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Participation of Women in Local Level Elections in the Afigya-Kwabre District of Ghana: Can this be a Better Example?

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Abstract:

Generally, participation of women in local government elections has been lower than other elective positions. For instance, few women in Ghana and other neighboring countries such as Togo and Cote d'Ivoire have the courage to contest elections at the local level and subsequently emerging as winners for positions of the assembly. This is indeed a challenge to democratic governance in particular and nation-building, in general. This study therefore sought to explore the issue of women participation in local level elections in the Afigya Kwabre District using a descriptive exploratory design. Purposive and convenience sampling techniques were used to select 67 respondents for the study. Questionnaires and interview guide were used to solicit the views of respondents on the issue. The study revealed that women's participation in local in the district was low. It was observed that factors such as inadequate funds, inferiority complex, fear and intimidation and cultural beliefs impinged on women's participation in local governance. Some societal perceptions that may affect women who partake in elections include the fact that they become disrespectful after winning elections; they refused to perform domestic duties; not natural leaders and become proud when they are in positions. Some of the benefits of women's participation in DAE are promotion of the welfare of women and children, gender balance in the District Assembly, facilitation of community development as well as serving as training ground for women. A number of measures such as the use of incentives, proper affirmative action, improved gender education and gender equality could be used to promote women's participation in local level elections in the district. It is recommended that the District Assembly should properly collaborate with the Ministry of Local Government and Development, the Ministry of Gender Protection and Social Welfare as well as the Development partners to design policy programs and initiatives that will be tailored towards improving poverty levels among women in the country through capacity building programs for women. The government should effectively collaborate with civil society organizations to put in place effective measures including financial incentives, public education, affirmative action and gender education programs in order to improve participation among women during local level elections in the district. The National Commission for Civic Education should be adequately resourced to discharge its mandate of educating people on their civic rights and responsibilities.

Keywords: Participation, governance, elections, local governance, feminism

1. Introduction

Like any other developing country, Ghana has been engaged in efforts to develop participatory governance at the local level for a long time. Participation occurs at both the national and sub-national levels as the required by the 1992 Constitution of Ghana (Ofei-Aboagye cited in Agyeman-Duah, 2008). Citizens' participation in local governance processes provides them with the opportunity to contribute their quota to national and local development initiatives and also helps them to adapt policies to suit their local needs, aspirations and expectations (Agyeman-Duah, 2008). However, given the increasing relevance of participation at the local level globally, there is the need for people to get into the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) even more. Indeed, if the intention behind effective local governance is increased participation and involvement of the people in matters affecting their lives, then all sections of the society must actively get involved in the process of representation.

Participation includes on the one hand involvement in formal political activities (voting, standing for election, etc.) and also non-party political activism, advocacy, and public debate (UNDP, 2005). Women empowerment is critical in women participation efforts. Empowerment is concerned with the process by which people become aware of their own interest and how those relate to the interest

of others, in order to both participate from a strong decision making position and to actually influence such decisions. It therefore goes beyond participation in decision-making to include the process that makes people to perceive themselves as being able and entitled to make decisions (Rowland, 1997). Women's political participation is increasingly on the development agenda of governments, bilateral and multilateral agencies, political parties and non-governmental organizations, including women's rights groups. The role women play as key actors and decision-makers in the development process across a wide range of sectors is vital (Allah-Mensah, 2005).

The number of women currently participating in our democratic governance is woefully inadequate to say the least. For sustainable development in any country, good governance is paramount; there are many women with the necessary qualification who can contribute to the developmental needs of the country if given the opportunity. In her lecture at a conference, Hilary Clinton said that women who work help to drive economic growth across all sectors. She added that when you send a girl to school even just for one year and her income radically increase for life, and her children are more likely to survive and her family more likely to be healthier for years to come. Besides, Hilary conceded that when women get equal rights, the entire nations become more stable and secure and when you deny women equal rights there will be instability of nations (UNDP, 2005). However, this is not the case, as women remain generally under-represented in these areas. The constitution of Ghana allows all sections of the society to take active part in the development of the nation. The preamble of the country's constitution elaborates on affirmation of the unity of all Ghanaians as one people with commitment to certain basic principles like probity, justice, freedom and accountability. Sovereignty is based on the principle of universal adult suffrage, rule of law and the protection and preservation of fundamental human rights (including women's rights) (Ghana, 1992).

The 1992 Constitution of Ghana is very clear on giving opportunities to women because they are an integral part of the people in whom the country's sovereignty resides and in whose names and for whose welfare the powers of government are to be exercised (Article 1 (1)). On the fundamental human rights and freedoms, article 12 (2) notes categorically that "every person in Ghana, whatever his race, place of origin, political opinion, color, religion, creed or gender shall be entitled to the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the individual contained in this chapter but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for the public interest". It is against this background that the participation of women in the political processes and the administrative sector becomes even more compelling (Ghana, 1992). Despite the position of Ghana's constitution on the need for all persons in the society to take part in the development efforts, women participation especially in local level elections across the nation appears to be problematic. In the views of Crook and Manor (1998), election of members into the local area assemblies disproportionately favor the wealthy and better educated at the expense of the poor and the less educated in Ghana. The situation is even worse across the north of the country. Arguably, women of the south have better socio-economic conditions than their counterparts in the north which may have different implications in their attempt to get elected into the local assemblies. However, the situation in the south, though better, may not also be satisfactory especially if politics is supposed to be ahead of society where norms are expected to apply more progressively to women participants as well as others of the larger society (Hyden, 2006). Kelber (1994) argues that if economic and social status of women is to be raised and prevailing inequities overcome, women's access to and inclusion in the policy-and decision-making bodies and institutions that shape our societies must be broadened and strengthened.

2. Statement of the Problem

Women represent slightly more than half of the world population. Yet their participation in formal political structures and processes through which decisions regarding the use of societal resources generated by both men and women are made, is of no consequence (Crook and Manor, 1998). At present, women's representation in legislatures around the world is 15%. What is more, despite the marked commitment of the international community and civil society organizations to gender equality and to bridging the gender gap in the formal political arena, reinforced by the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform of Action, the entire world can only boast of only twelve countries where women hold 33% or more seats in the parliaments (Mahamadu, 2010; UNDP, 2005). There are also several cases where even single female candidates have lost to their male counterparts. Thus, female representation falls far below a third currently. The Afigya Kwabre District (AKD) has fifty-seven (57) elected Assembly members (Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2012). Out of this, only six (10.5%) are females, which falls below the world average of 15%. The low number of women representatives in the district is a matter of concern to many people as it presents a challenge to the issue of inclusion in governance at the local level in the district. Though this situation is not peculiar to AKD, this study sought to investigate the issue of women's participation in the local level elections using AKD as a case in order to come out with measures for improvement.

3. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to examine the issue of women's participation in the local level elections in the AKD with the view to proffering suggestions for improvement. Specifically, this study sought to:

1. Explore the extent to which women contest positions at the local level;
2. Identify the categories of women who contest local level elections in the district;
3. Ascertain the factors that constrain women's participation in local level elections in the district;
4. Identify some societal perceptions regarding women's participation in local level elections at AKD;
5. Discover some of the benefits of women gain from their participation in local level elections; and
6. Determine the measures to improve participation of women in local level elections.

4. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent do women contest local level elections at AKD?
2. Which categories of women contest local level elections in the district?
3. What factors constrain women's participation in local level elections in the district?
4. How does society perceive women who participate in local level elections at AKD?
5. What benefits do women gain from their participation in local level elections in the district?
6. How can women's participation in local level elections at AKD be improved?

5. Literature Review

5.1. Women and Political Representation: The Feminist Position

Equality between women and men in politics in developed democracies has grown considerably in the past fifty years (Coffe and Bolzendahi, 2010; Mestre and Marin, 2012). More women are running for and being elected to national parliaments than ever before, and a record number of women hold executive positions within their nations' governments (Lovenduski, 2005). However, there remains substantial disagreement within the research literature about the nature of the gender gap in political participation, and the significance of the gender gap. There is a wide recognition that the range of activities against which this difference is assessed is too narrow and misses important ways that women do act politically. For example, in the views of Mestre and Marin (2012), both women and men turn out for exit in political knowledge and interest. There is a general consensus that the gender gaps in political representation persist and is very narrow at a very slow pace (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). Feminist and other researchers of democracy and development accentuate the importance of political representation such as being elected to parliament or in other legislative bodies. Having women representatives in political and other decision-making institutions that work on behalf of all citizens has been a topic of immense interest and policy consideration at the European level for the past several decades. This goal includes both the desire for a fairer representation of women in those institutions-Shvedova (2005) argues that, "The low level of women's representation in some European parliaments should be considered a violation of women's fundamental democratic right and, as such, a violation of their basic human rights".

Feminist theorist has used a sharply feminist-critical lens to explore what it means to talk about gendered politics, the implications of men's dominance in and of the political sphere, how (and if) women politicians can and do influence both policy and political processes and how democracy could be transformed by the greater involvement of women in both formal and informal politics (Bryson, 2003; Lovenduski, 2005; Waylen et al. 2013). However, contained within that appeal for more women to be elected as politicians are two competing and contradictory rationales. Whilst the 'equity' argument says that similar numbers of women and men should be elected representatives on the grounds of fairness and proportionality (Pateman, 1989). According to Moser, women participation provides evidence to issues of equality, equity and empowerment in the body politic. Based on this Moser developed a framework for gender analysis in development planning (Moser, 2010). The Moser Framework focuses on issues such as gender role identification, gender needs assessment and disaggregating the control of resources and decision making based on the concepts: the triple role of women, practical and strategic gender needs and categories of policy measures. The triple role consists of reproductive, productive and community-managing activities. Strategic needs are needs that transform the balance of power between men and women (Moser, 2010).

5.2. Factors that affect Women's Participation in Local Level Elections

A number of factors affect women participation in local level elections. First, is social Factors. For instance, social conditions and factors relating to education, family name, marital status, age, gender, skills and competence are important factors that could help aspirants seeking to be elected or appointed into local assemblies (Crook and Manor, 1998). Crook and Manor (1998) assert that in some parts of West Africa, there is a certain relationship between the success of local government and the quality of education of the participants. Elected representatives at the local level are still disproportionately from the male, educated and professional strata of society (Crook and Manor, 1998). In most communities with more skilled, competent and educated women, a lot of them could be elected or appointed into the assembly as councilors (Prewitt, 1970). Besides, it is believed that many of the economies are both small and fragile, and there is evidence that the region south of the Sahara is being increasingly left behind in the global economy (Hyden, 2006). Hyden (2006) adds that 40% of the population in South Saharan Africa live on less than one U. S. dollar a day. Africa's share of the poorest people in the world increased from 25% to 30% during the 1990s. Only Latin America has a more unequal distribution of income than Africa. This leads to a situation where African women 'desperately attempt to fit innumerable obligations into their schedule' in terms of trying to 'earn an income, deal with the budget, savings' among others. Indeed, to be able to organize people to talk to them and share whatever vision you have with them in order to get their mandate will involve money to pay for services like the use of public address system, furniture, venues (if it is in a building), media for publicity, organizers and most times, refreshments called 'item 13' in Ghana. But more financially exhausting is that these services will not just be one time activities but may have to be regularly organized during the campaign season by the candidate if he/she wants to win. This poses a danger to the possibility of women who do not have enough financial resources be able to fund all these activities if they want to contest and win elections.

More so, membership in NGOs, political parties and trade unions may help women to gain requisite experiences and organizational skills to enable them get elected or appointed into their assemblies (Offei-Aboagye, 2008). Women just like their male counterparts

should have the opportunity to participate and hold positions in either governmental or non-governmental organizations from the bottom to top (Mill, 1869). Also, the situation where some political elites will inhibit the candidacies of hardworking and popular women in some states and as a result make voters unwilling or even reluctant to support women candidacies should be discouraged (Darcy et al, 1987). But some have also argued that the use of female quotas may help some states to shy away from taking formal steps to address challenges hindering women's participation (Matland and Montgomery, 2003). Even in Norway, some males criticized quotas as undemocratic which have a potential for helping the unqualified over the qualified, and for creating conflicts among men and women (Kelber, 1994; Mahamadu, 2010).

Additionally, the level of interaction of the people with political processes and structures prevalent in a community may largely be influenced by their culture. Different cultures and different religions view the roles of individuals differently as most communities in the Northern part of Ghana for instance restrict decision making and address of public gatherings to only men whilst confining women to domestic responsibilities (Hoftsedde, 1999). While men traditionally could devote their full time and energies to politics, women are required to split their efforts between domestic and public duties. Duverger also cites hostility (preference for males) and the male conspiracy (domination of males in political parties) as problems in some cultures confronting women's participation (Darcy et al, 1987). For instance, in Ghana, Christianity is predominant in the south with a dominant matrilineal form of hereditary where women's political importance is manifested in the 'enstooling' or installation of some women as 'Queen Mothers' (Crook and Manor, 1998). Christians are about 82% of the population in Greater Accra whilst Muslims are 10% (GLSS, 2000). Contrary to the South, the Northern Region is predominantly Muslim with other religious persuasions also present like the case of the south. Christians are about 19% of the population in the Northern Region whilst Muslims are 58%. Line of succession in the family is effectively through the male child and a lot of leadership roles are assigned according to gender. Interestingly, masculine cultures and orientations usually tend to influence the election of more males into local government positions (Bochel and Bochel, 2000). Even though the restriction of the woman to the home is not only peculiar to the north but the whole country, we can assume that the situation is more intensive in the north than the south which is credited with a relatively open and cosmopolitan culture. Hyden's view on this is simple but instructive since he contends that women's participation would be enhanced in a situation where both 'national culture and religion' are progressive and not somewhat hostile to women (Hyden, 2006 p.178).

6. Methodological Framework

The descriptive survey design was used for the study because it entailed a systematic collection and presentation of data on various issues of women participation in local level elections to give a clearer picture of the prevailing situation. Descriptive design determines the nature of prevailing conditions, practices, attitude, opinions held by persons, processes of doing things and trends that are developed (Amedahe, 2002). The target population of the study consisted of all the Assembly women of the district, both past and present members. It also included women who contested local level elections but were defeated, the officer in charge of gender issues at the District Assembly, the District Electoral Officer as well as the opinion leaders (queen mothers) in the district. Purposive and convenience sampling procedures were used to select 67 respondents for the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to collect data from the District Electoral Officer (DEO) and the District Officer in charge of gender as well as other stakeholders in the district. Indeed, apart from the DEO, all the respondents were females. Convenience sampling technique was also employed to select Assemblywomen (past and present) as well as other women who contested the local level elections but were defeated. Convenience sampling was again used to select opinion leaders made up of queen mothers. The total respondents were made up of 31 Assembly women both past and present, 18 women who had contested for the local level elections but were defeated, six Unit Committee Members who are women (Past and present), 10 opinion leaders (made up of 10 queen mothers) as well as the District Electoral Officer and Officer in charge of Gender Issues in the District Assembly. The main instruments used for the collection of the data were questionnaires and interview guide. A set of interview guide was used to gather data from the District Officer in charge of Gender Issues, the District Electoral Officer, the Assemblywomen and Unit Committee Members who were women as well as the women who contested the local elections but were defeated. A similar (interview guide) instrument was used to collect data from the opinion leaders within the district. Data gathered from the field was limited to local government elections. Analytical techniques suitable for both quantitative and qualitative studies were employed for the study.

7. Results and Discussion

The analysis of this study started with the background characteristics of respondents. The background characteristics of the respondents studied included age, educational levels, marital status and religion as shown in Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4.

| Age | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|-----------|---------|
| 20-25 | 9 | 13.4 |
| 26-31 | 15 | 22.4 |
| 32-37 | 19 | 28.4 |
| 38 and above | 24 | 35.8 |
| Total | 67 | 100.0 |

Table 1: Age distribution of respondents

Source: Field survey, 2015

These characteristics were studied to serve as bases for differentiation with regard to the views of respondents in the Afigya Kwabre district. On the issue of age, the study found that 35.8% of the respondents were between 20 and 31 years while 62% were above 31 years as seen in Table 1. This means that the majority (64.2%) of the respondents aged above 31 years. According to Odoom, Kyeremeh and Opoku (2014), due to the onerous and sensitive responsibilities entrusted to persons at the District Assemblies, representatives at the Assembly require high educational qualifications in addition to their experience in order to ensure smooth democratization. The study sought to determine the educational qualifications of the respondents. From Table 2, it is clear that 58.2% of the respondents had educational qualification ranging from JHS to SHS certificates while 32.8% had qualification ranging from Diploma to first degree. This implies that the majority (56%) of the respondents had no tertiary educational certificates. The finding of this study corroborates that of Crook and Manor (1998) who posited that people with less education will have it difficult to make any headway when it comes to local elections. Crook and Manor (1998) added that there is a certain relationship between the success of local government and the quality of education of the participants in some parts of West Africa. However, the problem with Crook and Manor's (1998) position is that given the perceived role of women in most African societies, which is being at the kitchen, it is fair to understand why many women in these areas have a relatively low educational qualification which hinders their participation. Matland and Montgomery (2003) argue that no matter how female participation in local governance is viewed, education is central to women's chances since it has the potential to shape and boost female's ability to run for office and the decision of a party's leadership to appoint them. Safty, as cited in Odoom, Opoku and Gyamfi (2015), contends that an educated population is essential to the fostering of a democratic society. Nations which fail to institute measures to educate the citizenry will find it extremely difficult to make any substantial gains in terms of development (Odoom, Opoku and Gyamfi, 2015).

| Educational Qualification | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Junior High School/MSLC | 24 | 35.8 |
| Senior High School | 15 | 22.4 |
| Certificate | 6 | 9.0 |
| Diploma | 13 | 19.4 |
| 1st Degree | 9 | 13.4 |
| Total | 67 | 100.0 |

*Table 2: Level of Education of Respondents
Source: Field survey, 2015*

On the occupation of the respondents, the study found that they were engaged in a variety of ventures ranging from petty businesses, teaching, nursing, dressmaking, hairdressing to small scale businesses as shown in Table 3. For instance, it was found that the majority (55.2%) of the respondents were into petty trading and small scale businesses while 23.9% were into formal employment. Indeed, the kind of occupation women do is very important because it affects the income level which is crucial for their financial capacity to engage in district level elections. It was observed from the study that given the kinds of occupation most of the respondents engaged in, they were not likely to raise the kind of money required to do active and competitive politics in our part of the world. Occupational status of people has been found to be correlated with their level of participation in political activities (Tianjiam, 1997).

| Occupation | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Petty trading | 22 | 32.8 |
| Small scale business | 15 | 22.4 |
| Formal employment | 16 | 23.9 |
| Others | 14 | 20.9 |
| Total | 67 | 100.0 |

*Table 3: Level of education of respondents
Source: Field survey, 2015*

Knowledge on marital status of citizens will provide vital information for planning, budgeting, policy formulation and implementation. It also enhances decision-making with regard to elections and the overall strategies to nurture democracy by the state. The study also looked into the marital status of respondents. It was found that 28% of the respondents were single, 28% were married, 14% were separated, and 14% were divorced while 16% were widows. Given the fact that the majority (72%) of the respondents were either not married, widowed or had issues with their marriages one would wonder how these women can have the peace of mind to engage in active politics coupled with the societal perception that persons who have not married are immature and so can engage in issues of serious national interests. On the issue of religion, the study revealed that the majority (59.7%) of the respondents were Christians, 32.3% were Muslims while 9.0% were Traditionalists as shown in Table 4. This means that there were more Christians in the area than in the case of the other religions. In their study on the effect of religion on political participation, Djupe and Friesen (2013) found that women do not develop skills from religious institutions at the same rate as men largely due to their distinctive personality profile.

| Religion | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Christianity | 40 | 59.7 |
| Islam | 21 | 31.3 |
| Traditional | 6 | 9.0 |
| Total | 67 | 100.0 |

*Table 4: Religious distribution of respondents
Source: Field survey, 2015*

With regard to the extent of women's participation in local level elections in the district, the results from the questionnaires as shown in Table 5 show that the majority (71.9%) of the respondents believed that it was generally low while 17.6% held a contrary view. Interviews with the key informants showed that women's participation in DAE was very low in the district. The key informants however admitted that the situation appears to be the phenomenon in the entire Ghanaian society. Darcy et al. (1987) provide some reasons for this unfortunate phenomenon. The first reason is that until recently, local government at the village or commune level was considered to be part of the private rather than the public sphere. In exercising the right at the local level a woman was only exercising a private right, not a public one. Their second reason relates to traditional activities and functions local governments pursue in the form of taking care of the poor and the handling of communal property like land. Indeed, they rightly argue that it has been widened to include welfare of citizens, health care, sanitation and education which relates to women's traditional roles and concerns. Besides, women have little time because of their household responsibilities. Given the growing demand of citizens' involvement in development coupled with the increased wave of globalization, one begins to wonder whether the reasons provided by Darcy et al (1987) continue to exude any substance. In fact, the experiences in places such as the United Kingdom, the US, France among others where more women are running for and being elected to national parliaments than ever before, with many women who hold executive positions within their nation's government only expose the inadequacies in the positions held by Darcy et al. (1987) (Lovenduski, 2005).

| Views of respondents | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------------|-----------|---------|
| Very High | 3 | 5.3 |
| High | 7 | 12.3 |
| Moderate | 6 | 10.5 |
| Low | 25 | 43.9 |
| Poor | 16 | 28.0 |
| Total | 57 | 100.0 |

*Table 5: Views of respondents on the extent of women's participation in District Assembly elections
Source: Field survey, 2015*

On the issue of the categories of women who usually participate in DAE, the study results from the questionnaire revealed that while the majority (66.7%) of the respondents said that partisan politicians usually engage in the DAE, 33.3% believed non-partisan politicians dominate the elections. Interviews with other respondents confirmed the views that the local level elections are hugely dominated by partisan politicians. One key informant intimated, "We only deceive ourselves if we say there is no partisan influence. Most of the candidates have their party affiliations." Another informant commented, "We are pretending that the election is not partisan. In the last elections, I many of the people who contested are either with the NPP or NDC." The key informants also stated that in some cases some parties sponsor some of the candidates to take part in the local elections. The situation in AKD seems to support the general view that partisan politicians are secretly involved in the DAE in Ghana which is a violation of the core reason for the conduct of the said elections. The danger in the present situation is that many of the districts are likely to be denied quality Assembly members owing to the infiltration of partisan politics where money determines the persons who are elected. Beyond this, this situation presents a rather sorry challenge to the conceptual intention of the dictates of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana. Article 248 of the 1992 Constitution flatly debar political parties from endorsing, sponsoring and campaigning for or against candidates seeking election to the District Assembly or any lower local government unit.

The study also delved into the factors that hamper women's participation in the local level elections at AKD. The results from the questionnaires are presented in a tabular form. A number of reasons were given by the respondents as shown in Table 6. They include ranked poor funds (26.3%) as first, followed by cultural beliefs (17.5%), and fear and intimidation (15.8%), inferiority complex (15.7%), and lack of support (3.5%). Other factors were religious beliefs (3.5%), family commitment (7.0%) and low political awareness (3.5%). Most of the respondents cited inferiority complex and fear and intimidation as the main factors impinging on women's participation in local level elections, followed by poor financial capacity on their part. From the above, it is clear that the issue of poor financial capacity of women had a commanding negative influence on their chance of winning local level elections. The above views were also supported by the interviewees. For instance, one interviewee remarked, "Most women want to contest the elections do not have money to campaign. It is not easy to win elections here in Ghana if you don't have much cash." Another informant intimated, "Even our culture will not make it easy for them to contest and win." The present study corroborates that of Crook and Sverrisson (2001) who found that factors such as funds, social status, education and culture affect local level elections. Of the above factors identified by Crook and Sverrisson (2001), the issue of funds appears to be more pronounced in the debates. This is

because to be able to organize people to talk to them and share whatever vision you have with them in order to get their mandate will involve money to pay for services like the use of public address system, furniture, venues, media for publicity, organizers and most times, refreshments (Crook and Sverrisson, 2001). Indeed, what is more financially fatiguing is that these services will not just be one time activities but may have to be regularly organized during the campaign season by the candidate if he/she wants to win. The assertions of Crook and Sverrisson (2001) regarding factors that affect local elections have also been supported by Abane (2014). Abane (2014) opines further that issues of self-esteem and self-confidence have considerable influence on the ability of women who win elections. Darcy and Welch (1987) similarly hold cultures that confine women to domestic issues as partly being responsible for female under-representation. According to Mahamadu (2010), the influence of culture on women participation in elections in Ghana remains undoubted.

| Factors that impinge on the participation | Frequency | Percent |
|---|-----------|---------|
| Religious reasons | 2 | 3.5 |
| Lack of support | 2 | 3.5 |
| Financial constraint | 15 | 26.4 |
| Inferiority complex | 9 | 15.8 |
| Cultural beliefs | 10 | 17.5 |
| Low political awareness | 2 | 3.5 |
| Family commitment | 4 | 7.0 |
| Fear and intimidation | 10 | 17.5 |
| Time constraint | 1 | 1.8 |
| Assembly member's restrictions | 2 | 3.5 |
| Total | 57 | 100.0 |

Table 6: Respondents' views on the factors that hinder women's participation in local level elections in the AKD
Source: Field survey, 2015

Beyond the factors that impinge on women's ability to contest and win local level elections, women also are victims of some unhealthy societal perceptions from society which are inimical to their contributions toward nation building. The respondents were asked to identify some of these unhealthy perceptions and the results have been summarized in Table 7. Some of the perceptions include disrespectfulness after winning elections (21.1%), refusal to perform domestic duties (36.8%), not natural leaders (26.3%) and pride among women in positions (15.8%). It is clear from this Table (7) that the issue of women not performing their domestic duties when they are in positions is dominant. Culture and traditions, especially in Africa, place women's abilities in the kitchen and so fail to understand and appreciate why they (women) should be included in the efforts towards national development. The results from the interview guide revealed that pride and disrespectfulness among some women in positions of authority made it tedious for other women to contest elections and win. According to Abane (2014), women have multiple role burdens which leave them with virtually no time to engage in politics. Most of these role expectations are in the areas of domestic duties. Thus, men and in some cases women are too quick to reject women who have the desire to contest elections. Offerdal, as cited by Mahamadu (2010), believed that middle aged white males are over-represented on municipal council places such as Norway. This trend of under-representation of women in local government is also evident in Japan (Bochel and Bochel, 2000). Beyond this, this study confirms those of scholars including Hyden (2006), Moser (2010), and Abane (2014) who indicate that in almost all societies, men are seen as natural leaders. This naturally makes the desire, ability and the chance of women winning elections in order to lead really difficult which needs to be addressed with the urgency it deserves if nations are to move forward in terms of development.

| Perception of society | Frequency | Percent |
|---|-----------|---------|
| Women become disrespectful after winning elections | 12 | 21.1 |
| Women refuse to perform their domestic duties when in positions | 21 | 36.8 |
| Women are naturally incapable to lead in society | 15 | 26.3 |
| Women become proud when given a position | 9 | 15.8 |
| Total | 57 | 100.0 |

Table 7: Perceptions of society on women who contest DAE
Source: Field survey, 2015

Given the obvious difficulties as a result of the unhealthy perceptions regarding women, one wonders what could be the motivation for those (women) who would still participate in local elections. It was against this backdrop that the researchers found it compelling to interrogate the benefits women derive in participating in DAE as summarized in Table 8. Some of the benefits of women's participation in DAE are promotion of the welfare of women and children (29.9%), gender balance in the District Assembly (19.3%), facilitation of community development (14.0%) as well as serving as training ground for women (8.7%). These views were generally supported by the respondents who were interviewed for the study. When they were asked whether or not, women benefit from participating in DAE, all the respondents confirmed that women obtain some benefits due to their involvement in DAE. They also

went ahead to mention some of the benefits accrued to such women including promotion of the welfare of the women and children and helping to ensure gender balance at the District Assembly.

| Benefits | Frequency | Percent |
|--|-----------|---------|
| Promotes the welfare of women and children | 17 | 29.9 |
| Gender balance in the District Assembly | 11 | 19.3 |
| Facilitate community development | 8 | 14.0 |
| For prudence and accountability in District Assembly | 9 | 15.8 |
| Women are people of influence | 7 | 12.3 |
| Serve as training ground for women | 5 | 8.7 |
| Total | 57 | 100.0 |

Table 8: Views of respondents on the benefits of participating in DAE

Source: Field survey, 2015

Other benefits include facilitation of community development, bringing about prudence and accountability in District Assembly as well as serving as training ground for women. Women participation at the local level elections is critical since the rudiments and fundamentals of local politics in general are learnt from the grassroots which may serve as a tending ground for the development of national politicians (Mahamadu, 2010). Equitable participation of women in politics and government is indispensable to building and maintaining democracy. Women participation helps to promote national and local policies that address the socio-economic and political challenges facing women, children and disadvantaged groups. Besides, women are very effective in promoting honest government coupled with their commitment towards peace building and conflict resolutions. Women are linked to positive developments in education, infrastructure and health standards at the local levels (National Democratic Institute, 2010).

The study also looked at some of the measures to enhance women's participation in local governance. Table 9 presents the results from the questionnaire. From Table 9, it is clear that a number of measures could be used to enhance women's participation in local level elections in the district. The respondents ranked the use of incentives (38.6%) as first, followed by affirmative action (31.6%), gender education (17.5%) and gender equality (12.3%). It is therefore clear from that the dominant measures to enhance women's participation in local level elections are the use of incentives and affirmative action. The results from the interview showed no difference from that of the questionnaire. The interviewees also identified gender education, affirmative action and motivation as some of the measures to enhance women's participation. They also added the establishment of women groups for public sensitization, public education by recognized authorities and provision of financial support through appropriate employment creation policies and measures as viable alternatives in this regard.

| Measure | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------|-----------|------------|
| Affirmative action | 18 | 31.6 |
| Gender equality | 7 | 12.3 |
| Gender education | 10 | 17.5 |
| Incentives | 22 | 38.6 |
| Total | 57 | 100.0 |

Table 9: Measures to enhance women's participation in local governance

Source: Field survey, 2015

The interviewees however believed that the issue of affirmative action has been, at best, a lip service because of the obvious failure on the part of authorities to implement it. On the issue of affirmative action, Crook and Manor (1998) argue that unlike Africa, Asia has a long history of experimentation with affirmative action to incorporate the poor and the excluded into politics, and there is a political discourse on poverty and related issues. The success of democratic local government is therefore often a function of the extent to which local elite dominance has been challenged or mitigated by participation of the poor, lower castes or women. Crook & Manor (1998) assert that the election of members into the local area assemblies disproportionately favor the wealthy and better educated at the expense of 'the poor and the unschooled' in Ghana. Kelber (1994) argues that if economic and social status of women is to be raised and prevailing inequities overcome, women's access to and inclusion in the policy-and decision-making bodies and institutions that shape our societies must be broadened and strengthened.

As a strategy to improve women's participation in local elections, Offei-Aboagye, as cited in Agyeman-Duah (2008), advocates for the material and political empowerment of people at the sub-national level. Material empowerment refers to the mitigation of social and economic challenges different from the political aspect which deals with the empowerment of people and groups to be more powerful, vocal and visible at the local level to strengthen democracy and decentralization (Agyeman-Duah, 2008). Beyond these measures, it is believed that concrete efforts tailored towards sending more females to schools and retaining them will help to enhance literacy rates among women in Ghana. Besides, for those women who may have already gone past the stage of school going age, non-formal teaching or forms of education can be used to get them basic literacy, numeracy and communication skills which are necessary and could be used to facilitate females' competitiveness in election and subsequent performance of their duties inside the assemblies (Mahamadu, 2010). Thus, government's intervention including school feeding, capitation grant, free school uniforms should be

broadened especially to reach the under-privileged in addition to the provision of basic educational needs such as school buildings, chalk, and textbooks. Beyond this, the government ought to avert itself to the critical issues of financing, teacher quality and infrastructure within the broader framework of educational planning.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

Women's participation in local level elections in the AKD leaves much to be desired. This is also a reflection of the general situation in Ghana. Like it happens in other parts of Ghana, elections at the local level have not been free of partisan politics in the district. Factors such as lack of funds, inferiority complex, fear and intimidation, cultural beliefs, and limited time constrained the participation of women in local level elections. Women who partake in elections were perceived as becoming disrespectful after winning elections, refused to perform domestic duties, not natural leaders and become proud when they are in positions. The dividends of women's participation in DAE included the promotion of the welfare of women and children, gender balance in the District Assembly, facilitation of community development, and also serves as training ground for women. Measures such as the use of incentives, proper affirmative action, improved gender education and gender equality could be used to promote women's participation in DAE. The study recommended that the District Assembly properly collaborates with the Ministry of Local Government and Development, the Ministry of Gender Protection and Social Welfare as well as the Development partners to design policy programs and initiatives that will be tailored towards improving poverty levels among women in the country through capacity building programs for women. Besides, the government and the District Assembly should collaborate with civil society organizations (CSOs) to put concrete efforts tailored towards sending more females to schools and retained since their numbers usually diminish as they go higher the educational ladder. This will improve literacy, numeracy and communication skills which are necessary and could be used to facilitate females' competitiveness in election and subsequent performance of their duties inside the assemblies. Also, the government should effectively team up with CSOs to make affirmative action and gender education programs a living reality in Ghana. Again, the EC officials in the district should properly collaborate with the National Commission for Civic Education to provide adequate public education for the electorates in the district. Finally, the government should adequately resource the National Commission for Civic Education to discharge its mandate of educating people on their civic rights and responsibilities.

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