Obstacles to Women Representation and Participation in Local Governance: A Case Study of Sissala East District of Ghana

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Abstract

The study set out to investigate the obstacles to participation of women in local governance in the Sissala East District of Ghana. It covered 56 respondents made up of 11 assembly members, 30 Unit Committee members, six women group leaders, three female candidates in the 2015 District Level Election and six Non-Governmental Organization gender desk officers. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were employed to select the respondents. The main instrument used to gather data was semi-structured questionnaire using interview approach. The study showed that women's participation in local governance was low as evident by the low representation of women in local governance. The factors that contributed to low women participation included cultural and male prejudices against women, low economic empowerment of women, the low self-confidence of women, low educational levels and excessive marital obligations. The study, therefore, recommended that civic education, economic empowerment, and leadership training should be embarked upon to improve women's participation in local governance in the district.
Key words: Local governance, District assembly, women participation, obstacles.

1. Introduction

For some time now, women representation and participation of women in governance from the local to the national has attracted the attention of many people**.** Worldwide, the trend of low patronage of women in politics and public decision-making has been documented, where the representation of women in parliament has increased only slightly from 9 percent in 1995 to 16 percent in 2004 (UNCHS, 2000).

There are no regulations put up by the state that prevent women from participating in local governance in Ghana, though women usually face more obstacles than men from cultural, institutional, social, economic barriers to time constraints. Ofei-Aboagye (2000) notes that lack of funds required for campaigning; time constraints due to women's multiple roles as wives, mothers and workers; high illiteracy levels among women; and the deep ingrained feeling that politics is a dirty game have widely held women from venturing into politics.

Ohene-Konadu (2001) identifies financial constraints, institutional cultures, low knowledge on local government issues, lack of confidence, low literacy levels, the triple burden of mothering, and societal attitudes as barriers that women face in politics in Ghana.

Brown, Ghartey and Ekumah (1996) outline the obstacles preventing women from presenting themselves for election to the district assembly as: the lack of self-confidence among women; the general apathy among women; the general high illiteracy among females in Ghana; the pressures of domestic chores coupled with child bearing and caring.

ABANTU (2006) notes that several factors explain for the low numbers and success rate of women in the district assembly elections in Ghana. These are socio-cultural prejudices and sexist stereotypes where women are seen as not worthy of being leaders in some cultures; the low levels of education of women; the lack of skills in the art of political campaign, lobbying and advocacy; the inability of most women to mobilize resources to fund campaign; household responsibilities that leave little time for women to campaign; the interference of political parties in the campaigns and the absence of a coherent quota system or legal affirmative action

It must be noted that the lack of access to finances, inadequate skills, gender stereotypes accompanied by the assertion of male power, deep-rooted cultural prejudices are not specific to Ghana but common to most, if not all, countries, including the so-called developed countries.

According to Myers (2002) a number of factors account for the low-representation of women in politics in the Caribbean. These include the negative perception of politics as being corrupt and "dirty" resulting to a number of women not willing to get into mainstream politics; the reproductive role of women which confines them to the home keeping duties and therefore putting a lot of obligations on them rendering them with little time to engage in public life; inadequate public speaking skills; the lack of funds for political campaigns; and fear of public invasion of private life.

Drage (2001) notes that traditional beliefs that perceived women of not capable of being leaders in the society has served as a barrier to women participation in politics in Thailand. Also, in Malaysia women lack of education at a high level has been identified as inhibiting women's political participation, whereas in the Philippines, the triple roles of women were also noted as obstacles that considerably affect women's participation.

Mbatha (2003) asserts that among factors that inhibit women's effective participation in local governance in South Africa are family and household responsibilities, male councillors domineering attitudes towards women, and the use of English language in conducting business in council meetings.

According to Goetz (2003), three structural characteristics of women's position in social relation inhibit their participation in public life. First, gender-based division of labour and power in most societies creates practical and psychological constraints on women's engagement in politics. Women double duty of work in reproduction and production limit their time and energy for activism in local government since meetings are held at antisocial hours and far from home. Second, women's lower human and physical capital base due to disparities between the sexes in access to resources has been a limiting factor. And, third, women's sexual inferiority to men weakens the value of their activism in politics. This is because in most societies the terms of 'sexual contract' are such as to establish that women's consent to social and political arrangements may be assumed, not elicited.

The International Union of Local Government Authorities, IULA (1998b) submits that the obstacles to the participation of women in the local governance process are: inadequate access to education on the part of women; women multiple roles in society; women's inadequate financial resources for election campaign; women's lack of access to information relating to the public sphere; and the view that public sphere is a sphere traditionally reserved for men.

Globally, measures to increase participation of women in public life have not achieved much as women remain marginalized and under-represented in decision making bodies. Several studies about women's political participation both in and outside Africa, as well as Ghana, have focused on the gender imbalance of domination of men over women and strategies to increasing women involvement and influence in social and public life. Similarly, studies on women in local government has centered on the numbers of women elected, the obstacles and enabling conditions to their participation, and the impact of their participation (IULA, 1998b; Drage, 2001).

The International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) (1998), approximated the percentage of women local councilors in 1997in the USA as 23%, in Europe as 20%, in Canada as 18%, less than five percent in Africa and 3.8% in Latin America. However, there is great difference among countries in Europe varying from four percent in Greece to 40% in Sweden (IULA, 1998a). According to Borisyuk and Thrasher, cited in Lambe et al (2004), in the UK, women remain under-represented in virtually all democratic institutions, but the representation of women at the local government level has improved in recent decades, with only slightly more than 25% of councilors being women and approximately 22% of council cabinet positions held by women. However, these proportions vary between different types of authority and between the same types of authority.

In 1995 a comparative study of the representation of women in national parliament found women underrepresented through-out Africa ranging from 0.6% to 27.3% with 8% in Ghana (Ohene-Konadu, 2001). The representation of women in local councils is low in sub-Saharan Africa where it is estimated at less than five percent, with variation in Tanzania and Uganda where it is estimated to be 30% (UNCHS, 2000). In Uganda, this has been due to affirmative action where the Local Government Act of 1997 reserved 30% of seats in the local councils for women to be competed for exclusively among women (UNCHS, 2000; Jayal, 2005)

Since the introduction of the District Assembly concept in Ghana in 1988, the participation of women in local government has been low and virtually remained so. Women had occupied positions both as elected and appointed assembly members, but they constituted only a small percentage of the total membership: 3% of elected members in 1994, 5% in 1998 and 7% in 2002 (Offei-Aboagye 2000; ABANTU, 2004; Offei-Aboagye 2007). The situation is not different for women parliamentarians who account for 3.5%, 8%, 9%, 9.5% and 10.9% of elected parliamentarians in the 1979, 1992, 1996, 2000 and 2004 elections respectively (Offei-Aboagye, 2007).

Again in 1998, only three out of 110 Presiding Members, only 12(10.9%) of 110 District Chief Executives (DCEs) and only three (3.6%) of 110 District Co-ordinating Directors were women (Ofei-Aboagye, 2000). Between 2001 and 2004, there were only six female DCEs and as of February 2007, 13 out of 138 DCEs were female (Offei-Aboagye, 2007).

To ensure that women are represented in the local government system, In 1998, the Ghana Government gave a directive that allocated 30% of the appointed membership of District Assemblies for women. This made it possible for District Assemblies that would not have had any women to do so for the first time. Numbers of women Assembly members were increased somehow by the central government directive that at least 30 per

cent of appointed members should be women. However, the women appointees rarely exceeded this minimum (Offei- Aboagye, 2000). In response to the first directive in 1998, it was estimated that about 40% of District Assemblies had not fulfilled the directive (ABANTU, 2006). The government increased the quota to 50% in 2002 but only six of the districts achieved the 50% target (ABANTU, 2006).

From 1988-1994, only 17(6%) out of a total of 283 assembly members of the five districts in the Upper West Region were female and only six were elected. In 1998 only four women were elected in the Upper West Region. In 2002, 16 (8 %) out of a total of 198 elected assembly members were women.

In the 2006 elections, the percentage of elected women in the Upper West Region in each district was less than 7% with the exception of Nadowli District. There was a decline in the percentage of elected female assembly members from 8% in 1998 to 5.4% in 2006. Two districts, namely Wa East and Wa West districts had no female elected member (Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Environment, 2007).

1.1. Statement of the problem

Since 1988, women participation in local governance in the Sissala East District which was part of the then Sissala District before being carved out as a separate district in 2004 has been low and the pattern has not changed much over the years. In 2002, two out of 30 elected assembly members of the then Sissala district were women. Similarly, in 2006, only one out of the 15 elected members of the Sissala East District Assembly was a woman. The number of women appointees did not go beyond the government directive of 50% allocation to women. Thus, three of the six appointed members were women, thereby bringing the number of women in the 21-member assembly to four. Efforts by non- governmental organizations (NGOs) and other interest groups to urge women in the district to aspire to contest the District Level Elections and also the electorate to vote for female candidates have not yielded much. For instance, only four women contested in the 15 electoral areas in the Sissala East District in 2006. In 2015 out of a number of 32 assembly members, 28 are males and 4 females. The low level of participation of women in local governance in the district leads to dominance and reinforcement of male interest. Ironically, women form about 51% of the population of the district (GSS, 2002; GSS, 2014).

The objectives of the present study were therefore to identify the obstacles for the low representation and participation of women in the District Assembly as well as to explore the strategies that can be used by stakeholders to augment women participation in local governance in the district. The study was guided by the following research questions:

Research 1: What are the obstacles limiting the participation of women in the local government system?

Research question 2: What strategies can be used by stakeholders to promote women participation in local governance in the district?

1.2. Significance of the study

The study had some developmental significance. It was hoped it could help development workers, especially gender desk officers and other interest groups in the district to be aware of factors limiting the effective participation of women in local governance and take steps to minimize them. The study could equip all those interested in women participation in local governance with effective strategies so as to ensure an increase in the number of women in local government structures and also their effective participation.

1.3. Delimitation

The study was confined to the Sissala East District of the Upper West Region of Ghana. It would have been more appropriate to include other districts in the Upper West Region but this was not possible due to constraints relating to time, money and other resources.

1.4. Limitations

It must be noted that, the perspectives from the District Chief Executive and the District Co-ordinating Director which could have enriched the discussions on some issues were not possible as several efforts to meet them failed. Moreover, the earlier arrangement to record the interviews was discarded as it was noticed during the pilot study that most respondents were not ready to have their responses recorded. As a result, attempts were made to conscientiously write some responses word for word. As such, the data collection process was cumbersome.

2. Materials and Methods

The study is a descriptive case study about the participation of women in local governance in the Sissala East District. Descriptive research involves the collection of data to answer questions concerning a subject under

study. It determines and reveals the way things are (Gay, 1992). The case study method allows for in-depth study of a social phenomenon; however, the results relate to the unit of analysis only and allow no inductive generalizations. Based on the objectives of the study, Assembly members, Unit Committee members, special interest groups comprising gender desk officers of non-governmental organizations, leaders of women groups and women who contested the 2015 District Assembly elections but where neither elected nor appointed constituted the population of the study. A list of electoral areas, assembly members, numbers of Unit Committee members per each electoral area and women candidates in the 2015 elections which served as the sample frame was obtained from the District Electoral Commission for the study.

Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were employed to select the respondents. Purposive sampling was used because certain individual units by their characteristics provided more and better information on the study than a randomly selected unit. The selection did not involve intricate procedure of random sampling. It simply involved picking units on the basis of their known characteristics. According to Patton (1990), the logic and power of purposive sampling lie in information-rich cases from which one can learn a great deal about the issues of central importance to the purpose of the research.

 Out of the existing 32 Assembly members, a sample size of 11 representing 34.4% was selected. This was because the time and financial resources available for the study were very limited. Four female Assembly members and the Presiding member were purposively selected whilst the rest (5) were selected randomly. The electoral areas of the selected Assembly members were used to select the unit committee members. All female Unit Committee members of the selected electoral areas were purposively selected, whilst the male Unit Committee members were chosen using the lottery method of simple random sampling. All the three female candidates in the 2015 elections were purposively sampled.

The special interest groups made up of representatives of non-governmental organizations and leaders of women groups were conveniently sampled due to the limited time budget and the fact that there was no readily available sample frame for this category of respondents. In all 56 respondents made up of 30 Unit Committee members representing 53.6%, 11 assembly members representing 19.6%, six leaders of women groups representing 10.7%, three female candidates in the 2015 District Assembly Elections representing 5.4% and six NGO personnel representing 10.7% were sampled.

The primary sources of data were mainly qualitative using a semi-structured interview schedule. The primary purpose of this instrument was to gather as much data as possible. The basic structure of the interview schedule consisted of both closed and open-ended questions.

For easy analysis and interpretation, responses given were coded. Coding was done at the interview schedule design stage where specific answers to some questions were provided. The answers were deduced from the various literature that was reviewed before developing the interview schedule. Coding was also done at data entry stage to provide for responses that were not thought of before hand.

The coding framework was entered into the Statistical Product and Services Solutions (SPSS) version 21 software to facilitate the interpretation and analysis of the data in a more meaningful way, and also make the illustration with graphs and tables manageable. The SPSS software was used to obtain frequency distributions and percentages.

3. Results and Discussion

The demographic characteristics of the respondents were solicited from the respondents and are presented in Table 1.

From Table 1, in terms of gender distribution, 31 (55.3%) were males while 25 (44.7%). This means that males exceeded females in terms their representation in the local government system in the district. The higher number of male assembly and unit committee respondents reflects the existing male dominance in these bodies in the district. This supports similar findings by Offei-Aboagye (2000, 2007) that women representation in local government is low. Also, it can be seen that majority, 24 (42.9%) of the respondents were between the ages of 31 to 40, while 5 (8.9%) were between 51 to 60 years. In terms of marital status, 44 (78.6%) were married 7 (12.5%) were single, 4 (7.1%) were separated and only 1 (1.8%) widowed. The majority (62.5%) of the respondents were Moslems, while 28.6% were Christians and 8.9% were those who professed the African Traditional Religion. This is confirmed by the Ghana Statistical Service that Islam constitutes the dominant religion in the district (GSS, 2014). Of the 56 respondents, 25% had no formal education, 12.5 % had primary education, 14.3 % had their education up to middle or J.S.S school level, 17.8% of the respondents had up to secondary level education, 14.3% had education up to college level, and 16.1% had education up to university level.

Table 1: Background information of respondents (N = 56)

Variables	Categories	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	31	55.3
	Female	25	44.7
Age	21 - 30	13	23.2
	31 - 40	24	42.9
	41 - 50	14	25.0
	51 - 60	5	8.9
Marital status	Single	7	12.5
	Married	44	78.6
	Separated	4	7.1
	Widowed	1	1.8
Religion	Traditional	5	8.9
	Christianity	16	28.6
	Islam	35	62.5
Educational Background	None	14	25.0
	Primary	7	12.5
	Middle/JSS	8	14.3
	Secondary	10	17.8
	College(Teacher training)	8	14.3
	University	9	16.1

Source: Survey Data (2016).

Research 1: What are the obstacles limiting the participation of women in the local government system?

Respondents' views were sought on women interest in taking up positions as assembly members and the obstacles they face. Their views are presented in Tables 2a and 2b.

Table 2a: Do you think women are interested in becoming assembly members?

Response	Number	Percent (%)
Yes	30	53.6
No	26	46.4
Total	56	100

Source: Survey data (2016)

From Table 2a, about 53.9 percent of the 56 respondents reported that women were interested in becoming assembly members while the remaining 46.4 percent thought otherwise. Despite the interest of women in becoming assembly members, the respondents, however, noted that women failed to present themselves as candidates and those who attempted, the success rate was discouraging. Indeed, figures from the district electoral commission showed that only 9.1% and 4.1% of those who stood for assembly member positions in the district assembly level elections in 2006 and 2015 respectively were women. Besides, only one (1) woman representing 6.7% and 4.3% of elected assembly members in 2006 and 2015 respectively was female. There is, therefore, the need for an explanation for the low level of women participation in the local governance system.

The views of respondents were sought on the obstacles that women face in seeking elective positions in the assembly. Their views are presented in Table 2b.

Table 2b: Views of respondents on obstacles facing women in seeking elective assembly member positions (N=56)

Obstacles	Frequency	%
Cultural/male/religious prejudice	50	89.3
Inadequate financial resources	31	55.4
Low confidence	26	46.4
Low level of education	18	32.1
Lack of support from fellow women	16	28.6
Marital obligations	11	19.6
Politics is dangerous	10	17.9
Inadequate support from husband	9	16.1
Afraid of one's integrity	9	16.1
Inadequate Skills	8	14.3

Source: Survey data (2016)

From Table 2b, the respondents identified the obstacles that women face in seeking elective positions in the assembly the Sissala East District to factors such as cultural and male prejudices against women as leaders, low economic empowerment of women to fund electoral campaign, low self-confidence of women to stand for elections, high illiteracy level among women, low peer support and petty jealousies among women, excessive marital obligations of women, the dangerous nature of politics often characterized by insults and acrimony, inadequate support from husbands to allow their wives to go into public life, women afraid of their integrity and, inadequate skills.

From Table 2b, it is evident that Cultural, male and religious prejudice featured very high among the respondents (50 representing 89%) as an obstacle facing women in seeking elective positions at the local level. They contended that cultural and male prejudices subject women to inferior status of not worthy to be leaders and prohibit women to speak in a public gathering. This has resulted in women having a low self-esteem, a lack of personal confidence and courage to get into leadership positions in the district. Indeed, many studies have come up with similar findings. For instance, ABANTU (2006) featured socio-cultural and sexist stereotypes as dominant factors for the low participation of women in district level elections in Ghana. Brown et al (1996) made a similar observation in the Central Region that social discrimination and cultural discrimination could not allow women to interact with the public. Fick (2000: 40) notes that as a consequence of traditional stereotypes, South African women find themselves "unable to move out of the private sphere of home and family into the public realm of productive work and politics". Drage (2001) writes that traditional views on women's role in the family are strong in Thailand and such views had resulted in women not being perceived as dependable leaders, a belief which inhibited women's political participation. Rather, only men were traditionally involved in politics.

The respondents (31 representing 55%) also cited inadequate financial resources as an obstacle women face. Respondents contended that as housewives, women have little time left at their disposal to engage in income-generating activities as they are occupied with household responsibilities. The lack of financial resources as a limiting factor to women participation has been noted by IULA (1998b), Ofei-Aboagye (2000), Ohene- Konadu (2001), Myers (2002), Goetz (2003), and ABANTU (2006).

Low confidence was also cited by respondents (26 representing 46%) as a factor standing in the way of women quest in becoming assembly members. Women have been brainwashed to be subordinates of men and as such play second fiddle to men and that their place is the kitchen. As a result of these socio-cultural factors and age-long traditions, women suffer from a low self-esteem and confidence to seek political leadership.

The generally low level of education among females was cited as one of the obstacles by 18 respondents representing 32%. Generally, women in the district have lower educational levels as compared to those of their male counterparts (GSS, 2000). Brown, Ghartey and Ekumah (1996), Offei Aboagye (2000), Ohene-Konadu (2002) and Abantu (2006) in similar studies identified low literacy levels among women as a barrier to their participation in local government. This is because; the use of English in conducting business in the assembly serves as a barrier to a number of potential female candidates due to their inadequate knowledge and proficiency of the English language. The low literacy levels among the women in the district can be attributed partly to socio-cultural prejudices. Socio-cultural beliefs that regard the woman's place in the society to be the kitchen had led to the placement of low premium on female education. Also, the belief that a married woman including

her property belongs to her husband's family has led to placement on a high premium of the education of the male child in the event of limited family resources.

Inadequate support from fellow women was cited by respondents (16 representing 29%) as an obstacle to women participation in local governance. Cultural prejudices coupled with a lack of confidence had led to women not seeing anything good in fellow women candidates in district level elections and therefore do not lend them their support.

Marital pressures were also cited by respondents as another factor standing in the way of women participation in local governance. Domestic chores like child-bearing, looking after the family, providing farm labor and production of food hinder women participation in local governance as they are left with little time for public service. The findings of Brown et al (1996), Offei Aboagye (2000), Ohene-Konadu (2001), Drage (2001) and Geotz (2003) have corroborated the multiple or triple role of women as a barrier to women participation in politics.

The dangerous nature of politics, in general, was cited as a factor for limiting women's political advancement. It must be noted that political campaign in most parts of Ghana is characterized by insults and acrimony and those who cannot withstand these insults will bow out. This view has been cited by Offei-Aboagye (2000) that in Ghana, political activity is considered as 'dirty' and is not for decent women, as a result, close relatives and husbands are "reluctant to have women in public eye".

Inadequate support from husbands was also cited as a factor limiting women leadership or political ambition. Due to the perceived dangerous nature of the political activity, husbands are not willing to allow their wives to go into public life. Moreover, traditional beliefs that a woman cannot lead a man, for that matter the husband, make most husbands reluctant to allow their wives to get into leadership positions in the community.

Another factor mentioned by respondents as an obstacle to women seeking political positions in local governance was the issue of women being afraid of their integrity. As mentioned earlier, politics is perceived as 'dirty' and sometimes dangerous, so, most women, even though might be interested in political positions, would not compromise their integrity for that. Due to insults, mudslinging and violence sometimes associated with politics most women cannot withstand that and as such will not engage in it.

Inadequate skills were also cited by respondents as an obstacle. Most women, due to their low educational levels, lack essential skills in public speaking, campaigning, negotiation, and lobbying. These were skills necessary for the advancement of assembly women if they are to compete on an even level with men. Offei-Aboagye (2000) identified lack of public speaking skills and the inability to manage male intimidations as restraining factors against women even when they are elected.

In conclusion, it could be observed that all the factors hindering women participation in local governance in the Sissala East District were human-induced or man-made compounded by tradition and reinforced by society at large.

Research 2: What are the strategies to promote women participation in local governance in the district?

The study also sought to identify strategies to promote women participation in local governance. This was done by seeking the opinions of the respondents on some strategies that could be used to promote the participation of women in local governance and their opinions are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Suggested strategies to overcome low women participation (N = 56)

Strategies	No	%
Civic Education	49	87.5
Economic Empowerment	41	73.2
Capacity building	25	44.6
Support from fellow women	20	35.7
More exposure	17	30.4
Girl-child education	15	26.7
Encouraged by male counterparts	12	21.4
Increased capacity of NGOs to support women	11	19.6
Family support	10	17.9
Reserve place for women	9	16.1

Source: Survey data (2016)

From Table 3,   respondents outlined civic education (49 representing 88%), economic empowerment (41 representing 73%), capacity building (25 representing 45%), support from fellow women (20 representing 36%), more exposure (17 representing 30%), girl-child education (15 representing 27%), encouragement from male counterparts (12 representing 21%), NGO support (11 representing 20%), family support (10 representing 18%) and reserve places for women (9 representing 16%).

Civic education was rated highest by respondents. It would be recalled that cultural/male/religious prejudices were identified as the main obstacle to women's advancement in local governance in the district. These prejudices included age-old beliefs that women are objects of male domination, inferior, receptacles for reproduction of the human race, unfit to provide leadership and good only for the kitchen and are forbidden to speak in a public gathering. Outmoded as these beliefs were, they still gain prominence in the society in general and amongst men in particular. It therefore, comes not as a surprise that the respondents rated this barrier as number one, and suggested civic education as the main solution. Civic education should involve the society at large to enlighten the society. It should aim at unlocking the age-old social prejudices that make a male superior and a female inferior. Civic education should liberate people to see both sexes as equal partners in the development process.

Economic empowerment was noted by the respondents as crucial to the participation of women in local governance. It would be recalled that district-level election campaigns demanded a lot of financial and material resources and if one did not have enough money then he/she should forget about a political career. Women must be supported financially by stakeholders to enable them avail themselves for elections and also carry an electioneering campaign.

Respondents also cited capacity building as a solution to the challenges women face in their participation in local governance. Many respondents cited the leadership shortcomings of women such as lack of confidence, lack of presentation skills, poor public speaking abilities, poor public relations, lack of assertiveness, emotional, and easily demoralized. These characteristics could be reversed through training. This view has been supported by Ofei-Aboagye (2000), Ohene-Konadu (2001) and Myers (2002) that to ensure the effective participation of women in local government they need to be given training or capacity building. This is because the effectiveness of women in local government comes not only from numbers (i.e. the achievement of a "critical mass"), but also from having the requisite skills. It is essential that women members of local government possess the requisite skills, such as literacy skills and skills in the writing and interpretation of legislation, as well as networking and public speaking to be effective members of local government, otherwise they risk being sidelined.

Another suggestion by the respondents was that women should support one another. Thus, women should do away with prejudices and have confidence in themselves.

Exposure was cited as a means to encourage women's participation in local governance. The women in the district should get the opportunity to witness how women ministers, women parliamentarians, and women DCEs interact with their male counterparts as equals, especially in parliament.

Formal education of the 'girl-child' was also cited by respondents as a means of promoting the participation of women in local governance. Due to their low level of education, women were not confident to come forward to aspire for leadership positions in the district. Therefore, if more women were educated their confidence level would increase and such women would be liberated to stand up as leaders in the society. This view is supported by Shamim and Kumari (2004) when they contend that in India, most elected women emphasized the fact that their participation could be better if they had functional education, control over resources and also training on the various intricacies involved in the political field

Respondents also noted the important role played by NGOs in promoting the cause of women in general and women in local governance in particular, and demanded an expanded role of NGOs. These roles include civic education, leadership training for women, and economic empowerment programmes for women.   It is imperative, therefore, for the NGOs to continue to play these roles on an expanded and effective level.

Affirmative action such as reserving places for women in local governance as it pertains now where 50% of the appointed members are women was cited by respondents as one of the solutions to getting more women in local governance in the Sissala East District. However, some of the respondents argued that political authorities used this policy to recruit their favorites, who turned out to be not sufficiently qualified. Nonetheless, if applied judiciously, affirmative action would go a long way to get some of the most highly qualified, intelligent and dedicated women who would not stand for elections due to the perceived "dirty" nature of politics. This is supported by Jayal (2005), that it is now well established that, worldwide, it is only those countries with quota systems that have the representation of women in local government exceeding 15 percent. However, according to the ILO (2004), the use of quota system has been criticized as being biased and inequitable. Several countries have objected to the use of quotas by contending that they are at variance with the principle of gender equality

and bias against other disadvantaged groups. Moreover, quotas undermine women efforts to exhibit their abilities. It is also postulated that quotas create a condition where women who are elected devoid of the support of quotas put themselves superior to those who are helped by them.

4. Conclusion

The study was set out to identify the obstacles for the low participation of women in local governance in Sissala East District as well as explore the strategies to promote the participation of women in local governance. The respondents identified the factors for the low participation of women in local governance in the Sissala East District to factors such as cultural and male prejudices against women as leaders, low economic empowerment of women to fund electoral campaign, low self-confidence of women to stand for elections, high illiteracy level among women, low peer support and petty jealousies among women, excessive marital obligations of women, the dangerous nature of politics often characterized by insults and acrimony, inadequate support from husbands to allow their wives to go into public life, women afraid of their integrity and, inadequate skills. In summary, it could be concluded that all the factors hindering women participation in local governance in the Sissala East District were human-induced or man-made compounded by tradition and reinforced by society at large.

The respondents, therefore, suggested civic education, economic empowerment, leadership training, socialization of women leading to attitudinal change towards fellow women, exposure of women to see how women parliamentarians interact with their male counters as equals; formal education of the girl-child, and affirmative action such as allocation of 60% of appointed members to women as strategies that can be used to promote the participation of women in local governance in the district.

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