. In this regard: their long diplomatic work experience, educational level, postings to strategic Kenya Missions Abroad and intensity of diplomatic engagement and foreign policy influence.

Sampling procedure and Data Collection

Non-probability sampling: purposive and snow balling sampling, was used to select a sample of senior women diplomats in the foreign service to ensure 'representativeness of the whole'(Kothari, 2004; Ruane, 2005) population of women diplomats in Kenya's foreign service. Data was collected through interview schedules and semi-structured questionnaires sent to respective female diplomats via email and zoom meetings.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed through simple transcription of filled interview schedules and questionnaires by placing into specific folders in the researcher's laptop labelled 'Interview Schedule', categorized into ambassadors and other female diplomats. Interview schedule responses were then summarized & analysed instantaneously according to the research objective.

DISCUSSION: CHALLENGES BY WOMEN DIPLOMATS

Ambassadorships are the yardstick for assessing Foreign Service accomplishments. To many, ambassadorships seem to lead everlastingly glamorous and luxurious lives, yet ambassadorial posts are filled with infinite benefits and hurdles. Women's gendered challenges in diplomatic leadership are emblematic in a diplomatic history notorious to have handicapped women's roles on the basis of suitability of their deployment as envoys to countries with varied recognition of their stature. Astonishingly, women report greater prejudice, stereotyping or discrimination internally from within their own organizations, than from the host countries (Stephenson, 2019, p. 234). Whilst the appointments of senior women diplomats as ambassadors is an important move in the development of the Kenyan foreign service, experiences and stories from women driving Kenya's diplomatic service seem to be indicative of the commonality in the manner in which foreign policy achievements and gains made offset or camouflage the overall challenges in diverse ways including: work-family life integration and balance, gender stereotyping and social life demands, inadequate funding of Missions, conflicting relations of political vs career ambassadors, stagnation vs bias in senior policy decision making and capacity building.

Work-family life integration

The life of any Foreign Service Officer combined with marriage (especially with a child or children) continues to be particularly problematic for women. Even Madeleine Albright (2013), America's first female Secretary of State and the world's most powerful female diplomat, questioned in her biography, Madam Secretary, whether a married woman with full domestic duties could ever balance and be the player she was on the global stage. Apparently, female diplomats do face performance pressures associated with the expectation to play the inevitable conflicting diplomat-wife and/or mother roles. The propensity of senior women diplomats in Kenya's Foreign Service to advance Kenya's foreign policy interests in the host country has been adversely affected by what Slaughter (2012) affiliates to their disproportionate share of combining work with domestic responsibilities in the absence of a stable supporting system. Work-family conflict is commonly experienced from the pressures

arising from mutually incompatible family-work roles whereby participation in one role makes it difficult to effectively participate in the other role (Clancy & Tata, 2005). The work schedule of a Kenyan diplomat revolves inter alia, in frequent travelling, series of meetings and political work. Given the hecticness of diplomatic work, it is perhaps unsurprising that Kenyan female diplomats without house helps [maids] at times, get overburdened with having to work at extremely odd hours while concurrently attending to mothering and childcare responsibilities. Also, the lack of a child rearing infrastructural support such as the Kenyan government meeting the cost of child rearing in countries where such women cannot bring in domestic house helps remained burdensome. Interview guides with some anonymous married ambassadors with kids, pointed the inconvenience presented by some western-European foreign postings, ranging from finding the right schools for their children to attending parent interviews and how they navigated by multitasking.

Several other respondents pointed to the complications of an accompanied spouse [husband] with a separate and independent career outside the foreign service. The country of wife's posting [diplomat] brings different uncertainties on the fate of her spouse's [husband's] career especially on whether he will have to forego his domestic career in the home country and accompany his wife as a 'dependent', or opt to remain behind with the children, or letting the children accompany the wife, thus disorienting the family. However, depending on the host country labor laws as noted by some ambassadors and other women diplomats, the established bilateral Memorandum of Understanding [MoU] agreement on employment, allows diplomatic spouses to work, and despite providing work relief, it has pushed some spouses into irrelevant job opportunities outside their skills proficiency. At the same time, the trials and tribulations of a dependent spouse in finding a professional career in the host country, may be a drawback in itself. The thought of encountering such unpredictability of low professional careers or none at all, have led to reconsideration by some diplomatic spouses to remain and continue working in the home country. As a 2008 study on British female diplomats stated, "it seems that it is particularly difficult for a male spouse to accompany his wife overseas. Men, to a greater extent than women, are reluctant to work in areas outside their expertise or in badly paid jobs" (Aggestam & Towns, 2018; Coles, 2008, p. 139). Similarly, Julia Blackwelder (1997) in her study on The Feminization of Work in the United States, 1900-1995, alludes to the difficulty for a man to abruptly find himself in a 'dependent role' as opposed to a 'provider', because men have conventionally been the sole breadwinners and women, the dependents.

Gender Stereotyping, Social Life Demands and Networking

Networking as part of diplomatic reporting remains paramount in the Foreign Service. As Iver Neumann (2012, p. 33) vividly points out: "the present-day field diplomat is first and foremost an information gatherer who writes dispatches back to her foreign ministry". Diplomatic missions remain 'the home country's best source of comprehensive information on the country of location' (Rana, 2013, p. 53) and diplomats in this regard, remain primary knowledge producers and disseminators. Their knowledge 'derives from day-to-day personal dealings with the leading political strata in the country to which a diplomatist is accredited' (Bull, 2002, p. 175). The emotional and psychological toll of gender stereotyping, which

normally disproportionately befalls women, may be disruptive to diplomatic duties. As esteemed representatives of states, female diplomats encounter challenges in terms of increased vulnerability to gender stereotyping which derail attempts of overcoming barriers in the Foreign Service by negatively impacting on their mandate. Gender stereotyping is the tendency of attributing a set of behaviors and traits to a particular group of individuals. For instance, women as weak and sensitive and men as assertive and tough in political leadership (Bauer, 2019; Ellemers, 2018). In some countries, the female diplomatic status at times limits the frequency and depth of interactions due to foreign cultural prejudices of women as government representatives. Research trend is suggestive that women diplomats encounter more restrictions in establishing networks since they are perceived as 'tokens' operating in a 'gender-inappropriate' profession ventured by few women, which could explain their isolation from certain key missions (Niklasson, 2020). Such scenario within the Kenyan Foreign Service, is common in postings to highly gender-segregated regions exemplified by the Middle East [Muslim world] notably Iran, since the Middle East culture is based on centuries ancient traditions of female subordination perceptive of female incompetency in leadership roles.

While Neumann (2019) contrarily asserts through the concept of third femininity: designer femininity which perceives the strength of female ambassadors by virtue of their gender as trustworthy and unthreatening in social networking, hence advantaged in gaining easier access to information which would otherwise be inaccessible to male diplomats, the case may not always hold true. Anonymous Kenyan women diplomats posted to Tehran recollected the distress in accessing certain powerful engagements and officials of other key Iranian ministries, simply because it was 'culturally unconventional' for 'frequent' high-level interactions with a woman, let alone a senior-ranking female diplomatic official.

Existing studies further indicate that women's diplomatic skill in networking is variedly perceived depending on the social and environmental context, which in the case of the Kenyan Foreign Service, reverses the drawing board to the overseas diplomatic postings. Many of the interviewees admitted to the inability to be part of the 'after-work boys club'. Additionally, the agitation of coping with social life demands and expectations that come with the necessary informal networking responsibilities of an Ambassador abroad including from the diaspora who perceived them as 'unfriendly' in comparison to their male predecessors who would occasionally join them for a drink even when not drinking. Such female ambassadors were labelled 'loose' by the Kenyan diaspora.

Inadequate Allocation of Funds to Foreign Missions

Many of the Ambassadors and other female diplomats interviewed had uniform sentiments on the aspect of financial constraints arising from insufficient budgetary allocations that led to inconveniences of running pre-planned Foreign Service programs in their respective Missions. The above situation was equally compounded by inconsistencies and delays experienced by the Missions when receiving quarterly remittances [disbursements] of funds from the Ministry headquarters. On the other continuum, this also presented a spillover effect to insufficient funds allocated to the Heads of Missions as representational funds to cater for

official social functions [including hosting visiting Kenyan dignitaries and annual national day celebrations]. These budgetary items are usually underprovided and might not adequately cover social and networking events, especially in expensive First World capitals characterized by high living standards with fluctuating foreign currency exchange rates like Geneva, New York, London and Paris. As Heads of Mission in diplomatic posting, Ambassadors are 'plenipotentiary to chief executive' (Rana, 2004) acting as representatives of their governments to the host country and as such, they are expected to constantly portray a positive image of their home countries and act with the utmost decorum by upholding high standards of dignity and public standing. This expectation comes with cost attached to it, or rather, cost implications and accordingly, the hiccups of inadequate budgetary allocations derail achievement of this goal and negatively hinder efforts of Ambassadors in cementing bilateral relations with the host countries and in executing certain key foreign policy priorities. Since all Kenyan foreign Missions are financially-driven and execution of their duties is reliant upon sufficient provision of resources, adequate financing of Missions remains inevitable.

Conflicting Relations: Career vs Career Ambassadors

Western discourse on presidential appointments (including ambassadorial ones), has revealed that presidents tend to place their most competent appointees in portfolios of utmost relevance to their own agendas and policy priorities (Hollibaugh, 2014). The reality in senior Foreign Service appointments of African countries contrarily seem to deviate from meritocracy and from diplomatic practice requirements of specialized professional skills that are not easily acquired in the short term. More often, African presidents driven by political, electoral goals and policy interests, reward plum diplomatic jobs to incompetent political allies who fail to optimally represent the country's ideals in foreign missions hence, diluting the effectiveness of the Foreign Service.

Existing political and bureaucratic literature (Haglund, 2015) conclusively demonstrates a relative variation in performance between careerists [career diplomats] and non-careerists [political appointees]. Dayton and Kennedy's (1992) study on 'American Ambassadors in a Troubled World', buttresses this conventional wisdom by showing that careerists are better performers and well-equipped in managing foreign agencies and programs than political appointees because of their specific knowledge, management skills and long-term foreign service experience. Patronage appointments distributed among election campaign losers and political allies result in conflict, low morale and poor performance among diplomatic service personnel (Lewis, 2008). Indeed, George Kennan (1997) and other prominent diplomats contend that appointing non-career ambassadors is just one of the many frustrating factors that hamper recruitment efforts and damage the conduct of foreign policy. Similarly, Rana (2013, p. 27) concurs that such political appointments also undermine development of professional expertise within the Foreign Service since management of foreign relations involves craft skills blended with experience-based competence, which is rarely available to political appointees. Consequently, politically appointed Heads of Missions tend to deliver sub-optimal performance.

It has hitherto been the practice of the Government of Kenya [GoK] to appoint and post non-career ambassadors to bilateral and multilateral stations including but not limited to Vienna, Geneva, New York, Washington, The Hague, Pretoria and Moscow. The practice has been prevalent during the four Kenyan presidential regimes under Jomo Kenyatta, Moi, Kibaki Uhuru Kenyatta, which saw deployments of Ambassadors [career and non-career] to Kenya Missions Abroad such as Geneva, Vienna, Brussels, Paris, Addis Ababa and London.

A section of ambassadors resonate with the diplomatic thoughts of Kopp and Gillespie (2008) in regards to the erosion of balancing relationship between career ambassadors and political appointees posted concurrently in the same station, ranging from incompetence and under-performance, to reporting precedence and resentment from male colleagues who felt it demeaning to have a woman boss. Interviews with Kenyan foreign service personnel alluded to the impact on the achievement of the Mission's objectives and overall foreign service targets in the Kenyan Missions abroad headed by politically appointed ambassadors. While avoiding to pin point the exact stations, non-career diplomats and ambassadors for instance, expressed difficulty in analyzing political situations in the host country and submissions of comprehensive quarterly political updates to the Ministry headquarters. Apparently, even the pre-departure foreign service induction training undertaken by Kenya's Foreign Service Academy was insufficient to equip with necessary skills. The realities of diplomatic duties at the foreign missions in relation to their inexperience in foreign policy articulation becomes overwhelming. The situation is also compounded by skewed performance blamed on the non-career diplomat. The net effect was tense relations and unfavorable score in the performance contracting and in meeting planned foreign policy objectives.

Stagnation vs Bias in Policy Decision Making

Some interviewees reported that despite enabling legislation in Kenya, statistics reflect the dwindling of opportunities as women reach upper echelons of foreign service management reflected in their stagnation and non-progression to Ambassadorial or Ministerial senior administrative decision-making levels. "The ascent of any person to power within society is, almost by definition, a rare and extraordinary event" (Genovese & Steckenrider, 2013, p. 3). It is a dream and aspiration of many senior women diplomats and ambassadors to envision themselves reaching the pinnacle of the public service and foreign service policy decision making level equivalent to the rank of a Principal Secretary or Cabinet Secretary. On the contrary, at times, such prospects seem bleak in a society still infiltrated by cultural stereotypes. The pyramid level in Kenya's Foreign Service, according to several anonymous interviewees, narrows down as one reaches the top of the diplomatic hierarchy in policy decision making as one anonymous female diplomat observed: "Sometimes we get locked out in participating in decision making. Consultations are often held elsewhere behind closed doors. With women at senior levels there is a clear bias to ensure that women are represented in decision making committees in the Ministry and they are involved in Kenya`s diplomatic endeavors both at bilateral and multilateral levels."

Based on the above sentiments, enhancing the role of women in Kenya's Foreign Service necessitates decision-makers: from the top government executive and legislature to ensure an all-inclusive participation of women diplomats in Kenya's foreign policy formulation, decision making and implementation. A burgeoning body of evidence points to the rewarding effects of fostering gender diversity and having women socio-politically and economically represented in policy making on an equal footing with men. As research has shown, for instance, that institutionally-led gender diversity norms, improve productivity and yield better exchange of diverse viewpoints (Lazarou & Braden, 2019).

Dilemma: Strategic vs Non-Strategic Stations

It is undeniable that Ambassadors whether politically appointed or career diplomats, embody the role of heads of Diplomatic Missions and act as representatives of a sending State's interests in the receiving state abroad. However, not all Ambassadorships carry equal weight in diplomatic status with some appointments to strategic stations in states of economic and military prowess, being highly regarded than others (Towns & Niklasson, 2017, 2018). An Ambassadorial appointment to Ottawa, China, London or Washington DC, is by no means equivalent in importance to a posting in Windhoek or Havana.

While women have been peripheral to the pinnacle of foreign policy decision making processes, the foreign service has seemingly rendered women incompetent through the dictates of substandard assignments (Blanchard, 2012) prevalent in less strategic diplomatic stations. Whereas majority of the women diplomats secured lucrative or rather postings to strategic Kenya Missions in Vienna, Addis Ababa, Los Angeles, Geneva and Paris among others, a few were deployed to less strategic Missions like Harare in Zimbabwe, Tehran and Dakar in Senegal, hence, denied of a challenging assignment and effective furtherance of Kenya's foreign policy agendai. Such deployments presumably seem to underpin the prevailing notion of women's isolation from certain postings and regularly presenting other unforeseen setbacks, especially security. For instance, anonymous women diplomats previously posted to Kenya Embassy in Tehran reported security concerns and inconvenience of a 24/7 surveillance and security protection (personal bodyguard) given Iran's geopolitical and geostrategic location at the heart of a volatile Middle East region. Note forgetting, Iran is also a highly-patriarchal country oblivious to women's rights including female leadership, which placed the female diplomats in a condescending situation to adequately consolidate Kenya-Iran relations.

Furthermore, Iran has been embroiled in a series of sanctions for decades since the 1979 Iranian Revolution when radical students and protesters demanding extradition of the Shah, invaded the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and held 66 hostages. The intensification of sanctions between 2006 and 2012 that halted Iran's nuclear-enrichment program were a huge blow to its economy. The net effect of the Resolutions cut the Iranian economy off from global markets: banning banks worldwide from undertaking external transactions. This led to devaluation of Iranian currency, the rial, and cessation of monetary transactions compelling Iranians and foreigners to seek more stable currencies like the U.S dollar or euros (Yildiz, 2020). As a result, the anonymous Ambassador plus the Embassy staff caught at the height of

such sanctions, were compelled to store their Foreign Service Allowance of hard currency dollars [received through the diplomatic bag] at their residences, while succumbing to the psychological-related insecurities. Such a shaky posting requiring vigilance, compared with a posting in a geopolitically stable country, is definitely overwhelming to the effective promotion of Kenya's national interests.

Niklasson (2020) proposes a solution to the above shortcomings: as either deploying women diplomats to gender-equal places with a high prevalence of women in executive government positions, or proceed to the designated 'gender-unequal' stations in complete disregard of gender stereotypes, and use their gender to strategically extract important information requested by their MFA. After all, the ambassador's roles in the receiving state must mirror articles 3 (1a, 1d, 1e)ii of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (UN, 1961).

Capacity Building and job assignment

Requisite skills training, professional development has been trailing the Kenyan Foreign Service in recent years, especially continuous specialization-related training of diplomats commensurate with job assignment and progressive learning through skills up-gradation. In particular, the Kenyan Foreign Service Academy, mandated to build a pool of professional diplomats by equipping with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to achieve Kenya's foreign policy priorities, in preparation for job assignments, has ostensibly been slow and less adept at evaluating and matching training needs with the shifting roles of Foreign Service Officers amidst the dynamic diplomatic landscapeiii.

Unlike in the U.S. Diplomatic Service, where Career Development Officers disclose to new officers the available posts befitting them, and the new officers indicate their preferences within that guidance, then finally assigned their selected stations by the Bureau of Human Resources (Curtin et al., 2011, p. 59), the Kenyan Foreign Service operates conversely. Postings are unpredictable and women diplomats including ambassadors are haphazardly deployed to any of the Kenya Missions overseas. In addition, matching unique skills with job assignment has been blinded by random postings of diplomats for instance, with French language proficiency to non-francophone countries and vice versa. Similarly, some officers talented in negotiation instead of deployment to multilateral stations, end in bilateral missions, hence, under-utilizing skills. Some observed consequences as cited by a first-time senior diplomat, include how her posting to a certain bilateral station as opposed to Geneva to advance Kenya's health diplomacy interests at the WTO, impacted delivery of targeted foreign policy objectives. While others remarked on how they had to accede to 'on-the-job training' by heavy reliance on their subordinate officers to save embarrassing the country.

Again, the Foreign Service represented by the embassy abroad is the promoter, negotiator, communicator, manager, synthesizer and service provider (Rana 2013, 15). The nature of workload in bilateral and multilateral postings require equipping different tailor-made skills to diplomatic personnel. In multilateral diplomatic stations [Kenya Missions in Geneva, New York, Vienna, Addis Ababa, The Hague and Brussels], the ambassador [Permanent Representative] and her team are constantly in negotiation to the relative exclusion of other tasks. This requires them to acquire new skills of public diplomacy and strategic

communication, which is sadly deficient, often blamed on financial constraints, hence, creating a huge roadblock in the advancement of Kenya's diplomatic agenda.

The old notion that apprenticeship or on-the-job training was enough to learn diplomacy, as Kishan Rana (2011, p. 124) opines, no longer suffices. The smooth running of the diplomacy machinery hinges on the officer's professional competence, motivation, training and optimal utilization of talent. This is one of the pivots determining the efficiency of the system. Given that training is at the core of contemporary diplomacy and the Kenyan Foreign Service should thus, significantly enhance educational training opportunities to develop the diplomatic skills level and intellectual capacity required in an overly competitive global diplomatic environment (Rana, 2013).

Other Challenges

The unhealthy working environment at the Ministry headquarters brings to fore mental health challenges resulting from various factors such as inadequate office infrastructure to effectively execute duties. This is further exacerbated by lack of in-house counselling services and lack of prioritization of the welfare of officers. Additionally, cultural diversity manifested in tolerance for multi-ethnic and religious backgrounds is often under looked, rendering female diplomats for instance, muslims to feel side-lined or patronized. Moreover, male chauvinism has been a compounding factor especially discrimination in decision-making and consideration coupled with the false implication of sexual favours and monetary means to rise through the diplomatic ranks. At times, the gender-based beliefs and stereotypes held by Kenyan men that women should not be aggressive has undermined due consideration for dynamic leadership of women diplomats in certain foreign policy areas. Discrimination of female diplomats on the basis of age, gender and marital status especially as young diplomats; the absence of a clear-cut individual performance management of diplomatic personnel in the foreign service has also sabotaged achievement of set targets.

SUMMARIZED DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This research examined the challenges in advancing Kenya's Foreign Policy in relation to the representation of women in Kenya's Foreign Service. The research singled out some scholarly perspectives on the widely expected barriers and then narrowed down to some of the experiences of relevant women diplomats on the ground, highlighting the distinct hurdles at different regions of their diplomatic representation and countries of posting. Based on the findings from reviewed literature and analysis of interviewees' responses, the research study found that work-family life integration; social demands of networking; gender stereotyping; conflicting relations between political and career ambassadors; stagnation and bias in policy decision making; the dilemma of deployment to strategic and non-strategic stations; insufficient budgetary allocation; discrimination and mental health issues, represent some of the challenges confronting women diplomats in executing their mandate in Kenya's Foreign Service.

CONCLUSION

The research concludes that women diplomats including Ambassadors faced several challenges in overseas postings and the Foreign Service collectively, ranging from work-family life integration; gender stereotyping; social demands of networking; conflicting relations between political and career ambassadors; stagnation and bias in policy decision making; the dilemma of deployment to strategic and non-strategic stations; insufficient budgetary allocation; discrimination and mental health issues. These challenges not only influence the level of diplomatic presence and furtherance of Kenya's national interests by Ambassadors and senior women diplomats, but also affect execution of certain key foreign policy priorities at Kenya Missions Abroad, thus, undermining efforts in cementing bilateral relations with host countries. The challenges were noted as time specific, geopolitical and resulting from a combination of societal and institutional factors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The research recommends a number of mitigation strategies to aid in circumnavigating the challenges including review of the Foreign Service regulations to incorporate more gender-centric provisions; transparent and merit-based posting and promotions; professionalizing the Foreign Service to maintain standards; encouraging specialization, mentorship, training and continuous professional development of diplomats; identifying diplomats' skills with provision of continuous training in key areas relevant to advancing Kenya's foreign policy; ensuring women's empowerment and continued inclusivity in key decision-making meetings at the initial stages of foreign service deployment; upgrading induction/pre-departure courses to adequately prepare the diplomats' smooth transition in overseas missions; and policy re-orientation towards gender mainstreaming in Kenya's Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an effective instrument in elevating Kenya's global presence. The research calls for further investigation on the optimal integration of women in Kenya's Foreign Service.

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[i] The said Missions are less strategic implying low diplomatic activity, low presence of Kenyan diaspora populace. Such countries as Iran, Zimbabwe where Kenya's Missions are located, have been characterized by financial, economic and trade sanctions. Hence, female diplomats faced hurdles in optimal furtherance of Kenya's national interests.

[ii] 1a. representing the sending State in the receiving State; 1d. ascertaining by all lawful means conditions and developments in ' the receiving State, and reporting thereon to the Government of the sending State; 1e. promoting friendly relations between the-sending State and the receiving State, and developing their economic, cultural and scientific relations.

[iii] The Canadian Foreign Service which invests in training its officers in report writing, negotiations, political and economic reporting, may be a good model for Kenya's Foreign Service.