

Uganda legislators in an Information Context

A Gender perspective

by

Ruth E. Nalumaga; Ruth.Nalumaga@hb.se

Hogskolan i Borås & University of
Gothenburg, Sweden

Motivation

- Initially, developed out of a curiosity to understand and conceptualize what I perceived to be a growing gap between 'our' representatives, the Members of Parliament (Mps) and those they represent, the constituents
- I presumed the dissent could encompass an information dimension which could be fueling misrepresentation
- My study 's objective was to find out how representatives 'know and decide' what they deem suitable for this apparently dispirited audience, and the aim was to understand what happens in the legislature and the problems that legislators face.
- The mood of ordinary citizens regarding their representatives appeared to be beset by distrust and skepticism

Common expressions about representatives

- Mps are greedy
- Tend to get silent on important issues
- They do not come back to us
- We have never seen them
- I don't know them
- Only visible during elections

Why the negative image?

- Seemed to be created by;
 - • Different societal expectations of legislative and representation roles
 - • Harsh socio-economic conditions, pre-empting public impressions of a privileged and insensitive political class.
 - Size of the Constituency; adversely affecting women seats on affirmative action with consequences on information behavior manifest in the impracticability of being 'in the know' and in control of their constituency areas.

Eventually

I settled for exploring their entire information behavior, ie the information processes behind their decisions (for legislative and representative obligations).

Background

- **Highlights and women's political participation:**
- Incorporates Uganda's political and legislative history since colonialism in 1894
- Also incorporates the history of women's participation in politics during pre-colonial, colonial times and post colonialism
- Both colonialism and post colonialism were observed to have particularly disempowered women
- Issues like domestic violence were relegated to the private sphere
- Movement form of government takes power in 1986 till 2006
- 1989 was a turning point for disadvantaged groups with the enactment of an affirmative action policy and later institutionalized in the National Constitution in 1995

Cont'd

- Women were allocated a Parliamentary seat, but at the district level, as a point of entry into mainstream politics
- They were to be elected through constituent colleges composed of local councils.
- *However this mode was changed in 2005 to adult suffrage due to complaints of abuse and manipulation
- Multiparty elections held in 2006 after 26 years, last held in 1980
- Women numbers have risen from 2 in 1961 – 91 in 2006. The current Parliament, the 8th Parliament (2006-2011) consists of 91 women or 29%. The Seventh Parliament (2001-2006) had 74 women out of 305 or 24%.

Sample

- Size:
- 30Mps, 12 males and 18 females
- There was a need to highlight gender related perspectives as they play out in the highest decision making institution, since women were observed to be:
 - Less visible and less adjusted to the political ‘contests’. Studies and respondents showed that sometimes these ‘contests’ are alienating.
 - Suffer from an ambiguous representative role and face the burden of huge constituencies – the districts
 - Have failed to pass some of their pertinent pieces of Legislation – The Domestic Relations Bill

The Domestic Relations bill

- ***Bill to cater for;***
- Co-ownership of matrimonial property
- Women's rights to negotiate sex, especially on health grounds
- Minimum age of consent – at 18 years
- Prohibiting Female Genital mutilation/Female circumcision
- Criminalization of the return of marriage gifts
- Criminalization of Marital rape
- Recognition of cohabitation, after a period of time
- Regulation of Polygamy through economic support and consent on initial wife/ves



Methodological challenges

- The Uganda Parliamentary term is five years and capturing habits of a five year period would be a little laborious.
- I thought it would be appropriate to carry out a longitudinal study, in which i would follow up members in their different contexts, in Parliament, committees, constituency visits, consultations, public occasions, media shows, but decided against due to time constraints
- or) Diary methods involving noting down legislators' everyday tasks and involvements and observe information approaches - Ruled out, however as too burdensome for the 'Honorables'
- Compromise technique of data collection was through an In-depth recorded interview

Interview themes

- Background and prior engagements
- Perception of legislative responsibilities and roles
- Networks, formal and informal and their influence on tasks and opportunities and information issues involved
- Handling of constituency issues, information flows and how a representative is perceived by constituents
- Usage of formal information infrastructure and ICT facilities and intermediaries - Librarians
- Interaction with the Domestic Relations Bill
- Areas of personal accomplishments and contributory factors
- Losses

Cont'd

- Other techniques included;
- Observations through the public debates and selected constituency visits as well as their use of the formal information channels like the library and the ICT infrastructure
- .

Theoretical Presuppositions

- -- The study relies on the premise that for effective legislation to take place, one needs to be well informed using formal and informal sources. Those who are better informed and have the ability to synthesize information are likely to be more effective and influence the direction of the legislation.
-
- - Women tend to under use formal information sources, which usually portrays proof of arguments, but are well adapted to informal sources like colleagues and word of mouth to make decisions, and this in turn tends to impact on their effectiveness in legislation.
-

Cont'd

- - Social networks or caucuses within and outside Parliament are vital social spaces for exchange of information, but women's associational capabilities in these networks tend to be inhibited by their gender roles and obligations and social capital theorists like Molyneux (2002), Thoits (1986) postulate that women are more likely to find themselves in networks that do not bring economic and political advantage, as valuable contacts characteristically operate through male-in-groups, in masculine social spaces.
- - Individuals within networks form bonds according to the social norms of the network and are more likely to make decisions basing on group consciousness than individual or gender needs.
-

Studies on Gender and information in the Ugandan contexts

- Shows women's preference to informal networks as sources of information
- Preference for Networks within their vicinity
- Channels of information that transcend time barriers, for example SMS
- Shows the gendered division of labor as a significant determinant in Information choices.

Research Questions

- The study was guided by the following research questions;
- How do legislators perceive their roles and responsibilities?
 - What contexts are of influence in political engagement and what significance is attached to these contexts?
 - What other factors/forces are operational and how do they influence legislators' choices?
 -
 - What methods of information gathering and sources feature as vital and how is information utilized?
 -

Research Questions, cont'd

- What kind of connections are of significance to a political career?
- Does Gender impose any consequences?
-

Where am I?

- Data Analysis and writing up:
 -
 - Attempts at categorizing using the Grounded theory approach and later utilizing a structuralist agency theory at macro level that considers how institutions impact on individuals and their choices and Bourdieu's concept of reflexivity, how individuals adjust themselves to different situations.
- Examples of categories generated:
 - Prior career
 - Motivation for political career
 - Career status while Mp
 - Perception of legislative/representative role
 - Perception of Woman Mp
 - Measure of individual success
 - Committee membership, leadership and other choices
 - Auxiliary Networks in Parliament
 - Networks outside Parliament
 - Participation in plenary debates
 -

Cont'd

- Legislative/Representative priorities
 - Legislative tasks
 - Information sources
 - Information Channels (workshops, petitions, constituencies)
 - Active information seeking
 - Passive/Incidental
 - Instance of selective information dissemination
 - Context of Information incidence, active or passive
 - Use of formal information structures (Libraries, Research unit)
 - Use of ICT facilities
 - Information privileges
 - Information inhibition
 - Cognitive authorities

Cont'd

- Information barriers
- Information overload
- Instances of Political correctness
- Information behavior prior to legislative career
- Gender related handicaps and context
- Effectiveness
- Perception of DRB
- Opportunities for the DRB
- Perception of fore-fronters