



## Research Article

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**Women's Participation in Local Governance: A Study of South Dayi District in the Volta Region****Dominic Alimbey Dery\*<sup>1</sup>, Linda Bedzra<sup>2</sup>, Felicia Dapilee<sup>3</sup>, Samuel Kwabla Segbefia<sup>4</sup>, Mary Dogbe<sup>5</sup>**<sup>1</sup>Department of Languages and International Relation, Tamale Technical University<sup>2</sup>Department of Social Sciences, Akatsi College of Education, Ghana<sup>3</sup>Department of Social Sciences, Tumu College of Education<sup>4</sup>Department of Business and Social Sciences Education, University of Cape Coast, Ghana<sup>5</sup>Department of Social Studies, St. Teresa's College of Education, Hohoe Ghana**Article History**

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**Abstract:** Women's engagement in all aspects of life has become a key development concern worldwide. The research examines the extent to which women in the South Dayi District of the Volta Region participate in the governing process at the local level. The study used a mixed-method approach, including semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The study collected data from 53 women from various socioeconomic backgrounds in focus groups and interviews. Women's engagement in local governance in South Dayi District is quite low, according to the findings. The fact that the number of women elected to the Assembly has decreased over time supports this. The study also listed finance and commercialization of political space, a lack of knowledge and higher education, cultural and religious considerations, women's inferiority complex, and a lack of community support as reasons for women's poor engagement in local administration in South Dayi District. In addition, the respondents identified education and awareness, financial assistance, family/husband support, the implementation of a quota system for women, and support from NGOs and women organizations as solutions for expanding women's involvement in local administration in South Dayi District.

**Keywords:** Local Government, Governance, Participation, Women, Gender.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Participation in politics is a critical component of every society's democratic evolution. It is necessary for democratic quality (Diamond & Morlino, 2004). In an ideal world, democracy would safeguard and promote human dignity and fundamental rights, accomplish social fairness, encourage community economic and social growth, increase social cohesiveness, and improve national serenity (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1997). As a result, when citizens participate in the decision-making process within a political entity, governments are held to account more effectively, constitutionally protected rights are enforced, and individual and community needs are better reflected in the policy process. Thus, political participation enables the achievement of democratic goals in a political body.

One of the most critical components for providing good governance and developing local government bodies is a strong and effective local government. Local representatives of local bodies founded on democratic concepts can encourage more socioeconomic emancipation of the country's people, and this is highly dependent on citizens, both men and women, being fully used for the country's overall

growth. Even though women account for more than half of the population in Ghana, their standing in every area of the economy is much lower than that of males. Women's engagement is promoted, and impediments to their meaningful participation are reduced in democracies all over the world. The compulsory involvement of women in local governments may be a significant tool for promoting change in the country's political environment, especially as conservative inclinations resurface.

Women's participation in local government is crucial for decision-making processes to be legitimate. Women's participation in local government strengthens governments' legitimacy, provides an equitable representation of society in elected offices, and influences policy agendas by boosting women's abilities to address concerns in society (Markham, 2013). In terms of political rights, the topic of women's involvement in local government is centered on human rights. Every person has the right to take part in the decision-making processes that shape their lives. When women engage in local government on an equal footing with men, the female viewpoint is successfully incorporated into policy choices. Women have historically been excluded from politics across the world. This is due to "many structural, functional, and

personal elements that vary between nations in different social circumstances" (Bari, 2005). Women encounter several barriers to participation in political processes, from the local to the global level. Women are underrepresented as voters and in leadership positions due to structural impediments such as discriminatory laws and institutions and capability gaps such as a lack of education, contacts, and resources (UN-Women, n.d). The absence of gender analysis in the Ghanaian economy and the invisible role of women in Ghana has a long history in Ghana (Allah-Mensah, 2003).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Evolution of Local Government in Ghana

As everywhere in the globe, local governments in Ghana play a vital role in local governance and development. Local governments have a long history in Ghanaian culture. Individual Ghanaian villages, regardless of size, may have quite varied ways of governing themselves. A council of elders supports each community led by a chief. According to Ahwoi (2010), this is local governance, but not in the traditional sense.

The colonial administration on the Gold Coast at the time used a system that depended on native authority to maintain law and order rather than involving natives in actual local government management (Gocking, 2005). The British particularly established an indirect rule system (IRS) for local governance, with chiefs serving as the administrative center. Despite this, the colonial authorities accepted that chiefs and other traditional leaders wielded significant military, policy-making, and social power in the administration of local affairs. Native Authorities, a branch of local government, were used to enforce the legislation. However, some analysts believe that this system is not entirely clear-cut, as it is undemocratic and marked by corruption and inefficiency (Ahwoi, 2010). The enactment of the Local Government Ordinance in 1951 established a two-tier framework that combined the British system with local government administration. This system was determined to be intrinsically weak because it placed too much emphasis on local allegiances and feelings, resulting in clashes between local educated elites and traditional authority over local affairs leadership. Other municipal administration measures such as the Local Government Act, Act 54 (1961), and Act 359 followed suit (1971). The 1971 legislation was revised in 1974, resulting in the development of a four-tier local government system, with regional councils, district and area councils, municipal and urban councils.

The amendment passed in 1974 was the most recent substantial modification in Ghana's local government administrative structure. It represented the transfer from the old to the new local government system. Even though successive administrations have undertaken various types of decentralization and local

government policies since independence, the present Decentralization Policy began in 1988 with the passage of PNDC Law 207.

### Participation Concept

Participation has evolved into a necessary component and precondition a successful government. People must be included in the process of planning their needs and development since development is a process of enhancing people's capacity to select their own destinies. Participation is an important aspect of the development process and definition. As a result, there is a growing understanding that everyone has the right to participate in choices that impact their life.

According to the World Bank (1996), participation is a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development projects and the decisions and resources that affect them. Following the signing of the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation (ACPPDT) in Arusha, Tanzania, in 1990, participatory development in Africa reached the apex of development discourse (Africa Institute of South Africa, 2002). Decentralized development planning is a legitimate framework for sustainable development and good governance agenda; therefore, participatory planning at the local level is crucial right now (Chinsinga, 2003). As used in this study, participation refers to residents, most of whom are women, participating in local administration. This is because, at the grassroots level, women should actively participate and decide on development strategies.

### Women and Local Government in Ghana

Ghana's local government system is critical to the government's attempts to develop the country and balance the administrative apparatus. Intergovernmental ties, roles, and financing sources, notably the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF) and its administration were laid out in the Republican Constitution of 1992. (Zanu, 1996). Participatory democracy is a cornerstone of the existing system. District Assemblies (DAs) are the highest political, administrative, legislative, and deliberative institutions at the district level and are thus burdened with the onerous task of maintaining growth in a peaceful environment in their respective jurisdictions. A four-tier (3) metropolitan and three-tier (4) municipal/103 DAs make up the structure. Each of these is made up of seventy percent (70%) elected and thirty percent (30%) nominated members, presided over by a Presiding Member (PM), and managed by an overall administrative Chief Executive, aptly named Metropolitan, Municipal, or District Chief Executive (MCE or DCE). Subcommittee work bolsters these efforts (ibid). Because the system is (controversially) non-partisan, elected posts are fiercely contested but without the political party fervor that characterizes general elections. Following that, women's performance

in elected offices would be scrutinized; some Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) established Women in Development subcommittees to engender institutions as part of their efforts. Where electorates could not elect a good number of women, the administration bolstered their numbers by appointing women as government appointees, (Brown *et al.*, 1996). Since 1988, women have made steady but modest progress in municipal politics, not just in terms of the number of women who run for office but also in terms of those who win. However, while these are not significant, they do provide some promise for women's political engagement at the local level and a glimpse of what is to come at the national level as more women enter and earn the requisite expertise. Brown *et al.* (1996) examined women's engagement in local government to put the situation of women in local government into the public eye. Their research also aimed to identify the elements that influenced women's political engagement and develop methods to improve women's political rights. Since then, there have been comprehensive studies on women in public life in general, with sections on women's performance in local government administration. Brown *et al.* reaffirmed that women's political engagement is linked to the efficacy of their political actions and their ability to influence local political institutions on communities by participating in policy and decision-making processes (Brown *et al.*, 1996).

### **Women's Position in the Larger Society**

Women continuously have a smaller voice than men in the home, where decisions about reproduction and resource production, trade, and consumption are determined, in society at large. According to the conventional social demarcation of spending, men are often responsible for visible, formal, and predictable expenses such as rent, energy, and school fees inside the home. This elevates men's status as primary providers, leaving women to deal with the unexpected, day-to-day, and unseen tasks of clothing, school uniforms, and food. It also disadvantages women's capacity to manage resources and negotiate critical issues, such as the number of children they should have and how to space them, the frequency and method of sex, contraceptive usage, and the status of the marriages they enter into. Ghanaian women continue to bear the brunt of reproductive duties within the domestic division of labor, often known as household chores. Even though more men are becoming involved in some of these occupations, Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS 2016) shows that women undertake the majority of household work in addition to their income-generating activities. Women's workload is significantly higher than men's due to their various responsibilities. This jeopardizes their potential to create wealth through productive activities and contribute to society. Women and men both participate in communal issues. However, their participation is gendered, with males controlling

community government institutions such as chieftaincy perhaps one of the reasons why customs, traditions and laws were crafted to suit the man, such as men being able to engage in multiple marriages at the same time and district assembly unit committees and women participate more in community-level activities connected to home reproduction. Structures like Unit Committees are seen as masculine groups in certain rural villages. This is reflected in the male numerical and political domination at the District Assemblies, the Legislature, the Executive, and the Judiciary at the national level. Women typically lack expertise and familiarity with public life and have skill deficiencies in formal education, public speaking, and the trade of politics as a result of long-standing disadvantages and discriminatory policies. This underscores the widely held belief that women are better suited to support and service roles than to politics and political positions. Many proverbs regarding women's roles reflect this, such as the belief that women should sell garden eggs rather than gunpowder, that even if they owned a pistol, it would be kept in a man's chamber, and that if they reared animals, it would be the responsibility of the male to sell it (Amoah, 1997).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This paper adopts a mixed-method approach using data from semi-structured interviews and questionnaires through a purposive sampling of women in the South Dayi District. The study uses this approach because the mixed method compensates for each other's weaknesses (Creswell, 2009; & Thornhill, 2009). The method used enabled the researchers to gather responses through expressions of feelings and ideas and, at the same time, quantify information about a phenomenon. With this, both semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were employed in the collection of data from 53 respondents in the South Dayi District. The sampling technique employed in this study was purposive sampling for recruiting respondents in the community and examining the opinion leaders' views. The purposive sampling technique is aimed at targeting specific people who have a direct link to the study. A structured interview guide was employed to collect data from two officers in the assembly. The questionnaires were administered by the researchers themselves and a team of young graduates conversant with the area and fluent in the language of the people. The data obtained were analyzed using SPSS statistical package version 16. The results obtained were represented in frequency and percentage tables for easy interpretation and understanding. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and recapitulated for the study based on themes and subthemes.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Factors accounting for low women's participation in Local Government**

In line with the research objective, this section presents the respondents' responses on factors accounting for low women's participation in local government in South Dayi District. Prior to that, respondents' views were sought on matters relating to their local political participation.

**Table 1.** Women's participation in Assembly voting.

Have you voted in a district Assembly Election?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	10	19
No	43	81
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 shows the respondents' responses to the question of whether they have ever voted in district-level elections. From their responses, 10 respondents representing 19 percent, responded YES, while the rest of the 81 percent responded NO to the question. They were of the view that the election of Assembly members was not beneficial to them, and for that matter, they saw no reason for taking part in voting them into power. They argued that people elected as representatives were not helping to ensure development as supposed to them but rather waited for another election year before they come down to them.

**Table 2.** Women and Assembly's elections

Are you aware you can equally contest in D.A	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	34	64
No	19	36
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>

The information in table 2 is the responses of the respondents on whether they are aware they can equally contest in assembly elections. From their responses, 64 percent are aware they can contest, while the remaining 36 percent are never aware because they think assembly positions are mainly reserved for men.

**Table 3.** Women candidates in Assembly elections.

Have you contested an assembly election Before?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	3	6
No	50	94
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3 shows the responses of the respondents. 6 percent responded that they have contested and held various positions at the local level. All of the two respondents have contested and were currently serving as unit committee members for their electoral areas. The rest of the 94 percent responded that they have never contested for any local level position. Subsequent analyses will portray the factors responsible for low women's participation in local governance in the South Dayi District.

**Table 4.** Reasons for low women representation in local government

Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of capacity & confidence	11	21
Inadequate access to financial Resources	8	15
Socio-cultural practices	16	30
The perception of politics as a "dirty" game	18	34
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4 highlights the causes for the low representation of women in the South Dayi District local assembly. According to the table, 21% of respondents believe that a lack of capacity and confidence was a significant issue that prevented women from participating in and being represented in local politics. According to the report, women considering running for office often believe that their lack of schooling would work against them since they lack sufficient prior experience speaking in public using the "Queens" language. This should not be an issue for female applicants who were uneducated or had a limited educational background. This is because section 54 of the Local Government Act (Act 462) states that "a district should arrange its assembly sessions in English or any Ghanaian language common to the district assembly members." Nonetheless, the study found that during assembly meetings, the standing order and other assembly reports were debated in English. This trend continues to be an issue for members of the local Assembly who are unable to read, write, or speak English. "Some of our women assembly members who had formerly represented their people are constantly hampered and cannot make any appropriate contributions owing to the employment of English as a means of communication in the assembly," a member of the Assembly said.

In addition, the study found that 34% of women consider politics to be a "dirty game." According to the information gathered, women candidates faced stigma in the municipality because it is widely assumed that women who engage in politics are cheap and immoral, similar to prostitutes who provide sexual favors to some dishonest men in leadership positions in exchange for financial assistance to run for political positions. As a result, women have little interest in local politics.

Third, because of the replies of 30% of women, socio-cultural habits are a key hindrance to women's engagement in municipal politics. These sociocultural practices, which present themselves in attitudes and morality, have acquired popularity in the town throughout time. As a result, males are the family's head and make choices on behalf of their families, while women are socially disempowered and confined to domestic tasks like cooking, housekeeping,

and child support. The study also indicated that electorates frequently discriminate against women candidates who ran for and contested seats with men during voting because voters trust males more than women in politics. This supports the findings of O'Brien & Krook (2012), who claim that sociocultural practices have a detrimental influence on women's political engagement.

Finally, a lack of financial means is a major barrier to women entering municipal politics. According to 15% of the respondents, women in the municipality do not have immediate access to financial resources to run for political office. This indicates that women in the municipality participate in non-traditional activities such as fish mongering, small commerce, and food selling. As a result, they do not earn as much as males who own and operate much larger firms in the town. These factors frequently discourage potential candidates, particularly women, from running for political office.

### **Measures to Encourage Women's Participation in Local Government**

Conversations on enhancing women's participation in local government activities yielded the following three themes.

#### **Women's Education**

All respondents emphasized the importance of education to improve their involvement in local government. According to the respondents, women's education means "power" to lead, influence, and be heard, especially in patriarchal settings where males had decision-making power. In order to be more visible in political activities, respondents urged for a type of "political education" that would try to provide women with the civic skills and attitudes they need to enter politics, particularly when running for office. In keeping with this recommendation, separate training sessions for women interested in running for political office were organized various political parties namely NDC, NPP, and CPP in the South Dayi District.

#### **Participation in Informal Voluntary Associations**

Respondents also suggested that more women be encouraged to join voluntary organizations as apprenticeships for future leadership roles.

#### **Strict Enforcement of the Quota System**

According to Ghana's Local Government Act (207), 70 percent of assembly members must be elected, while the remaining 30 percent must be chosen after consultation with district stakeholders. Furthermore, at least half of the elected members must be women. As a result, respondents questioned the policy's implementation and pushed for more stringent enforcement of the Local Government Act. They emphasized the need to mandate a 50 percent female

representation in the assembly in order to guarantee that more women are involved in decision-making.

#### **Motivation for participation**

Family and friends were the most important sources of inspiration for women. Respondents stated that they support other women who are interested in running for political office. Sossou (2011) made similar comments on Ghanaian women's political perceptions in her study. People may have the means and psychological involvement for political participation, but they will stay inactive unless their network friends invite them to participate, according to Barkan (2004).

## **CONCLUSION**

Women's active participation in local government has been regarded as essential due to their effective management talents and the fact that women make up the majority of Ghana's population. If more than half of the population is under-represented in politics, democracy cannot really provide for all of its inhabitants. As a result, allowing women to participate in local government is important to improve gender equality and gender-aware policies.

Furthermore, the study's findings show that, despite Ghana's efforts to increase women's engagement in local administration, hurdles persist, owing to patriarchal Ghanaian communities that favour males over women in participation. As a result, while women are more visible in local government operations, they remain limited in decision-making positions. Women must be recognized as partners in local governance, where they are permitted to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with their male counterparts (Arnstein, 1969) and where their opinions and voices are considered in decision-making. This is necessary for attaining long-term development and guaranteeing equality in other areas where disparities exist, such as education, violence, poverty, and health.

#### **Recommendation**

The Following are some recommendations to be emphasized after a thorough examination of the findings: First, the Ghanaian government should implement laws to make it easier for women to participate in and be represented in local elections through reservations. For instance, the Ghanaian government could implement a quota system that allocates a set number of seats in district/municipal legislatures to women to formalize the practice where more women are appointed to such assemblies. Women's participation in local government is anticipated to increase if the proposed laws are promulgated.

Furthermore, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and financial institutions should be encouraged to financially empower women. If these bodies provide financial assistance to women, they can

engage in economic activities that will allow them to become financially independent, allowing women candidates to sponsor their political activities. Again, NGOs and other charitable organizations, and individual donors should collaborate to establish an educational fund to aid in the funding of female child education. This would encourage females to continue in school at all levels of education to learn to gain information and skills and boost their confidence to run for political office in the future.

Furthermore, Non-Formal Education programmes must be adequately resourced to enable women in the Non-Formal Education system to read, write, and comprehend topics of government and politics. This would encourage more political engagement and representation for women in the country.

Finally, religious and opinion leaders should be encouraged to launch crusades in their communities to support the cause of women's representation in politics. These parties must launch initiatives to inform the public about the importance of women in national and local politics.

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