

Full Length Research

Challenges and Opportunities of Women's Political Participation in Ilu Aba Bor and Buno Bedele Zones

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Accepted 7 August 2020

The main objective of this study is to investigate the challenges and opportunities of women's political participation in Ilu Aba Bor and Buno Bedelle Zones. In order to achieve this objective, researchers employed descriptive research design and combination of quantitative and qualitative research approach. In addition, both primary and secondary sources of data were used. Primary data were gathered through questionnaire, interview and document analysis while secondary data were gathered from books, journals, and articles related with women political participation. Data collected from different sources were analyzed and interpreted using descriptive statistics and qualitative technique. The finding of the study revealed that women's low educational status, prevailed social norms, religious teachings, women's low interest towards politics, women's gender role and household responsibility, and society's low confidence on women decision making power. In addition, the study identified that women's low representation in political position and absence of women role model in the political field, low consideration of women and their interest in decision making process, absence of political training, absence of separate quotas for women, and women's lower economic status and property ownership as critical challenges affecting women political participation in Ilu Aba Bor and Bunno Bedelle zones. Based on the findings of the study, the researchers recommend creating awareness on women's significance in politics, political training, allowing separate quota for women to take part in political decision making, and empowering women economically as the possible ways of restricting challenges of women's political participation in the study area.

Key words: women, political participation, challenges and opportunities

Cite this article as: Lelisa K., Lamessa M., Bijiga E (2020). Challenges and Opportunities of Women's Political Participation in Ilu Aba Bor and Buno Bedele Zones. *Int. J. Polit. Sci. Develop.* 8(7) 305-314

INTRODUCTION

"Freedom cannot be achieved unless the women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression and ... they have been empowered to intervene in all aspects of life equal with any other member of the society" Nelson Mandela

Politics is imperative for the existence of statehood and the way in which people interact is meaningfully come to

exist while people actively engaged the governmental processes that affect their lives. Political participation is thus, those voluntary actions through which citizens seek to influence the making of public policy. In this case, full and equal participation of both women and men in political decision making enhance the legitimacy of political processes by making them responsive to the concerns and perspectives of all segments of society. Women constitute slightly more than half of the world population, their contribution to the social and economic

development of societies is also more than half as compared to that of men by virtue of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres. It has been widely recognized that women's active participation in political decision making is central to development and poverty alleviation. According to UDHR states equal participation of women with men in political decision making enhance the achievement of both transparent and accountable government to strengthen democracy (Douglas L (2014)).

Thus, any political, economic and social activity that doesn't involve and benefit women cannot be fruitful because such an activity is based on half the manpower, half the knowledge and half the effort. Though women's rights to equal participation and benefits, with men, can't be seen separately from the overall economic and political progress in society, it is an established fact that women's rights need special attention in the change process (WCYA, 2013). By understanding this fact in recent years, participation of women in public decision-making is one of the areas in which progress has been made in Africa in general and Ethiopia in particular. Ethiopia became party to the most important women's conventions, like CEDAW which calls for equal participation of women in public decision making, Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action (BDPA), which requires governments to attain a 30% benchmark for

women's representation in all public decision making positions. Moreover, various literatures argue that as compared to prior decades, the participations of women in decision making throughout the country are somehow increasing (Meaza, 2009). Despite the efforts made, still women's political participation is low in Ilu Aba Bor and Bunno Bedelle zones due to socio-economic and political challenges. Thus, the researchers motivated to conduct research aimed to assess the challenges and opportunities of women's political participation in Ilu Aba Bor and Buno Bedelle Zones.

For the fulfillment of this objective, the researchers have employed descriptive research design. Both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were also used. Regarding with Sampling

Techniques and Sample Size, researchers selected seven woredas from Ilu Aba Bor and Bunno Bedelle by using simple random sampling. These are Bure, Hurumu, Alge, Mettu, Bedelle, Cora and Gachi. From the total population of 525, 221 respondents were selected by systematic sampling for questionnaire survey. In addition, 35 respondents were purposively selected for interview. Furthermore, the data for this study were collected from primary and secondary sources through questionnaires, in-depth interview and document analysis. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS (version20 software) and through narration and description.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Challenges of women's political participation in Ilu Aba Bor and Buno Bedelle zones

Women's low educational status

Table 1

Item	Response	Frequency	Percent
Women's lower educational status affects their political participation.	strongly agree	91	41.1
	Agree	106	48.0
	Neutral	7	3.2
	Disagree	17	7.7
	strongly disagree	-	-
	Total	221	100

Source: researchers' survey 2018

As the table 1 shows, 41.1% and 48.0% of the total respondents reply strongly agree and agree respectively as women's lower educational status negatively affect their political participation. The rest 3.2% remains neutral and 7.7% of respondents disagree on the same question. Totally 89.1% of them confirmed as lower educational status of women affect their political participation in the study area.

Women's household responsibility

Table 2

Item	Response	Frequency	Percent
Women's household responsibility negatively affect their political participation	strongly agree	151	68.3
	Agree	58	26.2
	neutral	7	3.2
	disagree	4	1.8
	strongly disagree	1	0.5
	Total		221

Sources: Researchers' own survey results, 2018

As it is revealed in the above table, 68.3% of the respondents have strongly agreed whereas 26.2% of the respondents have agreed. As well 3.2% of the respondents were neutral and 1.8% of the respondents have disagreed while the rest merely 0.5% strongly disagreed regarding whether women's household responsibility affects their political participation. In addition, some of the key informants suggested that there is still cultural perception of women's inferiority to men. As they informed that yet there is perception among some rural community that undermine women's role beyond child care, serving as house wife and mothers. Due to these reasons, women had been exclusively dependent on men. In connection with the above response Mamede 2006, stated that women are burdened with hard house hold activities of home like cooking, collecting fire wood, fetching water, cleaning the house and milking (Mamede, 2006).

Prevailed societal norms on women

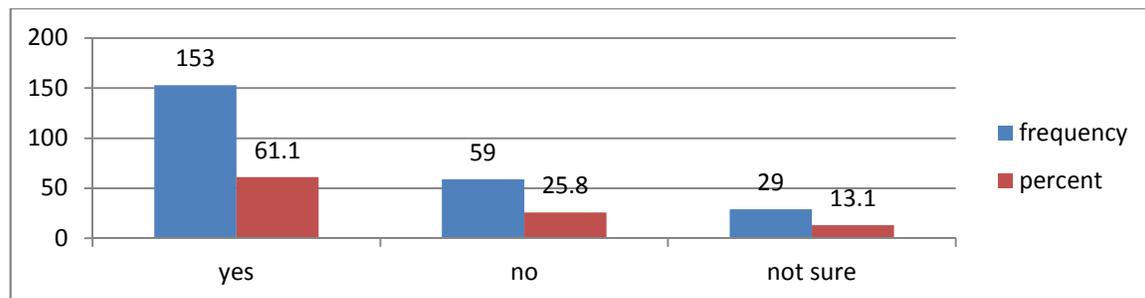


Figure 1

Source: researchers' survey 2018

Figure 1 shows, 61.1%, and 25.8% of the respondents replied yes and no respectively on whether societal norms hinder women political participation. The rest 13.1% of the respondents were not sure on the question. Besides, key informants told that traditional perceptions on women and their place in political history of the country discourage women in political participation.

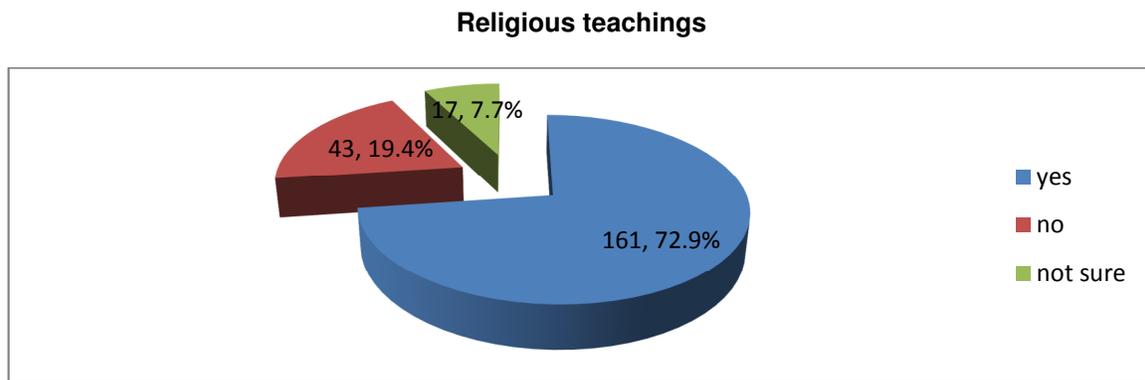


Figure 2
Source: researchers' survey 2018

As indicated above, 72.9% of respondents replied as religious teachings affect women's political participation and 19.4% replied the opposite. The rest 7.7% of the respondents remain neutral on the question under discussion. As key informants from the study area suggested almost all religious teachings and doctrines makes women to be ruled as their husband rules. This hinders women's political participation.

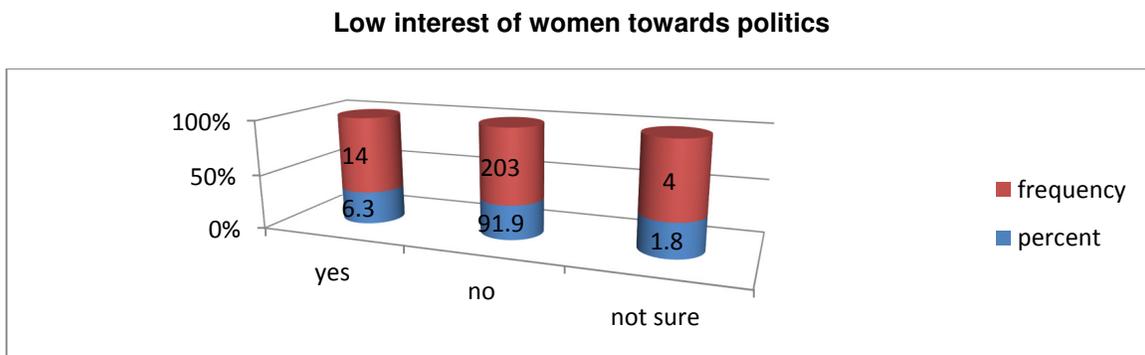


Figure 3
Source: researchers' survey 2018

As one can observe from the above Figure 3, 6.3% of the respondents responded 'Yes' and 91.9% of them responded 'No' regarding women's interest on political participation compared with men. The rest 1.8% of the respondents were not sure on whether women are interested in political participation. In addition, respondents were asked the reason behind women lack of interest in the political participation and their response is stated in the table 3.

Table 3

Item	Response	Frequency	Percent
If your answer is 'No' on the above question what do you think as the reason?	fear of risk taking in political activities	91	44.8
	lack recognition from political parties	52	25.6
	male domination of political experience	60	29.6
	Total	203	100

Source: researchers' survey 2018

As the above Table 3 indicates, 44.8%, 25.6% and 29.6% of the respondents answered fear of risk taking in political activities, lack recognition from political parties and male dominated political experience respectively. On the same question key informants suggested as women are not interested to participate in political activities because they were more tied to economic and social issues. From this one can conclude that women's internal external factors hindered them from political activities in the study area.

Society's low attitude on women's decision making power

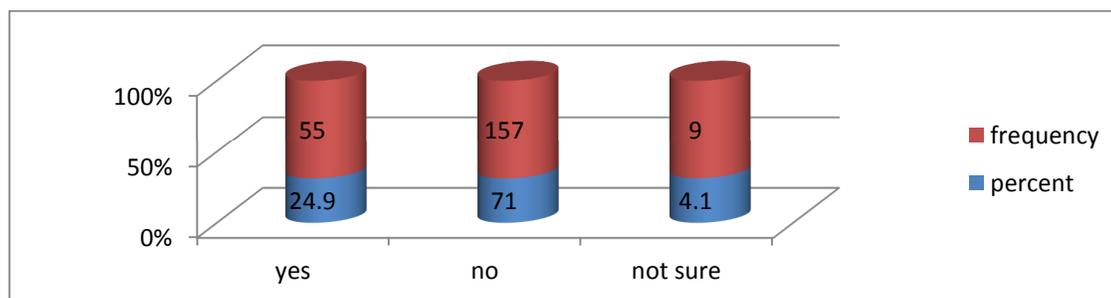


Figure 4

Source: researchers' survey 2018

As it can be observed from the above, 24.9% of respondents replied as society was confident and 71.0% of them replied the opposite. The rest 4.1% were not sure on the issue under question. In addition to this, majority key informants in the study area suggested that ... *women were not recognized as men even though they hold different positions in public offices. They suggested this due to women's lack of commitment, household tasks and their low motivation in political spheres.* In addition they told that ... *even some women working in different public offices need the permission from their husbands to go field trips. In addition, women are not confident to confront problems raised in relation to their position as men.* This fear of risk in the work place and burdens from family de-motivate women in field of politics.

Low women's attitude towards political participation

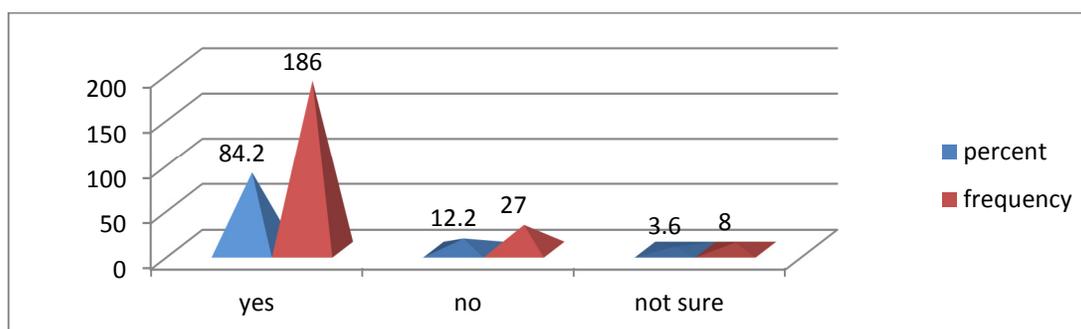


Figure 5

Source: researchers' survey 2018

As described on the Figure 5, 84.2% replied 'Yes', and 12.2% replied 'No' on the question under study. The rest 3.6% were not sure as women attitude towards politics their political participation. As suggested by key informants in the study area, women do not perceive themselves as key players in political activities as men. They consider political activities the work of men.

Low women representation in leadership positions

Table 4

Item	Response	Frequency	Percent
How do you rate women representation in leadership position in your area?	v. high	-	
	High	9	4.1
	Medium	37	16.7
	low	162	73.3
	v. low	13	5.9
	Total	221	100

Source: researchers' survey 2018

As observed from the above table, 4.1%, 16.7%, 73.3% and 5.9% of the respondents replied women’s representation in leadership position high, medium, low and very low respectively. In this case, the greater number of respondents confirmed as low representation of women in the study area. In connection with the above question, respondents were asked the factors hindering women from local political participation and their response was presented and discussed as follows.

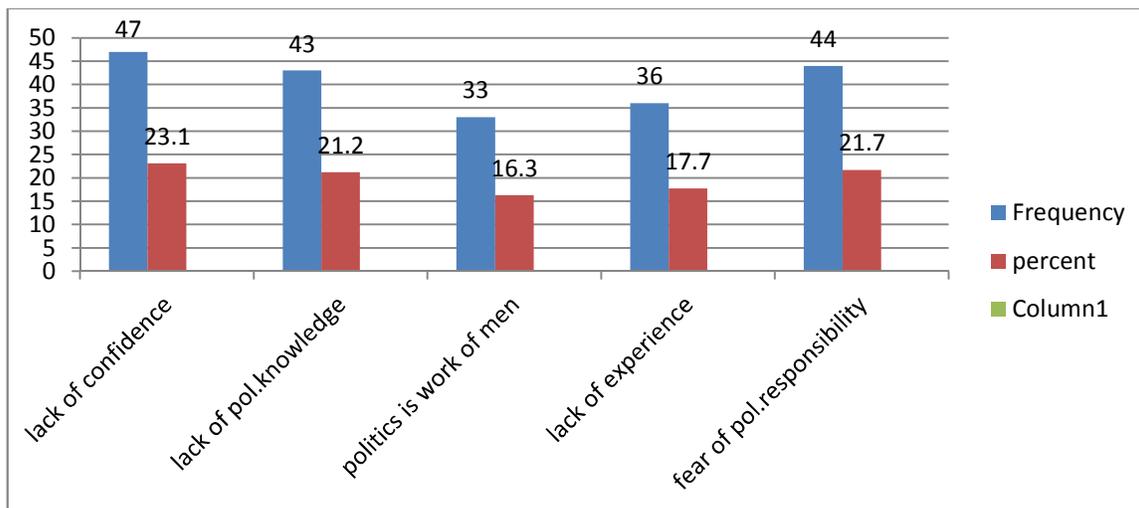


Figure 6
Source: researchers’ survey 2018

In connection with the above raised question, respondents choose different reason for why women failed to compete for woreda council in their respective area. Accordingly, 23.1% said lack of confidence towards political activities, 21.2% respond lack of political knowledge and education, 16.3% said women’s attitude of politics as work of men, 17.7% lack of experience among women on political participation and 21.7% responded fear of political responsibility for the absence of women competition for woreda council in the study area.

Lack of political training for women

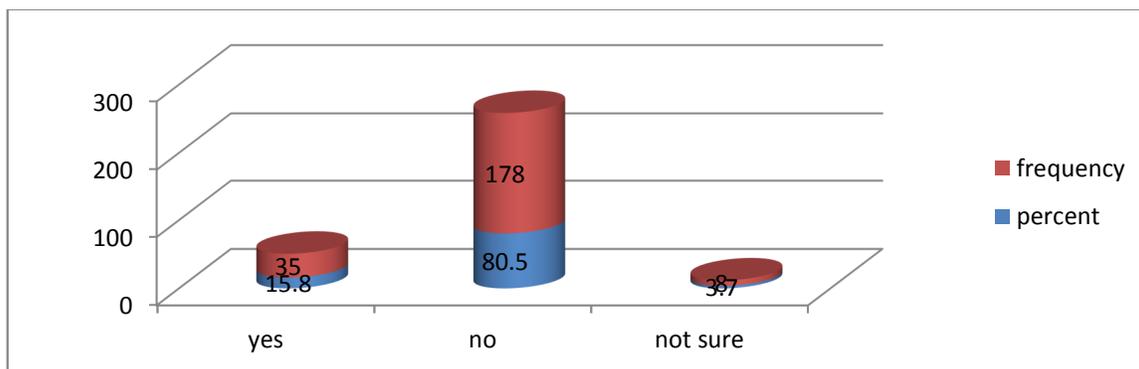


Figure 7
Source: researchers’ survey 2018

As the above Figure 7 shows, 15.8% of the respondents replied that women were given political training and the greater percent (80.5%) of them replied the opposite. The rest 3.7% of the respondents were not sure on the asked question. Key informants have also confirmed as there was no political training given for women in their respective locality. Based on this, lack of training for women affect their confidence to participate in political issues.

Lack of separate quota for women in leadership

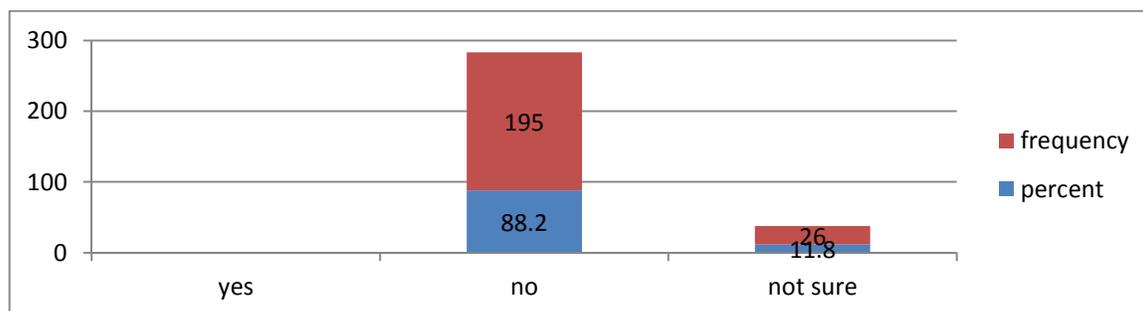


Figure 8

Source: researchers' survey 2018

As it is indicated on the Figure 8, 88.2% of the respondents replied as there is no separate quota for women political activities and the rest 11.8% of them were not sure. In addition interviewees told that, women were not given enough quotas to represent their fellow women. Based on this data it is possible to suggest absence of quota for women political participation discourages women's interest in politics in general and the study area in particular.

Low consideration of women's interest in political decision making

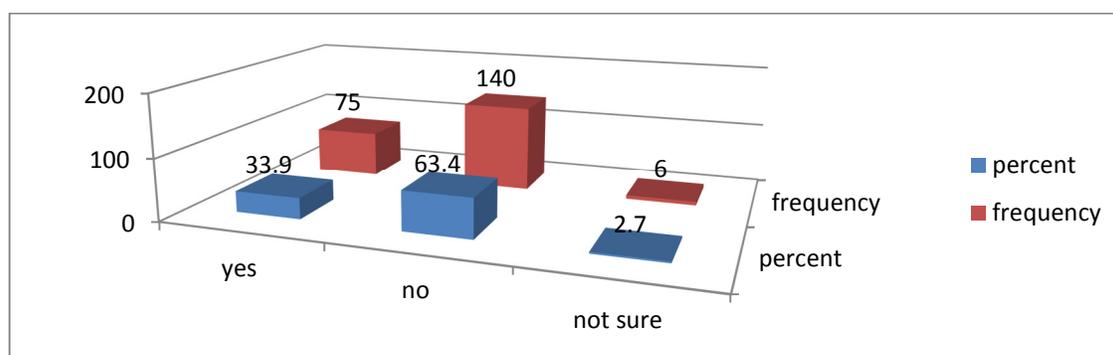


Figure 9

Source: researchers' survey 2018

The above Figure 9 reveals that, 33.9%, respondents responded 'Yes', 63.4% responded 'No' and 2.7% of the respondents answered I don't know. Key informants from different woreda have also suggested as decision made at local level consider and include the best interests of women in the area. This could be the reason why most problems women around rural areas still unsolved and hinder women not to come to political affairs.

Lack of transparency in decision making process

Table.5

Lack of transparency in decision making process lower women's interest in political participation?	Total Sample (N = 221)	
	Frequency	Percent %
Strongly agree	81	36.7
Agree	113	51
Neutral	15	6.8
disagree	9	4.1
strongly disagree	3	1.4
Total	221	100%

Source: researchers survey 2018

As the table 5 reveals, 36.7% and 51% of the total respondents reply strongly agree and agree respectively as lack of transparency in decision making process lower women’s interest in political participation. Some respondent’s (6.8%) replied as a neutral whereas the rest 4.1 and 1.4% of respondents disagree and strongly disagree on the same question. Here even if the degree of respondents’ agreement differs on the issue majority of them confirmed as lack of transparency in decision making process lower women’s interest in political participation in the study area.

Lack of women role model in political leadership

Table 6

Lack of role model women in political leadership makes women not to have interest in political participation.	Total Sample (N = 221)	
	Frequency	Percent %
Strongly agree	89	40.3
Agree	107	48.4
Neutral	20	9
disagree	5	2.3
strongly disagree	-	-
Total	221	100%

Source: Researchers’ Survey, 2018

As the table 6 indicates, 40.3% and 48.4% of the total respondents reply strongly agree and agree respectively as Lack of role model women in political leadership makes women not to have interest in political participation. Some respondent’s (9%) replied as a neutral whereas the rest 2.3 of respondents disagree on the same subject. Here even if the degree of respondents’ agreement differs on the issue majority of them affirmed as Lack of role model women in political leadership makes women not to have interest in political participation in the study area.

Besides, key informants bolster the above issue by suggesting as lack of role model women in political leadership makes women not to have interest in political participation. Since they have been not seen successful women they may take as exemplary in political activities nothing is motivating them to join leadership position. This in turn weakens the moral and hope that they may consider themselves being successful in political arena which may reduce their interest for political leadership.

Women’s low economic status

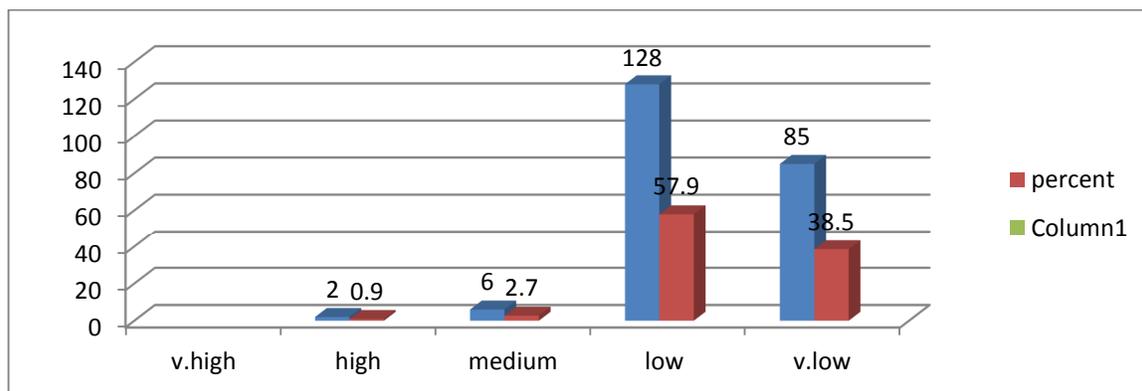


Figure 10

Sources: Researchers’ own survey results, 2018

As it is depicted in the above Figure, 57.9% and 38.5% of the respondents replied as women’s economic status in their respective locality low and very low respectively. The rest 2.7% and 0.9% of them responded as medium and high. Moreover, most of the key informant interviewees were also ratifies less economic status of women extremely encumber political participation of women at the whole level.

CONCLUSION

It is the fact that, without equal participation of women to political process, the hope for democracy and democratization cannot be realized. Thus, equal participation of women and men, at all levels of decision-making is essential to the achievement of equality, sustainable development, peace and democracy. Despite these facts women political participation in Ilu Aba Bor and Bunno Bedelle zones is still low because of different challenges. From these women's low educational status, religious teachings, women's low interest towards politics and believing politics is the work of men, women's gender role and household responsibility, society's low confidence on women decision making power, women's low representation in political position and absence of women role model in the political field, low consideration of women and their interest in decision making process, absence of political training, absence of separate quotas for women, and women's lower economic status as critical challenges affecting women political participation in Ilu Aba Bor and Bunno Bedelle zones.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Government and other stake holders should give training for women to augment their political knowledge and to extricate them from fear of taking political responsibilities.
- Political parties, civil society and interest have to intervene in women's affairs to mobilize them by designing different programs which enhance their potential to confidently participate in political activities without considering themselves inferior.
- Men should rescue themselves from Patriarchic mentality and encourage their wives to participate in politics even by sharing domestic task which traditionally considered as only the role of women.
- Government should allow Quota for women to participate in political decision making.
- Training women's about political participation as their participation in politics has equal impact on democracy and good governance with their male counterparts.
- Government, NGOs and development partners should extend their strategies to empower women financially which in turns motivate them to participate in politics by extricating from dependency on others.

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