

# Women's Representation and Participation in District Assemblies in Ghana: Analysis of Supply-Side and Demand-Side Framework

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**Abstract-** The quest for increased female representation and participation at the local level government in Ghana has not been obtained probably because we have neglected the demand and supply side factors that account for the paucity of policies and programmes to promote participation of women in the local government system in Ghana. Women involvement in decision-making processes in governance for sustainable development is very critical not only because they constitute majority of the Ghanaian population but they are discriminated and under-represented in the socio-economic and political development activities thereby bringing about not only a gender gap but also exclusion of women and their needs, interests and perspectives from governance. This paper examines the demand and supply side framework so as to prompt stakeholders in their bid to enhance the presence of women in the local government system in Ghana. It also looks at the concept of local government system in Ghana and examines the statistics of women's representation in the district assemblies. It concludes that women must strive to empower themselves by acquiring the knowledge, skills, resources (i.e. time, money) and motivation. NGOs, political parties as well as government and its agencies should put in place positive discriminatory policies and programmes as well as legislations that will bring social change to encourage and attract women in local level governance.

**Index Terms-** Women, Representation, Participation, Supply and Demand Sides, Local governance

## I. INTRODUCTION

There are various arguments when it comes to the concept of political representation and participation of women in decision-making positions. Whiles gender representation focuses on the number of women in decision-making positions, participation looks at what women do when they get into these decision-making positions (Kurebwa, 2014). Women's position in the political sphere was invoked by women activists in the United States as early as 1848, when they convened the first women's right Convention in Seneca Falls, New York (Ballington et al., 2012). Since then, political representation and participation of women in governance systems have been one of the major issues in the international community. Representation and participation of women in political position vary within and among countries. In its decision on the universal declaration on human rights and women's rights, the United Nations incorporate

in their goals, conventions, resolutions and treaties tasking member countries to ensure gender equality by having fair representation of women in decision making positions and governance systems.

The role of women has become discernible in every sphere of life. In Sweden and Rwanda, there is a remarkable progress when it comes to women's representation and participation in governance (IPU, 2013). In fact, equal representation of men and women in decision-making bodies in the local level administration of countries can be used to measure the country's level of development (Javal, 2005). According to Kurebwa (2014), fair representation of women and men in the local government system is also very important to ensure potential development change among the people at the grassroots level administration. In Ghana, the call to enhance gender equality in political decision making begun in the 1960s when the first President of the First Republic, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, through a Parliamentary Act, appointed 10 females into the National Assembly. By 1980s and early 1990s, the call for the increase in women's representation had been intensified in the whole of the sub-Saharan Africa (Manuh, 2011).

However, gender inequality across all elected and appointed positions persists (Paxton, Kunovich, & Hughes, 2007). After one and half centuries, women's representation in the decision-making position is still not encouraging. For example, in Saudi Arabia, after four years of the granting of equal voting right was granted, it was only in 2015 that the women in the country were allowed to register to vote for the first time (al-Yami, 2015). This implies that women were under represented in the decision-making processes during the period when women were not voted into political positions ((Paxton et al., 2007). In an African country like Senegal, women have not realized same gains in political decision making positions as observed in Rwanda, Mozambique and South Africa (Bauer & Britton, 2006). Similarly, in Ghana, women are not equally or fairly represented in the District Assemblies in Ghana even though they constitute majority of the population, (Baah-Ennumh, Owusu, & Kokor, 2005; GSS, 2012; Tsikata, 2009). The under representation of women in governance is a matter of grave concern. For instance, the 2010 District Assembly elections in Ghana recorded 412 (7.95%) female representatives, which is not even up to ten percent of the total number of 6093 persons elected into the 216 District Assemblies (Yobo, 2012a). What influencing factors supported the election of the 412 (7.95%) female representatives? Is it that these few elected women had financial

resources, communicative skills and showed interest to engage in the local government system? Ghana's local government system is a non-partisan governance system. There is no legally binding affirmative action policy to enhance gender equality in the decision-making processes in Ghana and there are also no laws that prohibits women from engaging in public spheres of life (Sam 2010). Both women and men are given the opportunity to contest in an electoral system (Baah-Ennumh et al., 2005). In a patriarchal society like Ghana, without legally binding affirmative action policies, women with skills, financial resources, training, self-esteem and interest have to contest in an election. Probably when policies and gender friendly electoral systems are put in place such as quota and reserved seats to support women, perhaps they will develop the more interest and engage in the local government system.

The paper considers the local government system in Ghana by examining the nature of women's representation and participation in the district assemblies since 1988. It further analyses the factors influencing women's engagement in local politics with reference to the supply and demand side framework. Also conclusion and suggestions are made for further study.

### Local Government System in Ghana

In Ghana, district assemblies are the highest administrative authorities at the local level of governance. The local level governance and for that matter, a district assembly in Ghana is the level of government that is close to the day-to-day lives of ordinary people. The people's habitation, markets, food, basic services, sanitation, environments, social interactions and even civic duty is largely the business of the district assembly (Offei-Aboagye, 2015). Article 240 of the 1992 Ghanaian Constitution established the Local Government System and Act 1993, Act 462 section 10, 1-3 of the system sanctions the district assemblies to be responsible for the overall development in the districts in Ghana through the exercise of deliberative, legislative and executive powers. The system plays very central roles in administration and development of communities. It is directly linked to the central government in an intricately balanced five-tier system of public administration and allocation of functions (Ahwoi, 2010).

Below is the structure of the local government system in Ghana.

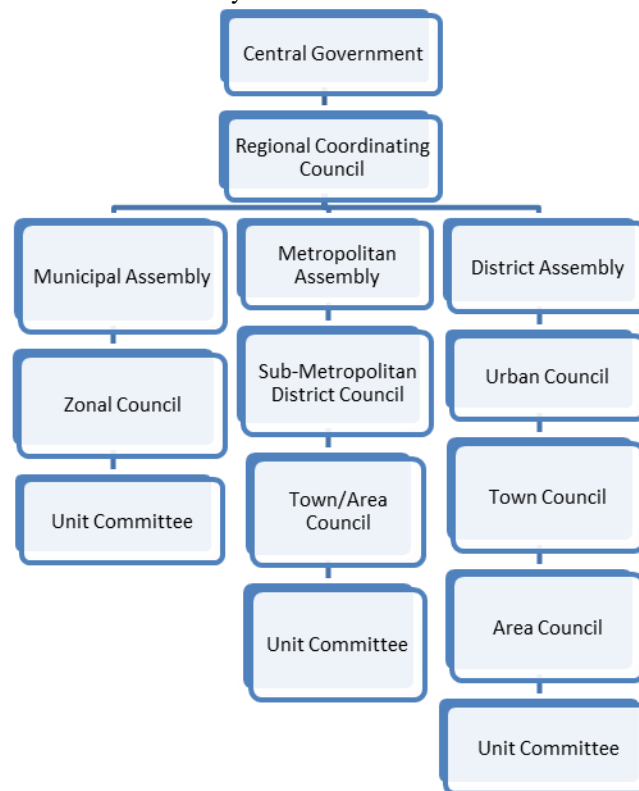


Figure 1: Ghana's Local Government Structure

Source: (Ahwoi, 2010)

Decentralizing authority to the local levels means establishing a system of government that breaks open the inertia associated with rigid centralized government and its bureaucracy. Decentralized approach to governance means three key things namely, the transfer of responsibility, resources (human and financial) and accountability from central government to local self-governing entities. This involves a long process of political, fiscal and administrative decentralization, which leads to local self-governance (Local Government Act, 1993, Act 462). The

relationship between central government and local government influences the provision of public services and the expenditure of public funds between the two levels. This relationship takes the form of collaboration and/or control, which can be found at various levels and in different sectors. It is therefore assumed that in all these sectors, women would be involved in the development of their localities.

Ghana's local government system has been in operation since 1988 with the aim of ensuring more equitable participation of ordinary people in governance (ABANTU, 2003) yet district assembly elections continue to record low level of female representation. There are a number of factors, including the existence of patriarchal culture, causing this gender inequality in

political representation and participation (Baah-Ennumh et al., 2005; Bauer & Britton, 2006). In order to provide a clear picture of female representation since 1994 to 2015, Table 1 presents a representation of elected females and males in the district assemblies in Ghana.

**Table 1: Female Representation in District Assemblies in Ghana (1994-2015)**

Year	Contested			Elected				
	Female	Male	Total	Female	%	Male	%	Total
2015	1182	17756	18938	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2010	1376	15939	17315	412	7.95	5681	92.05	6093
2006	1772	13084	14856	478	10.1	4254	89.9	4732
2002	965	12625	13590	341	7.4	4241	92.6	4582
1998	547	14696	15243	196	4.1	4624	95.9	4820
1994	N/A	N/A	N/A	122	2.9	4082	97.1	4204

Source: Adopted from (ABANTU, 2003; Tsikata, 2009; Yobo, 2012b)

Since 1994, none of the District Assembly elections in Ghana has recorded more than ten percent (10%) representation of women. Thus, in 1994 out of the total number of 4204 elected members of the Assembly, only 122 (2.9%) were females. The 1998 District Assembly elections recorded 4820 elected members, out of which were 196 (4.1%) females. During the 2002 District level elections, 13590 contested, including 965 females, of which 341 won. The 2006 and 2010 results from the District Assembly elections recorded a total number of 478 and 412 elected females out of a total number of 4732 and 6093 respectively (Ahwoi, 2010; Yobo, 2012b). Again, out of 216 District Chief Executives in 2013, only 11 were women (Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, 2006). The percentage representation is less than the UN bench mark of thirty percent (30%) (Manuh, 2011). After the September 1, 2015 District Assembly elections, there was a record of 1182 females who contested the election as against 17756 males (Coalition of Domestic Election Observers, 2015). The situation reflects gender exclusion from electoral participation and equality in representation (Rai, 2005), which the world have recognized that a government is more democratic when more women are present (Krook, 2010). However, the availability of women to aspire for political position can be as a result of the forces of supply and demand; women availing themselves and they being recognized by stake holders like political elites and governments through policy directives.

#### *Supply and Demand-Side Factors to Women's Representation and Participation in political positions*

The concepts of supply-side and demand-side factors were employed by earlier feminists to explain the patterns of female representation in political decision, which is associated with the pioneering study on *Recruitment: Gender, Race, and Class in the British Parliament*, authored by Pippa Norris and Joni Lovenduski (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995). According to these scholars, the supply-side factors are the two key factors that shape the supply of aspirants. These included (1)resources, like time, money, skills, talent and experience; and (2) motivation, such as drive, training, networking, mentoring, ambition and interest in politics (Krook, 2010; Paxton et al., 2007). To these

scholars, potential candidates who willingly come forward to contest for political office are influenced by the supply-factors. These factors might have come to play to shape an aspirant for her to convince herself that she is capable to compete against any contender; be it male or female to enhance female representation in elected office. The supply-side factors therefore have a strategic influence to enhance women's representation in elective office (Krook, 2010). Ghanaian women who have been trained, educated, mentored, resourced, networked, have more capacity to engage in politics. In other words, "women's representation is unlikely to increase without significant shifts in the resources and motivations of women to wage political campaigns" (Krook, 2010, p. 159).

The demand-side factors on the other hand are features of countries; electoral systems, or political parties that influence the probability that a woman will be drawn to engage in political activities from the supply-side and the willing candidates (Krook, 2010; Paxton et al., 2007). Aspirants who are desired by political elites are influenced by the demand-side factors (Krook, 2010). In other words, these factors shape the rules of the game in a country. However, in real terms, not all type of people participate in politics (Paxton et al., 2007).

The argument has been that irrespective of the impact of the supply-side factors, a woman's ability to succeed in breaking the 'political glass ceiling' to become a potential aspirant, compared to a man, the female is more likely to rescind her decision to engage in electoral process (Krook, 2010). This is because gender affects political ambition (Lawles & Fox, 2012; Norris & Lovenduski, 1995). For the reason that the enduring nature of traditional gender socialisation, gender-specific family roles and expectation like household responsibilities and reproductive roles of caring for a child, continue to be an obstacle to a woman's opportunity to engage well in public spheres of life (Lawles & Fox, 2012; Norris & Lovenduski, 1995). Simply, the supply of women available for political office is determined partly by gender socialization, which influences women's interest, knowledge, and ambition regarding politics.

Gender is a socially constructed relationship between women and men in a society. The gendered social and cultural norms determine the rights, resources and decision-making

power that women and men have. These constructed relationships make men and women play different roles at home and in society ([Kabeer, 2001](#)). The result is that the two persons are being valued differently and the female experience unequal opportunities and life chances ([Kabeer, 2001](#)). There are discriminatory practices and many informal systems such as customs, traditions, adages and institutional relationships that are deeply patriarchal, which cut across local government ([Beall, 2004](#)). As a result of how gender has been constructed to position women and men in terms of their roles and responsibilities in patriarchal societies resulting in inequality in the gender, there are several calls for the increase in the representation of women in both local and national government. The participation of women therefore can mostly be the result of a process of socialization that leads them to think of political activity in a different way than men ([Chhibber, 2003](#)).

[Paxton et al. \(2007\)](#) also posit that gender socialization influences women's interest, knowledge and ambition regarding politics. Thus, seeing that political participation requires supply-side factors; personal characteristics such as interest, ambition, and knowledge as well as other resources like networks, civic skills, education and economic resources, women's availability to engage in politics will depend partly on these supply-side factors. Women's availability to be in politics can also be influenced by the demand-side factors; social structures, which improve or limit women's opportunities for education and employment ([Roza, 2010a](#)). In other words, as women have access to these supply-side factors and or resources, they are empowered to resist any obstacles to their participation and representation in politics. It is therefore explicable that as women continue to socialize, they are more likely to be empowered to resist any hindrance to their socio-economic development in society and participate in decision-making positions at the local level of governance. In general, the levels of women's political representation within a country and across the globe are determined by the supply-side and demand-side factors. Supply-side factors contribute in bringing more women into the political landscape as women express the willingness and committed experience to compete against men for political position ([Roza, 2010b](#)).

One must not lose sight of the fact that culture, beliefs and attitudes influence both the supply-side and demand-side factors for female candidates. For instance, a patriarchal society is likely to negatively influence women's political representation as the structures in these societies are endemic with traditional and cultural barriers to women's decision to engage in politics ([Bauer & Britton, 2006](#)). Other factors that can influence women's representation include the role of international actors and institutional regulations such as gender quotas ([Krook, 2010](#)).

### **Supply and demand side framework and women's representation**

In Ghana, as a result of a social change and reforms in customary practices; equal opportunity for girls and boys as against the hitherto believe in the preference for male child education, gender advocates work within institutions to "level the playing field" through changing laws, education, and socialization to bring about gender equality ([Antrosio, 2015](#)). Making reference to the elected women in the district assemblies

in Ghana from 1994 to 2010, the percentage of women elected into the district assemblies increased, though it decreased in 2010 (see Table 1). These could be attributed to changes in the patriarchal society to deconstruct some domineering systems that used to restrict women to engage in public spheres of life. Ghana attained goal 2 of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of equality in primary and basic education. For instance, the 2014 Global Gap Index Report indicated an equal enrolment in primary education for both males and females in Ghana ([Schwab, 2014](#)). This is significant because the supply side of the framework emphasizes on women to educate themselves to acquire knowledge and skills to enable them develop interest in electoral system. As part of its effort to achieve goal 4 of the MDG; promote gender equality and empower women, an affirmative action bill is laid before Parliament pending its enactment into law ([Yobo, 2012b](#)), had been as a result of vociferous advocacy for gender equality in the governance systems. Again, in collaboration with the Institute for Local Government Studies, the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development organize training workshop for female aspirants during the District Assembly Elections. Through the efforts of NGOs such as ABANTU for Development, NETWRIGHT, Ghanaian women are being encouraged to engage in public spheres of life.

Taking into consideration the measurement of gender inequality index of a country, the World Economic Forum (WEF) measures how men and women have unequal access to income, education, health and political decision-making in every country ([Hausman, Tyson, Bekhouche, & Zahidi, 2013](#)). Some of these dimensions like income and education are factors under the supply side factors to women's representation and participation ([Krook, 2010](#)). These dimensions complement each other to ensure gender equality. For instance, access to income, education and health contribute to a woman having an opportunity to occupy political decision-making positions (these factors are also a dimension to measure gender inequality). In the 2013 Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) Report, Ghana ranked better at 24<sup>th</sup> in Economic Participation ([Hausman et al., 2013](#)). This economic ranking position of Ghana can also be attributed to the economic empowerment of women in the informal economic sector that enhance their economic opportunities ([Asmah, 2004](#)). Women's economic opportunity is defined as a set of laws, regulations, practices, customs and attitudes that allow women to participate in the workforce under conditions roughly equal to those of men, whether as wage-earning employees or as owners of a business (Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, 2010). For instance, micro credit schemes such as Women Development Fund (WDF) have continued to be used to improve the economic condition of women in Ghana. The WDF was established by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSPP) to offer credit to women in Agriculture, food processing and petty trading. The Ghana Cooperative Credit Union (CUA) with 40 percent membership of women extends credit to its members based on their contribution to the fund ([Asmah, 2004](#)).

However, the Ghana was ranked 95<sup>th</sup> in Political Empowerment and placed 111<sup>th</sup> in Educational Attainment in the GGGI Report. The expectation is that with women in the majority of Ghana's population, they would be fairly represented in government, but that has not been the case. However, these



elected women in the district assemblies achieved this political success through empowerment, which also helped them to resist this patriarchal culture in Ghana to be able to get elected into the district assemblies. One will then associate this political success of the women to social change within the Ghanaian society, which was so patriarchal in nature. Social change can also be as a result of the call for gender equality. Gender is being reconstructed as a result of social change and therefore the Ghanaian woman is becoming empowered through education, economic opportunities, skill training and the recognition of women's contribution to improving other people's life ([Shanker, 2014](#)).

## II. CONCLUSION

The purpose of the paper was to examine the supply and demand sides' factor framework to enhance women's representation and participation in decision-making positions at the local level of governance. It is clear from literature that women are under-represented at the local level decision-making processes. The unfair representation of women has the tendency to deny them the chance to contribute their bid towards local and national developments, which also affect Ghana's ranking in almost all gender empowerment indexes. In view of this, the supply and demand side factor framework is critical to both women and all stakeholders to address the under-representation and participation of women. Since the supply side factors are within the domain of women, they should endeavour to equip themselves with the needed skills and capacities that will make them more marketable in the field of politics. The proponents of the supply and demand factors failed to recognize that the factors in the framework operate in a complex structured in a patriarchal society like Ghana. The Ghanaian society therefore needs to create the needed ambiance to aid Ghanaian women have the desire and interest to develop themselves. In addition, NGOs, political parties, government and its agencies are required to put in place the needed positive discriminatory policies and legislative framework to engineer social change that will help deconstruct and also reconstruct gender in the Ghanaian society. Addressing the discriminatory structures will help attract women to represent and participate in decision-making positions at the local level.

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