ABSTRACT

Violence against women (VA W) is widespread in Africa, with psychological abuse, domestic violence, rape and defilement occurring daily. It increases and manifests in different forms across various contexts, particularly in conflict, humanitarian situations, informal urban settlements and during electioneering periods among others. In the latter case, elections around the world are peaceful expressions of the right of peoples to choose their leaders, however in certain circumstances they have divided and destabilized countries. The UN Secretary General's report on Preventive Diplomacy stresses that a broader, more political approach which recognizes among other issues that election-related violence is most fundamentally a form of political violence, the root causes of which are most often systemic, long-standing and unresolved grievances are required to address this challenge. In an ideal world, women's political participation takes on various roles including leadership and decision making. Women are political candidates, campaign or political party organizers and voters who exercise their right to vote for leaders of their choice. Reality however is different and successive elections have demonstrated that gender-based violence is deliberately used as a tool to intimidate and exclude women from fully participating in electoral processes. Existing political, socio-economic and cultural beliefs predominantly prevent their full political participation. Strong negative traditional beliefs and cultural attitudes remain and dictate women's roles and low status in society. In essence, the major challenge that women face at a political level is that they come up against the patriarchal nature of their societies. In patriarchy, power and privilege is vested on men and all efforts are made to retain and enhance this power. It is during elections that one can begin to understand and quantify data around Electoral gender-based violence (EGBV) mostly committed against women - any act of violence against women for political reasons - to facilitate the inclusion of women's voices in preventing and managing political violence in general but also specifically political violence that targets women. This violence may take place in the private sphere but is found primarily in the public sphere, and manifests itself through psychological, physical and emotional violence. It can affect women politicians, candidates, voters, political activists and organizers, and women whose family members are working within the political terrain of the country. EGBV recognizes the discrimination of women in relation to unsettling acts of distorted political power relations by men that prevent women from entering political office, from exercising their right to participate in politics as organizers or voters, and from choosing representatives of their own political interests. It also recognizes acts of violence against female politicians, as well as acts of violence against family members of women in politics. On the other hand, the State has an enabling role to provide the legislative framework and institutions in this case during the elections to serve as custodians of human rights for both women and men. In Africa, these institutions are often led by men and influenced by the patriarchal systems within which they exist and operate leading to, non-accountability to women's rights. This study compares and analyses electoral gender based violence in Kenya and Uganda and provides recommendations on how to address EGBV to promote women's political leadership. It is critical to understand electoral gender-based violence as part of a continuum of existing high levels of gender-based violence and discrimination against women. To address these systemic violations of women's rights, citizens and the broader society must be vigilant and continue to impress on government to provide the enabling environment while political parties should become the institutional vehicle through which women's participation in politics is enhanced especially in facilitating their participation within party structures and over election periods.