

# Women's Participation in Local Politics in Agona East Constituency of Ghana

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## Abstract

The study was conducted to explore women participation in politics in Agona East constituency. The study was only limited to women who were into politics in the constituency. Literature review was done based on the objectives of the study. This study used qualitative research design. Specifically, the exploratory study design was used and the study population were women. Non-probability sampling technique (snowball sampling) was used to select the respondents for the study. An interview guide was used to collect primary data for the study and the data was analyzed manually. The study revealed that the state of women participation in politics in the Agona East Constituency was low. Furthermore, the respondents explained that when women participate in politics, it will bridge the gap between men and women in politics, address the concerns of other women, help in decision making, improve women's self-confidence and lead to a general improvement in human development.

**KEYWORDS:** Politics, Women Participation, Constituency, Human development

## INTRODUCTION

Women's political under-representation is a failure of today's democracies (Blomgren, 2010). The reality is that roughly half of the world's voting population is women but the average percent of women in national parliament is not even a fifth (18.7%) (Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), World average for women in national parliament, single or lower house, Situation as of September 2009). Representation in politics where men and women are equally represented is called a gender-balanced representation. When examining the political representation, it is of higher interest to look at representation in legislative bodies than in other political bodies since it is elected by the people and considered the most influential. The under-representation of certain groups includes other groups than women, for example ethnic, class, racial or religious groups. Some argue that a population should not be divided into different groups which might be under-represented in politics and other spheres of society (Phillips, 2000). Nevertheless, it is hard to neglect that under-representation of some groups in society will lead to under-representation of certain opinions and insufficient attention to particular questions.

Several arguments for a gender-balanced representation have been brought up including one of the ground pillars of democracy; everyone's equal right to participate in politics, to vote, candidate and participate in decision making processes (Dahl, 2007; Held, 2010). When arguments for democracy are brought up it is usually about demands on what could be called politics of presence. This indicates that all parts of society should be able to participate in politics to ensure that all opinions are represented in the decision making process. This politics of presence include the equal representation of men and women (Phillips, 2002). The variation in women's representation has in previous research been explained by institutions such as the electoral system, women's right to vote etc; structures in the form of gender structures, political structure etc and actors such as political parties, women's movements and individuals (Wide, 2006). The explanations for why female representation is extremely low in many countries vary greatly. One of the most discussed explanation that has been lifted in research and literature of female representation is the electoral system. Some researchers claim this is the strongest reason for women's under-representation in parliaments.

Previous research shows that countries with a majority system have less women represented in Parliament (Unicameral or if bicameral the lower house) than countries that practise proportional system. This is due to the small chances of women to get elected, why men are in enormous majority as candidates in majority systems (Wide, 2006). The structures that have been regarded as either promoters or hindrances for increased female representation in previous research are the socio-economic structure and culture (Wide, 2006). Gender roles are included within the concept of culture. Actors that have proven to have vast impact on women representation in political bodies are the political parties. It is evident in previous research that greater representation of women in

the decision making bodies of parties that elect candidates for elections lead to a higher number of female candidates and eventually higher representation of women in legislative bodies, nationally and locally (Wide, 2006). Studies made of women's political representation have mainly focused on western democracies, and especially the US. There is relatively weak statistics and data on female participation in politics of poorer countries (Wide, 2006).

Many studies made in this field observe women legislatures' impact on policy (Poggione, 2006). Much focus is aimed at examining the differences between men and women in legislation and their different impact on policies. Results from previous research mainly suggest that women politicians are more committed to welfare policies concerning children, women and family (Poggione, 2006). I consider that this aspect of women's representation have already been fairly well explored, although not to imply that no more research needs to be done in that field in the future. It is estimated that the percentage of women's representation in the legislature ranges from 17% in the European parliaments to 5% in the Arab States (Kethusegile-Juru, 2002). In Africa, the average percentage of seats occupied by women parliamentarians was 13% in 2002. This is in stark contrast with other statistics on women.

In Africa, women constitute slightly over 50% of the world population. They also account for 65% of the world working hours. In the economic front, women make vast contributions through agricultural work, marketing and wage labour, contributing 80% of productive agricultural labour worldwide. In rural areas of Third World countries such as Kenya, women provide 60-80% of agricultural labour yet women receive less than 10% of the world's salaries and own less than 1% of the world's real estate. In fact, only 14% of elected members of parliament (both upper and lower houses) in the world are women (Bowman, Grant, & Kuenyehia 2003). The apparent invisibility of women in politics is a worldwide phenomenon. Poor representation and low level participation is not a recent trend in Kenya: women make up to about 52% of the population and they are always the majority voters with a turn out exceeding 55% in polling stations countrywide. In spite of these statistics women participation has been minimal at the public policy and decision-making levels (Yiapan, 2002).

In exercising the right to participation the men and women shall have an equal opportunity in involvement in the political system in many forms from voting in elections, holding a position as a legislator, ministry, and judge or to be a head of the state. To put in other words the women and men in exercising their rights to participation is entitled to exert influence in the decision making process through public debate, and dialogue with the representatives they elected or through their capacity to organize themselves; or exercise public power by holding public office at different levels of administrations- local, regional, national and international (Abdi, 2007). The realization of the effective participation in both women and men in the political and decision making process in an equal manner is the obligation of the state.

The exclusion of women in political participation and decision making processes was one inherited by human history. Even when democracy had birth ancient Athens in 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, the exclusion of women from political participation and decision making was existed. The Athenians women had no right to vote or to participate in the democratic process and even they had not considered as citizens. The only Athenian men had a right to attend meetings of the assembly, a meeting of the citizen body which was called more than 40 times per year (Bentley et al., 1995). The absence of women in the involvement of the decisions of the assembly had deprived them to have a right to speak and to vote at the assembly. This also prevented from them to have a chance to directly determine what the law should be. The other European countries women had neither a right to political participation nor involve the decision making and public affairs before 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the beginning of the 19 centuries Britain's electoral system was far from democratic. The British electoral system was male adult suffrage and did not provide the means for fair and equal representations. The right to vote and be voted was restricted to men. Women had no role in the political sphere of the country. This had result the rise of the suffragists (women campaigned to win the vote) (Bentley, Dobson, grant, & Roberts, 1995). Despite the efforts of the chartists, a mass movement of mainly working people who demanded universal suffrage in the late 1830s and 1840s, it was not until 1867 that the second reform Act was passed. Just after the end of the First World War Britain was fully recognized the women's right to political participation and decision making process (Bentley et al., 1995).

Although these efforts were become fruitful in some areas, women are not still having an enough space in the political involvements. This is true in many countries of Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa as UN Human Rights Committee has found that "the right to participate in the conduct of political affairs is not fully implemented everywhere on an equal basis..." (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights & International Bar Association, 2003). In African countries women have lacked an enough space in both political engagement and decision making process. Although the whole African constitutions and laws enshrined provision that recognize the right of women to equally participate in politics, African women is the most disadvantageous and marginalized groups in political arena. Because this the result of several underlined and perceptible factors. One of the most remarkable factors was the African customary and traditional laws which were based on the patriarchy supremacy (Abdo & Abegaz, 2009). For example the African traditional assembly leaders were male dominant; male has exercised the power of the law making, decision or policy making and leadership of the African society traditionally and even religiously. Women had neither decision nor had the right to sit and speak or vote at the assembly. The ignorance of the African culture in women's role of traditional leadership was hampered the current political participation and decision making involvements of the most African women, though many African nations made affirmative action's to enabled women's equal participation in politics. According Quadri Nigeria (and other African countries) lives in a patriarchy society where the women's place is said to be in the kitchen. She can't go against the wish of her husband. And within political groups, the woman is seen as a threat that must not be allowed to thrive (Charles & Tayo, n.d).

The experience that women in Ghana face in their bid to enter into the political arena is not entirely different from what is happening elsewhere in the world. For instance, according to Sossou, (2011), women in Ghana are underrepresented in the sense that few of them hold political offices or participate in formal political organization. Their invisibility can be documented at all levels of government. She went on to state that two interrelated factors explain the political underrepresentation of women in Ghana. First, politics is viewed by most people including women as the quintessential male sphere of action, one in which women are both unwelcome and ineffective. Second, most politically active women are members of the elite group. Better educated and wealthier, these women pursue a political agenda that reflects their class rather than their gender interests.

In emphasizing the ordeal women go through as they try to take part in the socioeconomic and social-order, the Ghana Statistical Services, in their Population Data Analysis Reports for 2005 stated; ‘Male-dominance is a key aspect of the Ghanaian social system and the woman’s role and status are recognizably inferior to those of the man in almost all aspects of social, political and economic life. Custom, law and even religion have been used to rationalize and perpetuate these differential roles to the extent that women themselves seem to have accepted and internalized them’. The role women can play in the development of Ghana, especially when given the opportunity to partake in decision-making processes, cannot be overestimated. For instance, during the struggle for independence, women played substantial role in the Convention People’s Party (C.P.P.), where Kwame Nkrumah, the leader of the party noted, “In the struggle for independence one market– woman in Accra, and there were fifteen thousand of them, was worth any dozen Achimota graduates” (Deku, 2005). This shows the importance of women for the CPP politically. Due to the significant role they played, Nkrumah himself suggested this by his axiom that “the degree of a country’s revolutionary awareness may be measured by the political maturity of its women” (Deku, 2005).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Women constitute more than half of Ghana’s population and contribute immensely economically and socially towards the socio–economic–development of the nation. Unfortunately their participation at all levels of decision-making in Ghana is very low. This can be attributed to the daunting challenges women have to face in their quest to enter into politics. Some of these challenges range from lack of funds to organize campaign, cultural stereotypes that consider women to be better fit for the reproductive duties such as child birth and the domestic chores that support the proper growth of the family which in most cases are never quantified (Ballington, 2005). It cannot however be overemphasized that every nation, worldwide needs the role of women in decision-making at all levels. This has led to the proliferation of nongovernmental organizations and feminist groups who claim to be empowering the women to take their rightful places in decision-making in all spheres of life. Many nations like Ghana have gone a step further to create ministerial portfolios, legislated and also mainstreamed gender issues all in a bid to change the perception about women and also give the needed support to issues that hinder the development of women.

Despite such an illuminating picture painted about the capabilities of women in Ghana, women’s participation in decision-making at the community, district, regional, and national levels have met some challenges. This has led women groups to advocate for a fairer representation of women in decision-making processes both at the district and national sphere. Ghana’s democratic dispensation allows for representation at both the local (district) and national (executive, legislature, and judiciary) levels. Ghana’s democracy without equal participation by women in public decision-making, policies are likely to be gender-blind, causing deleterious short- and long-term effects on women, children and families (Sossou, 2011). The Ghanaian society can function better for all its members when both men and women are equally represented in development processes, public policy making, political participation and decision-making processes. Despite all these effort, it is clear that the level of women’s participation in politics is nothing to write home about. This is an indication that women still face some challenges that need to be tackled appropriately. This has necessitated the need to conduct this study to find out the extent of women participation in politics in the Agona East constituency.

### **Objectives of the study**

The general objective of this study was to explore women’s participation in politics in Agona East. The specific objectives of the study were to;

1. Describe the state of women participation in politics in Agona East constituency.
2. Investigate the importance of women’s participation in politics in the constituency.
3. Identify constraints to women participation in politics in the constituency
4. Find out strategies for improving women’s participation in politics in Agona East.

### **Research questions**

1. What is the situation of women participation in politics in Agona East constituency?
2. What is the importance of women’s participation in politics in Agona East? What are the factors?
3. What are the challenges to women participation in politics in Agona East constituency?
4. What strategies can improve women’s participation in politics in Agona East constituency?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was based on Maslow's Hierarchical Needs theory and Albert Bandura's Self efficacy and motivational theory. Abraham Maslow, in a study of human development, proposed the notion that for human beings to realize the highest level of development as individuals, there is need to be a gradual and incremental development process starting with the satisfaction of the most fundamental human needs, namely, air, water, food, procreation (Maslow, 1943). All other needs would be ignored or denied until such time as these basic needs were realized, and so it goes on until people reach the highest tier on the pyramid. Maslow's theory is relevant in this study, in the sense that most of the women who take part in local level elections find it difficult to graduate into national politics because they need to satisfy their basic needs at the local levels which are impeded by lack of education, poor finance and discriminations they suffer at the grass root level.

Bandura (1997), in support of Maslow's theory, came out with his theory on Self-efficacy which states that, "Self- efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments", these beliefs influence courses of action efforts, perseverance in the face of obstacles and failures, resilience to the adversity and level of accomplishment realized. The theory showed potential for wide application in learning and development situations. It took full account of external physical and social structures as well as internal cognitive processes. This, Bandura referred to as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation where both internal and external forces come together in the attainment of success in the field of life. The human nature is being driven by both intrinsic and extrinsic desire. These desires help people to either be successful or fail in their field of endeavours. Politics as a field ought to provide some form of motivation for people who pursue it. Unfortunately, female politicians especially in Ghana are not seen, though the motivation may be available. The only political position women are found occupying is women organizer position. The other political positions are competed for with their male counterparts and mostly the males have the highest of those other very important positions like Member of Parliament and ministerial positions. This is because politics is assumed to be a male dominating terrain and women who show interest are faced with a lot of barriers which affects their political participation to aspire higher. Leya (2010) referred to these barriers as socio-economic, cultural and structural. It is in view of this that the study attempted to find out why women in politics are not motivated enough to take up positions in spite of the above theories. In summary, it is worth noting that, Maslow's physiological need theory, justified the fact that women as part of the human race need to realize the highest level of development as individuals and group in order to achieve incremental development to satisfy their basic and societal needs with less constraints.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research design**

This study used the qualitative research design. Specifically, the exploratory study design was used. Qualitative research can be defined as "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Thus, the focus lies on in-depth understanding of words, opinions and experiences rather than on numbers. Moreover, qualitative methods are concentrating more on the individual than on the general (Mayring, 2003). Qualitative research is mostly inductive. Although backed up with a theoretical framework, the data should be guiding the study, not a theory (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The choice of research methodology depends mainly on the nature of the research question. For rather explorative studies, like this thesis, qualitative methods seem a suitable choice (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Instead of measuring the phenomenon of integration by numbers, this thesis used open questions to explore the views of women who are involved in active politics. However, the main focus of this research is inductive, trying to develop an understanding of what the term participation integration means for women who are into politics. These statements were not entirely foreseeable for the researcher so that it did not seem recommendable to test anticipated variables, taking the risk to miss out on important issues related to political participation.

### **Target population**

Gorard (2001) opines that population is a group usually of individuals from which a sample can be selected to generate results of a study. The target population is the population out of which the respondents are obtained. For this study, the target population was made up of women in the Agona East constituency who were involved in politics. This was obtained from women representatives from all the political parties in the constituency. These included constituency representatives as well as polling stations representatives. The reason for the choice of the target population was based on the fact that they are those who are regarded as being in the position to provide indepth information about the study. The total number of women into politics in the constituency was one hundred and six (106).

### **Sampling procedure and size**

For this study, a snowball sampling approach was chosen because (Black, 2009). Snowball sampling is a special nonprobability method for developing a research sample where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances. This sampling technique is often used in hidden populations which are difficult for researchers to access (such as drug users or commercial sex workers), or in cases where a sampling frame is hard to establish and it is assumed that cases are affiliated through links that can be exploited to locate other respondents based on existing ones (Katz, 2006). It was widely believed that it was impossible to make unbiased estimates from snowball samples, but a variation of snowball sampling called respondent-driven sampling has been shown to allow researchers to make asymptotically unbiased estimates from snowball samples under certain conditions (Heckathorn, 1997).

Respondent-driven sampling also allows researchers to make estimates about the social network connecting the hidden population. This type of snowball sampling was used for the study. The sample size for the study was twenty (20). Since the study was qualitative, the sample size was reached on the basis of data saturation.

### Sources of data

Both secondary and primary data sources were employed for the research. Secondary data on the list of women contestants in district and parliamentary elections in Agona East Constituency was collected from the District Electoral Commission and Department of Women and Children's Affairs. Primary data was also collected on the factors that determine women participation in politics, constraints to women participation in politics and the strategies to improve women participation in politics. The primary data was obtained from the respondents who were sampled for the study. The use of both primary and secondary sources of information was influenced by the decision to obtain in-depth information about the issue.

### Research instrument

Since the study was based on issues that were both descriptive and exploratory in nature, the semi-structured interview guide was most appropriate to address these issues. Open-questions in the in-depth interview allow respondents to explain their point of view and understanding of women's participation in politics. The interviewer also had the opportunity to clarify any ambiguity about the instructions or questions and may allow probes on questions to encourage the respondent to enlarge on, clarify, or explain answers (Berg, 2009; Sarantakos, 2005).

### Methods of data collection

The data collection was done by the researcher himself. The interviews were conducted by the researcher in the lounges or other quiet seating areas prescribed by the interviewees and convenient for the researcher. Prior to the interview respondents were informed about the purpose of the research, the need to tape-record the interview and the confidentiality and anonymity of the information given. The interviews lasted between 30 and 50 minutes and the recordings were complemented with notes taken during the interview and impressions, ideas and thoughts of the interviewer that arose from the interview. Although the interview guide was developed in English, some of the questions that needed clarification were translated into the local dialect 'Fante' for easy understanding for those who needed clarification.

### Methods of data analysis

The study adopted a qualitative analytical approach for analysing the data. The data was transcribed into English and analysed under thematic areas based on the responses. Responses that were consistent were analysed together to check for clarity and consistency. The themes that emerged were used to answer the research questions of the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Introduction

This section dealt with the analyses of the data collected from the field. It covered the demographic characteristics of respondents, state of women participation in politics, importance of women participation in politics, constraints to women participation in politics and strategies to address the challenges in women participation in politics.

**Table 1: Age of respondents**

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
<b>Age</b>		
25-29	1	5
30-34	1	5
35-39	3	15
40-44	6	30
45-49	5	25
50-54	3	15
55-60	1	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>

From Table 1, majority of the respondents (30%) were between 40-44 years old, followed by 25% who were aged 45-49 years and the least number of respondents were in the age categories of 25-29, 30-34 and 55-60 years.

**Table 2: Marital status of respondents**

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married	16	80

Never married	2	10
Divorced	2	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>

With marital status, most of the respondents (80%) were married and the rest were either never married or divorced. This is shown in Table 2.

**Table 3: Political positions of respondents**

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
<b>Position</b>		
Constituency executives	4	20
Polling station executives	14	70
Electoral area coordinator	2	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>

According to Table 3, majority of the respondents (55%) were polling stations executives and a few of them (10%) were electoral area executives.

**Table 4: Religious affiliations of respondents**

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
<b>Religion</b>		
Islam	2	10
Christian	18	90
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4 shows that most of the respondents (90%) were Christians and the rest (10%) were Muslims.

**Table 5: Educational level of respondents**

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
<b>Educational level</b>		
JHS	2	10
SHS	4	20
Tertiary	14	70
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>

From Table 5, majority of the respondents (70%) had tertiary education and a few of them (10%) had JHS education.

### State of Women Participation in Politics

The state of women participation in politics in the Agona East Constituency was considered based on MPs, constituency executives, electoral area coordinators and polling station officers.

**Table 6: State of women participation in politics in the Agona east constituency**

Variables	Males	Females	Total
<b>Political Position</b>			
Member of parliaments elect(1992-2012)	22	1	23
Constituency executives	28	4	32
Electoral area coordinators	40	2	42
Polling station officers	400	100	500
<b>Total</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>597</b>

From Table 6 the researcher found out that, since 1992 to 2012, only one woman won in the parliamentary elections organised by the Electoral Commission of Ghana. Among the thirty two (32) constituency executives, there were only four (4) females; again, only five (2) women also served us Electoral area coordinators and finally, out of 500 polling station officers, there were only 100 females who were polling station women organizers. The findings of the study on the state of women participation in Politics is in line with the findings of Paxton and Hughes (2007); Ocran (2014) and Inter-Parliamentary Union (2014). Their findings revealed that, women are the majority of every country's population worldwide. But the global average proportion of women in national parliaments is merely 21.4% . This is further supported by the data from the Electoral Commission of Ghana in 2012. The data revealed that out of the 133 women who stood for parliamentary positions, only 29 were elected into parliament. Also, out of the 72 cabinet ministers appointed by the current president of Ghana, 17 are women, representing only 24 per cent. More to these, most of the political positions like regional chairman, district coordinators and other positions are held by men, putting the women at a disadvantage.

### **Importance of women participation in politics**

The importance of women participation in politics were analysed by taking into consideration the need for women in politics. The respondents mentioned that the importance of women participation in politics include; helping to address the concerns of other women, helping in decision making and helping to improve women's self-confidence. A few of the respondents mentioned that women participation in politics help to bridge the gap between men and women and help in the general improvement in human development.

On the issue of women participation in politics helping to address the concerns of other women, respondents first mentioned some of the concerns of women. Some of the concerns of women that were mentioned were low employment, educational and financial status.

*'I think women have concerns that need to be addressed. For instance there is a concern like 'Campaign for female education'. Other issues like high low employment status and financial difficulties affect women.'* (Polling Station Women organizer, 38 years).

Other concerns were the fact that most women are discriminated against, suppressed and have health concerns that need to be addressed. Other respondents also mentioned that there are certain policies that do not favour women are made and these also are some of the concerns women face. Some of the policies mentioned were child policies and maternal policies:

*'Women major concerns are usually how men take or implement policies. Most women participate in politics in order to balance the policy making.'* (Constituency Women Organizer, 46 years).

The respondents believed that most of these concerns are not addressed by men who are in political positions. For the respondents, most of the policies that are made at the political level are geared towards solving the needs of men. Most women in politics are there because of these concerns are ready to address them One of the respondents said that:

*'The country invests so much in sports which is often male-centred at the neglect of other equally important issues that affect women. I think if we have both men and women there, there is going to be a balance. If you have a lady MP I think she will try to push for the agenda of ladies such as scholarship for ladies.'* (Deputy Constituency Women Organizer, 40 years).

These support the claim by earlier researchers who found that the major need for women in politics is to solve the concerns of women. A researcher like Bauer affirmed in 2006 that female legislators could arrange, support or elect women issues-matters of specific importance and concern to women folk. These concerns may be openly connected to women (Bauer, 2006). Tremblay & Pelletier (2000), also elaborated that female political figures may also arrange, give a helping hand or select plans of specific concern to women, such as abortion.

The issue of decision making was also mentioned by respondents. They believed that it is important for women to participate in politics in order to help make effective decisions. For the respondents, some decisions made in the country could have been better made if women were actively involved: 'In the olden days, people used to think that ladies are always weak. The woman is weak and so they always need the men to be there for them. It is true we need men but we don't need men to decide for us in everything. So when women are involved in decision making, they are actually going to bring out challenges that women face and help address them (Electoral Area Coordinator, 29 years). This confirms what was found by Norderval (2005) when he said that including females in politics can make the worth of making decisions in the legislation upsurge. According to him, when women participate in politics, it adds to the cream of talent and capacity from which front-runners can be drawn. Similarly, Paxton & Hughes (2007), also found that when women are part of the political field there are fresh thoughts or new ideas, in that woman represent diversity of concerns. Some of the respondents however believed that although women can help make effective decisions, when it comes to quick decision making, women may not be of help.

*'From what I know, when men are taking decisions, they take their time and women in particular are careful of the decisions that they take. So women take lengthy time before they take a decision. Their decisions are mostly effective but they might delay. So they may not be involved in decisions that require immediate attention.'* (Poling Station Women Organizer, 25 years).

Improvement in women's self-confidence was considered by the respondents as one of the importance for women participation in politics. According to the respondents, women generally are shy and would always want the men to take up leadership positions and they will support the men. This originates from how the society has socialized both men and women. They were of the view that even in the home, right from infancy, boys are more active in everything compared to girls and this follows them to adulthood and goes on throughout the life cycle. Some examples were given by the respondents to support this claim:

*'Generally if you want someone to be a leader of a group, more men will raise their hands. The women believe that the men should lead and they will support. Even in schools, especially at the tertiary level, the SRC presidents are mostly males and females act as vice presidents.'* (Poling Station Women Organizer, 28 years).

The respondents believed that when ladies are in higher positions, they are going to be a source of motivation to others and this helps in improving the self-confidence of other women. Respondents mentioned some women like Naana Jane Opoku Agyeman (Minister of education), Mrs Marietta Brew Appiah-Oppong (*Attorney General & Ministry of Justice*), Mrs. Hannah Tetteh and others as women who are serving as sources of motivation for other women. These findings confirm what was found by Campbell & Wolbrecht (2006), when they attested that women legislators serve as role models for up and coming young girls and women. According to them, having a significant amount of women in governance aids to promote the confidence levels of other women.

On the issue regarding the general improvement in human development, the respondents were of the view that when women participate in politics, it will bring improvements in education, employment status and consequently lead to an improvement in human

development. According to the respondents, when women are empowered through education in particular, they can bring a lot of changes to the nation and individuals in the country. To one of the respondents, the education of a woman has more value than that of a man. She said:

*“As the saying goes ‘if you educate a man, you educate an individual and when you educate a woman, you educate a whole nation’. This means that educating women can lead to the general improvement in human development.”* (Deputy Constituency Women Organizer, 48 years).

The respondents were of the view that when women participate in politics, their being there alone is enough to ensure human development. Their ideas and suggestions which usually carry more weight help bring general improvement. Similar findings were obtained from previous studies that look at the importance of women participation in politics. In a study by Bari (2005), it was found that nine out of twelve countries where women hold more than 33 percent of the seats in parliament are ranked high in the human development category (girls are more likely to have access to education, lower illiteracy rates).

Finally, respondents held diverse views on the importance of women participation in politics in bridging the gap between men and women in politics. For some of the respondents, the participation of women in politics will help bridge the gap between men and women. This can occur where most women are motivated to engage in politics because of the presence of other women who hold political positions:

*‘Sometimes, I think women who hold political positions serve as motivation to other ladies outside there. When they realize that they have their colleagues in position, they will be motivated to also go for some positions. Although they may not be able to bridge the gap in term so numbers, they can bridge the gap in terms of decision making.’* (Polling Station Women Organizer, 42 years).

Similarly, another Polling Station Women Organizer, who was 40 years old said:

*‘For me, when more women participate in politics, they will be able to address the concerns of women. In this regard, the discrepancies that exist when it comes to addressing the concerns of both men and women will be dealt with. This is a way helps in bridging the gap between men and women in politics. The numbers can also be achieved but it will take so much time.’* (Polling Station Women Organizer, 42 years)

These findings confirm what was said by (Paxton & Hughes, 2007) in their study. For them, opportunity of equality via official representation does not seem to spontaneously yield large numbers of women in the political sphere. It is presumed that if women constitute 50 percent of the population, then it is only fair enough that they account for approximately 50% of governmental and decision-making bodies. For other respondents, the issue of women participation in politics leading to a bridge in the gap between men and women in politics is not achievable. They believed that the gap that exists between men and women in politics is so wide that it cannot be bridged. Although there have been effort at bridging the gap by bringing more women on board, this has not bridged much of the gap that exists.

### **Constraints to women participation in politics**

Issues on constraints to women participation in politics were also considered. For the respondents, the major constraints to women’s participation in politics are grouped into socio-cultural, socio-economic, psychological and political.

The socio-cultural constraints to women participation in politics emanate from the primitive society idea about women as well as the norms and values that exist in society. For the respondents, most of the norms and values are not favourable for women and these serve as barriers to their participation in politics. Some of the primitive ideas mentioned were the idea that the place of the women is the kitchen and the fact that women are generally weak and do not have the capacity to take up certain positions. Some ethnic groups were regarded as thinking of their women as reserved and that most positions should be taken up by men. These support what was found by Yartey (2012), who said that the attitudes toward gender equality are often seen as an important factor in analyzing women’s entry into elected office. Traditions still emphasize women’s primary roles as mothers and housewives. A strong, patriarchal value system keeps these sexually segregated roles in place. The responsibility of women as mothers and wives as well as her domestic duties complicate their involvement and participation in the public sphere.

The respondents were also of the idea that some religions look down upon women and this serves as a constraint to their participation in politics and in some decision making:

*‘In some part of our country, it is often said that the men should be above and the women below, to the extent that I even realized there is a particular religion that women don’t even sit among men. So if a woman wants to engage in some of these things, it will be very challenging. So let’s say a Muslim lady wants to become a president, even their religion does not allow the woman to sit with the men when they go to the Mosque how much more giving her the opportunity to stand in front of everybody. Even her fellow Muslims will not vote for her.’* (Constituency Women Executive, 45 years).

This confirms what Bari (2005) found in his study where he concluded that socio-culturally, the subordinate status of women in relation to men is a universal phenomenon, though with a difference in the nature and extent of subordination across countries. Gender role ideology does not only create duality of femininity and masculinity, it also places them in hierarchal fashion in which female sex is generally valued less than male sex because of their socially ascribed roles in reproductive sphere.

The socio-economic issues that were explored as constraints to women participation in politics were education, employment and finances. The respondents unanimously believed that these three issues are major constraints to women participation in politics but they work hand-in-hand to pose socio-economic challenges. According to the respondents, women generally do not have the

opportunity to be in school as compared to men and some of the reasons are socio-cultural. This leads to high female illiteracy rates and this also affect women employment opportunities. Consequently, the low employment status among women leads to low financial status. The result is that since money is necessary to enter into politics, most women will be restricted entry due to their inadequate financial status:

*'First of all when a lady is not much educated, it is obviously going to limit her participation in politics. The higher she goes, the more confident she becomes to enter into politics. For instance a man with a doctorate degree and a woman with diploma when contesting for a position will obviously result in the man winning. The educational level also influences your employment status and even now men provide job opportunities for women, usually at a fee which could be by sleeping with the women. Even when a woman has the competence to go for a position and needs support in the form of money, she has to exchange something for that. All these serve as barriers to women participation in politics.'* (Electoral Area Coordinator, 52 years).

The findings on the socio-economic barriers to women participation in politics are not different from what was found by earlier researchers. For instance Mould-Iddirisu (2010), found that in Ghana, women constitute the majority of the poorest of the poor and are therefore unable to raise funds to contest and win political elections. A similar idea emanated from Konde (1992), who said that at the very initial stages of the introduction of education to the colonies, girls were exempted because the colonial administration was only interested in training and equipping young men who will be grounded in the art of governance and statesmanship

Psychologically, the respondents accepted the fact that women are naturally weak and are not able to go through the psychological traumas in life. Most women also have low self-esteem and lack confidence in taking up leadership positions. They affirmed that this is natural and that is how women were created, thus it is only the few who have determination and who have high self-esteem that usually take up leadership positions. They respondents believed that even how women see themselves as nothing in the presence of men in society also brings about some psychological issues that serve as barrier to their participation in politics:

*'Psychological factors will have a major influence. This is because women naturally are not like men that have the zeal for anything. Women generally have passion for things but men do not have. Women usually attach emotions to whatever they do. This usually affects dreams for things like this.'* (Polling Station Women Organizer, 50 years).

This finding is in line with what was found by Yartey (2012) who mentioned that psychological factors also serve as factors hindering women participation in politics and are often manifested in lack of confidence. He further said that this is one of the main reasons for women's underrepresentation in formal political institutions, including parliaments, governments and political parties. He added that with confidence and determination, women can reach the highest level in the political process. Another important psychological factor mentioned by the respondents was the perception of politics. According to the respondents, over the years, politics has been perceived to be a 'dirty' game and this perception has generally affected the confidence of women in participation of political processes. A similar finding was obtained by Lindberg, (2003) and he added that the basis of passive corruption often deter women from participating in politics.

Finally, political factors were considered by the respondents as hindrances to women participation in politics. By their views, the respondents explained that the nature of politics in Ghana, which manifests itself in corruption, male domination, insults, killing, spiritual attacks and other unacceptable conducts puts fear in them and sometimes shatter their dreams of assuming political positions. Most of the respondents were frank to say that if they were in some political positions in Ghana and were always insulted and talked against, they would have resigned. They also added that when they see these things happening to their fellow women and men in political positions, nothing encourages them to aspire for political positions:

*'Political factors can also be something that push women away. If it was me and insults and all that, I wouldn't take it and you reacting can be another issues and sometimes what goes into politics before you win, the amount of corruption and all that are major challenges. Apart from this, since there are more males in positions in the various political parties, even voting will always affect them'* (Polling Station Women Organizer, 44 years).

These findings confirm what was found by Yartey (2012) who made it clear that women's right to vote remains restricted: principally because the only candidates to vote for are mostly male. This is true not only for partial and developing democracies, but for established democracies as well. Similar ideas emerged from a study by Bari (2005), who said that women are usually not elected at the position of power within party structures because of gender biases of male leadership. Notwithstanding, some of the respondents said that with determination, women can overcome the political challenges:

*'I think these political issues are hindrances to women participation in politics but when you are determined and you know that you are fighting a good course, you don't need to be afraid with God on your side.'* (Polling Station Women Organizer, 35 years).

### **Strategies to address the challenges in women participation in politics**

Various strategies can be used to deal with constraints to women's participation in politics. However, for the purpose of the study the strategies that were explored were gender quotas, address gender equality in internal party regulations and adopt measures for women's participation in decision-making structures. Others were set targets for participation in party conventions, establish women's wings and sections within political parties and ensure gender equality perspective in policy development.

With gender quotas, most of the respondents were of the view that that can address the challenges in women participation in politics. For them, giving quotas for both men and women in politics will result in help solve address the constraints but to some level. They

further explained that that strategy can be effective when the women are willing to take up the position and can help solve most of the challenges that confront women who want to participate in politics:

*'I think it can help but if the people are not willing to go, then it will be useless. It will be good but the quotas should be on the determination that the lady or the woman is willing to go.'* (Polling Station Women Organizer, 49 years).

This confirms what was previously found by Bari (2005), when he mentioned that gender quotas are instituted within the context of gender disparities, which are structural and systemic. Without addressing the structural constraints to women's political exclusion, their inclusion through gender quota cannot lead to an effective representation. Similarly, Rai (2005) also emphasized the same point by arguing that "while quotas are important in addressing the exclusion of women from the public political sphere, they can only form one part of a multi - faceted strategy for empowering women, which must together with increased political participation also involve a redistribute ion of socio- economic resources within societies." Other respondents were however of the view that because of the low level of education among women, when gender quotas are put in place most women who do not qualify for the position will even come for it and this will lead to incompetent leaders:

*'I seriously don't agree with the issue of gender quotas. Are we just pushing women into leadership positions just because we want to bridge the gap between men and women in politics? We want leaders who will push our agendas for us. If we are just pushing ladies there because of the issue of gender gap, then we are making a mistake. I am always against that.'* (Polling Station Women Organizer, 42 years).

This implies that the respondents had mixed ideas when the issue of gender quotas as a strategy for addressing challenges in women participation in politics.

On the strategy of gender equality in party regulations, the respondents mentioned that this is a very important strategy that can help deal with the challenges. According to the respondents, the issue of gender inequality is a major challenge in politics in the country. This stem from the fact that there is unequal representation of women in politics, most decisions that are taken do not favour women and there are few policies that address the concerns of women. In fact, the respondents saw this strategy as the most important and were of the view that when such a strategy is implemented, it can curb most of the challenges:

*'When political parties are able to ensure gender equality, we can get some women from those parties so that when it comes to the national level, getting the quotas wouldn't be a problem.'* (Polling Station Women Organizer, 47 years).

The same issue was mentioned by UNDP (2011) when it was realized that the internal functioning of political parties has an impact on how different needs, interests, and social demands in the society get represented in parliament.

Another strategy that was mentioned by the respondents was the adoption of measures for women's participation in decision-making structures. The respondents gave yes and no answer to this strategy. According to the respondents the passion and emotions that women have help in making effective decisions but they may not help in taking decisions that need immediate response. They further added that including the women in decision making would not be able to address some of the challenges. The inclusion of women in decision making according to the respondents will help shape policies and strategies. This issue was stated by one of the respondents when she said:

*'My answer will be yes and no. Yes, because women are generally emotional and will take decisions that will favour other women. No, because they will stress the issue. Maybe you are in a meeting and quick decisions need to be taking. The presence of the women will affect the decision making.'* (Electoral Area Cordinator, 55 years).

A similar finding was obtained by UNDP (2011) when it stated that the participation of women in governing boards is important for several reasons, notably to ensure that women's perspectives contribute to shaping party policies, priorities, strategies, and platforms.

Establishment of women wings and sections within political parties was also mentioned and explained as a strategy to address the challenges in women participation in politics. Women wings and sections were considered by the respondents as a major means of bridging the gap between men and women in politics. They explained that since the wings are sections will be reserved for only women, it will gradually help deal with the challenge of gender inequality and unequal participation in politics. One of the respondents had a contrary view. The views of the respondents in this regard confirm what UNDP (2011), said about women wings and sections when it concluded that establishing a wing or section for women party members to meet, discuss and deliberate, articulate their priorities, and seek solutions to common problems can be instrumental in placing women's concerns on the party agenda. According to her,

*'Those reserved positions for women are only there to take care of issues that affect women. For instance, if someone is women organizer, that person is only in charge of women and not the entire group of people. So in effect, it is women leading women and this cannot solve the challenges.'* (Polling Station Women Organizer, 48 years).

Finally, there was a unanimous decision from the respondents when they all agreed that gender equality in policy development is a good strategy to address the challenges to women participation in politics. They explained that when this strategy is implemented, the concerns of women will be addressed and women will be able to enjoy the privileges that they have not enjoyed due to discrimination. One of the respondents said

*'Men are not living in isolation. They are living with women so decisions and policies should favour both men and women. So when the policies favour both men and women, it will go a long way to address some of the challenges.'* (Electoral Area Coordinator, 47 years).

This supports the strategy that was brought up by UNDP (2011) when it was found that political parties must ensure that their policies and priorities respond to the needs of women and men, not only in terms of gender specific policy reforms, but also ensuring that gender is mainstreamed into all the policies of the party.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings, the following conclusions have been drawn:

Firstly, women have low participation in politics. This manifests itself through the number of elected Members of Parliament (MPs), constituency executives, electoral area coordinators and polling station executives.

Secondly, it is important for women to in to participate in politics because it will bridge the gap between men and women in politics, address the concerns of other women, help in decision making, improve women's self-confidence and lead to a general improvement in human development.

Moreover, women participation in politics comes with a lot of constraints including socio-cultural and ideological, socio-economic, psychological and political factors.

Finally, the challenges in women participation in politics can be addressed through gender quotas, addressing gender equality in internal party regulations, adopting measures for women's participation in decision-making structures, establishment of women's wings and sections within political parties and ensuring gender equality perspective in policy development.

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