WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN GHANA*

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ABSTRACT

There is a growing recognition of the key role that women play in the economic and social development of a country. The empowerment of women has become an integral part of us. Therefore, we need to understand the processes through which we can ensure their empowerment and political participation. First of all, this study critically examines the socio-cultural problems that serve as barriers to women empowerment and the concrete policies and programs needed to nip them in the bud. As a result of this, the study also analyses the government of Ghana's policies and programs aimed at empowering women. These were designed and executed according to the political settlements approach. The study, therefore, examines this approach and uses both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze them. In the end, data analysis will prove that these policies were successful in ensuring Women empowerment and political participation.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Political Participation, Government, Policies, Institutions.

JEL Codes: I24, I32, J16.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ghana was one of the first countries to introduce the quota system in the election of parliamentarians in 1960. Unfortunately, after so many years women, women empowerment (WE) and therefore their political participation (PP) have not been accorded the needed push to flourish. Ghana has rectified all International conventions on women and introduced the needed policies and programmes with the aim of breaking the socio-cultural barriers that impede WE and PP.

According to Awumbila (2001) these programmes helped to generate self confidence in their own abilities, enhanced their dignity and led them actively participate in and contribute effectively to the growth and development of their localities (cited in Odame, 2010: 2). Although, the 1992 constitution of the Ghana states in article 17(2) states that "A person shall not be discriminated against on grounds of gender, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed or social or economic status. There are still socio-cultural barriers that impede WE and PP. There is therefore the need to address these barriers and bridge

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the apparent inequalities between men and women. The Government of Ghana (GOG) together with stakeholders therefore decided to nip these problems in the bud.

Research problem

It has been observed that women in African countries are not independent in taking decisions because most of them do not have economic sustenance. This is especially true for married women because most of them depend entirely on their husbands. As result of this, they are not empowered and so unable to take part in political activities.

Research objectives

The specific objectives of this study are:

• To demystify the concepts of women empowerment and political participation.

• To analyze Sara Hlupekile's conceptual framework for women empowerment in order to bring to bear the socio-cultural barriers to women empowerment and political participation.

• It also seeks explore and share Ghana's experience in using the political settlement approach to empower women and thereby sensitising them on their political rights.

Research questions

 This study seeks to answer the following questions:

• How are the concepts of WE and PP defined?

• How does Sara Hlupekile Longwe's framework for WE apply to Ghana?

• What policies and programs did Ghana put in place to address the barriers to WE and PP?

Significance of the study

The implementation of a good and sustainable policy is sine qua non to economic growth and development of a country. This study is expected to be beneficial to managers, planners and policy makers in their quest to make well planned and results-oriented policies. One of the numerous problems of African countries is the implementation of knee-jerk policies. This research paper would therefore serve as a rallying point for policy ideas and implementation strategies.

2.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Sara Hlupekile Longwe's framework for WE

This study is based on Sara Hlupekile Longwe's conceptual framework for WE A consultant on gender and development for the United Nations and based in Zambia. She was employed as a teacher in Zambia and became famous when she took the Ministry of Education to court and had judgment in her favour. She was suspended for wearing trousers to school and sued the education ministry and won the

case. She was the chairperson of a very successful NGO in Zambia between 1997- 2003. Her theoretical framework is important in understanding WE and PP.

According to her framework, there are five (5) distinct levels of equality: 1. welfare 2.access 3.conscientization 4.participation and 5.control. According to her, each of these levels of equality exists in any social and economic life. However, the level achieved by an individual determines the level of empowerment. These levels according to her are hierarchical in that the higher one gets to the top the better it will be for the empowerment of that person. This means the degree of inequality between men and women reduces as moves higher to the top.

Figure 1. Sara Hlupekile Longwe's Theoretical Framework For Women Empowerment
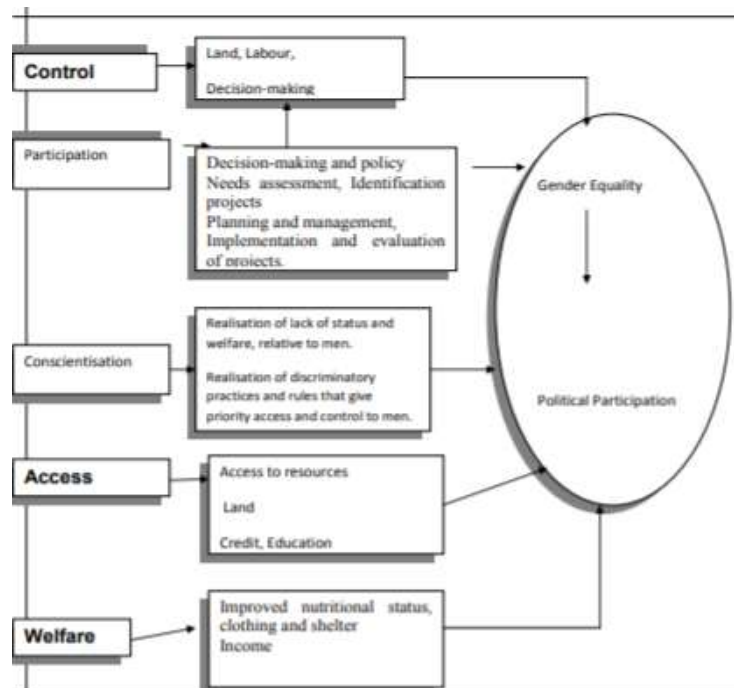
Source: Odame (2010), p.5

2.2. Limitations of The Framework

The framework is not designed to explain why and how a program works. It focuses on only three levels of equality namely positive, equal and negative impact and neglects success of a policy. It does not highlight the importance of feedbacks on policies to ensure adjustments and review. It neglects the role of government and institutions as the distributor of the national cake and the implementers of policies and programs respectfully.

2.3. Political Settlements Approach

The solutions to the limitations of Sara Hlupekile Longwe's framework for women empowerment is provided by the political settlements approach. This approach was adopted because of two problems:

a. Policy makers and planners realized that policies that worked in some places could not work in other places.

b. They also noted that institutions which were solving problems in some places were not successful in other places.

According to Khan (2018), every institution has actors who have their own interests and as such they can support programs to ensure success, or oppose the programs which will eventually spell doom for the implementation of the program (p.636). Their vested interests should be in conformity with the programs to ensure successful implementation.

So, for a policy to work in an organization, all the institutions under it must coordinate their efforts devoid of personal interests. It was due to the effectiveness of this approach in executing policies and programs that the GOG adopted it in consultation with other vested interests. In partnership with stakeholders, the GOG implemented policies and programs to empower women and ensure their participation in political issues in Ghana.

Figure 2. How Political Settlements Work in a Country

Actors	Interests of Actors	Institutions
Dominant elite coalition that controls political and economic activity through informal power	Array of interests within elite circles that determine behavior and lead to the formation of coalitions	Set of arrangements that govern access to resources, control violence, and set the parameters for political competition
• Traditional elites • Leadership circles of political parties & factions • Prominent senior officials in state institutions (military, bureaucracy) that control policy and resource allocations • Powerful political leaders with an independent base of support (e. g., populist leaders) • Business elites with significant influence in political and economic competition and access to resources • Senior levels of the security establishment	• Shared elite interest in durable system to maintain power • Interest in excluding other elites from power (i.e., winner-take-all environment) • Interests of business elites in access to markets and effective economic management • Interests of narrow elite coalition in gaining legitimacy among the population • Interest in maintaining opportunities for predatory behavior	• Limits on violence • Informal dispute resolution • Limits on access to resources and privileges • Rules of the game for political competition and influence • Informal institutions (traditional norms, practices and organizations) • Formal state agencies (police, military, justice sector)

Source: Mustaq H. Khan as cited in Parks and Cole (2010), p.7

According to Khan (2018: 637), the interests and responses of all the actors must be aggregated to help make the implementation of policies and programs successful. This largely depends on the sharing of rewards and remunerations proportionately according to efforts and capabilities. In a country, actors include the ruling party or grand coalition in power, traditional rulers, leadership circles and political party leaders, prominent senior officials in state institutions (military, bureaucracy), business elites and senior officers of the security. So for a program or policy to work effectively, the ruling class and all these actors must be involved.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature has been reviewed on definitions for the concepts of women empowerment and political participation as well as the socio-cultural barriers associated with them. Sara Hlupekile Longwe's framework for women empowerment and the political settlements approach provide the conceptual frameworks for this study. Literature is also reviewed on the policies and programs implemented by the GOG to break the barriers to women empowerment and political participation. According to Musonera and Heshmati (2017), for WE to succeed women must be given the opportunity and access to education, employment as well as access to information and tele-communication.

3.1. What is Empowerment?

The World Bank (2012) defines empowerment as the ability of a person to make informed choices from vast options and actions to shape one's life. Kabeer, (1999) on the other hand defines empowerment as a process by which those who hitherto could not make independent choices acquire the ability to do same. It is important to note that in each of the definitions of empowerment accentuates the ability of a woman to make her own decisions and take control of her life. Unfortunately, there exist age-long stereotypes against women for instance there is a proverb in the dominant language in Ghana that "when a woman buys a gun she keeps it in her husband's room". The woman is therefore perceived as not capable of taking her own decisions. Allah Mensah (2003) stresses this point when she agrees that the traditions of Ghana make the kitchen as the place for a woman.

3.2. Socio-cultural Barriers to Women Empowerment

Social cultural barriers are defined by the Cambridge English dictionary as the hindrances related to the norms, traditions, and the way of life of a particular people. In Ghana in particular and Africa in general, there exist deep-rooted stereotypes and traditional beliefs that serve as barriers to WE. Some of these are explained below:

First of all, gender discrimination is a barrier that impedes women empowerment in Ghana. According to Odame (2010:10), due to economic difficulties some families were forced to decide on taking only one child to school. This choice obviously was easy to make because they preferred educating boys than the girl child. Such discrimination against the female sex hinders their empowerment.

Moreover, low levels of education for women also serve as a barrier to their empowerment. Most women especially those from rual areas do not go to school and for that matter unable to read and write. Allah Mensah (2003), contends that women's inability to go to school often makes them second class citizens in Ghana in particular and in Africa in general.

In addition to these, difficulties in accessing capital from the micro-finance companies are an impediment to women empowerment. Most women in Ghana are engaged in the informal sector and so

need capital to either help them buy raw materials or expand their businesses. This is intimated by Abor and Quartey (2010), when they say that financing for small scale enterprises is especially important for the development of any country, more so as these sector is the leading provider of employment (Mullineux., 1997). Unfortunately, these women are often turned-away by micro-financing institutions for their in ability to provide collateral security. This goes a long way to hinder WE.

According to Chakrabarti and Beswas (2008), the main causes of inequalities and among these are social and economic in nature. There is therefore the need to to work towards arresting these practices through policies and help to realize the full potential of women. The need to alleviate the plight of women has been an important agenda since the 1950's. According to Mehra (1997), NGO's and other agencies must find ways and means to create employment in small and medium enterprises (SME's) and the availability of markets.

3.3. What is Political Participation?

United Nations (UN, 1945) defines PP as the ability of an individual or group of people to take part in political activities without any restrictions. According to Lipkin and Okamoto (2015: 49) women in Ghana face many problems in realizing their participatory goals and though the constitution of Ghana guarantees equal opportunities for men and women. Most women often see politics as a "dirty game" and for that matter an area reserved for men. What are then some of the socio-cultural barriers to women's PP?

3.4. Barriers to Women's Political Participation

First of all, one barrier to women's' PP is finance. It is an acceptable fact that there is a lot of money involved if one wants to for instance stand in primaries. Ohene-Konadu (1999) agrees with this by saying that women are often impeded by their inability to obtain funds to enable them take part in political activities (cited in Odame (2010: 9). That position is collaborated by Ofei-Aboagye (2004) and Lithur (2004). According to Points (2007), the population of Africa is largely rural based and hence depend solely on agriculture for sustenance. As a result of that there are less opportunities and increase unemployment. This makes poverty widespread and endemic.

Secondly, marriage serves as a barrier to women's' PP. Traditionally, women are home makers. They must cook food, do the household chores, and take care of their husbands and children. As a result of this, there is often no time to engage in PP. Some Analysts blame like Amadiume (1987) blames colonialism for relegating women to the background. Adepoju (1994) agrees that as a result of the need to work and take care of their families, women are often tired to take part in public work.

Also, one other hindrance to women's' PP is low levels of education. Even though Dr. Kwegyir Aggrey said that "if you educate a man, you educate an individual but if you educate a woman, you

educate a nation", this does not reflect in societies in Ghana. Most women especially those from the country side are not educated and as result of that unable to take part in political activities.

Finally, traditionally, political activities are viewed as a preserve for men. This is especially true in northern Ghana where the majorities are Muslims. Over there, women often do not take part in political activities. According to a report by CEDPA (1997), even those who wish to take part must ask for permission to do so from their husbands (cited in Odame, 2010: 8)

3.5. Ghana's Political Settlements Approach to Women Empowerment and Political Participation

Ghana realised the ever growing inequality between men and woman and decided to arrest the socio-cultural barriers to WE and PP. The GOG decided to involve all the actors in its political settlements approach to WE and PP. The GOG worked through several ministries including the Attorney General (AG) and the Ministry of Education (MOE). The ministries organized and executive the needed policies and programs through the political settlements approach (Allah Mensah, 2003).

Also, according to Abdulai (2019), traditional rulers and Queen mothers who are the custodians of traditions and norms were also involved in the projects and programs. Traditional authorities in Ghana had been used during British colonial rule in the implementation policies. The institution therefore has vast experience in policy implementation. It was against this backdrop that the GOG involved them in the political settlements approach to empower women in Ghana.

Furthermore, Ghana's development Partners and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as the World bank, European Union (EU), The IMF (International Monetary Fund) and other local NGO's such Abantu for development and the 31st December women's' Movement (DWM) were all instrumental in the implementation of the projects and programs to ensure WE and PP (Allah-Mensah and Osei-Afful, 2017). Finally, women CEO's and the legal departments of security forces (army, police service, prisons, customs, and Fire services were also involved in the drafting of the policies and programs for the settlements approach to WE and PP (Behuria, Buur and Gray, 2017).

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study relied on secondary sources and these included data extracted from relevant textbooks, newspapers, reports/articles, journals, bulletins, and data obtained from the official website of the GOG and other ministries and institutions. The following hypothesis was used in the study:

H_o: women empowerment leads to political awareness and participation.

H_a: Women empowerment does not lead to political awareness and participation.

The null hypothesis will be accepted if there is a positive correlation between the dependent and independent variables that is if WE leads to PP, the null hypothesis will be accepted. On the other hand, we will reject the null hypothesis if there is negative correlation between the independent and dependent variables. That is if WE does not lead to PP.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Gender Discrimination

Female genital mutilation (FGM) became a second degree felony and attracted a punishment of three (3) years prison term.

**Figure 3. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Prevalence in Ghana**
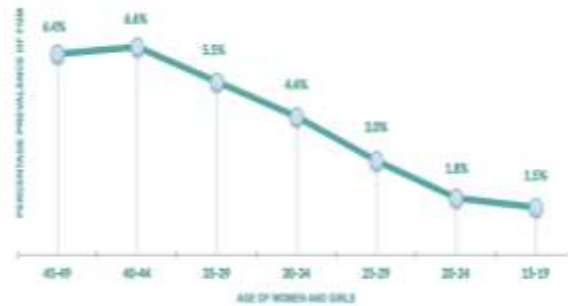
Source: MICS

From the graph above, the prevalence rate of FGM decreased from 6.4% among the 45-49 age group to 1.5% in the 15-19 age group after the legislation making that custom a second-degree felony.

5.2. The Domestic Violence Act

In 2007, the GOG introduced the domestic violence act to impose serious punishments to men who violently abuse their spouses. The government of Ghana passed the domestic violence act in 2007 to impose higher punishment on men who violently abuse their partners.

Figure 4. Top 5 Domestic Violence Cases in Ghana (2014- 2016)
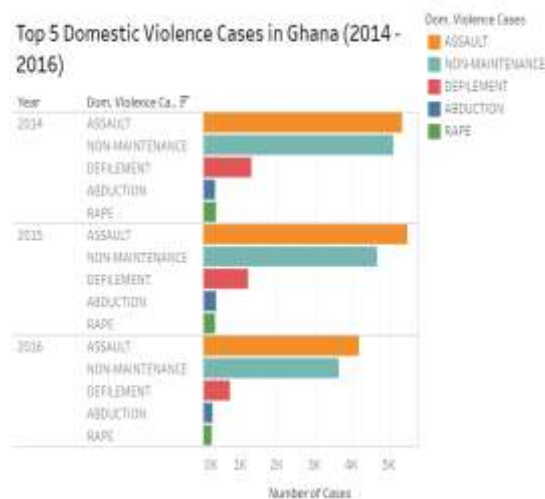

Source: visualsforgender.com

From the above graph, we can see a decrease in domestic violence cases in Ghana after the introduction of the domestic violence act in 2007.

5.3. Encouraging Girl Child Education

There were deliberate policies and programs to encourage girl child education. The GOG gave scholarships to needy girls to enable them pursue higher education. Moreover, in 2017, the GOG introduced free senior high school education in Ghana. This therefore increased female access to education significantly.
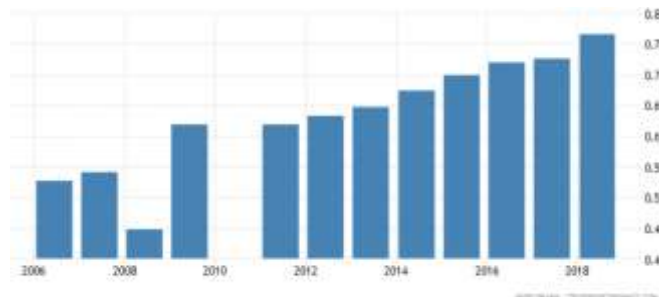
Figure 5. Ratio of Girls to Boys in Primary and Secondary Education (2006 - 2018)
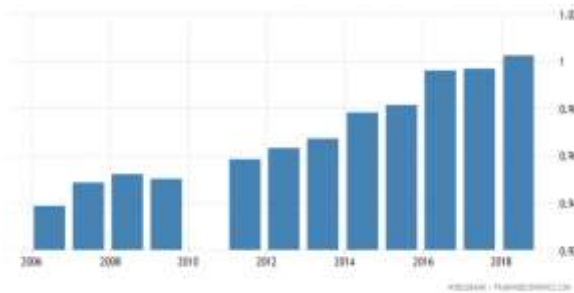
Source: The World Bank

From the graph above, the ratio of girls to boys has significantly improved. It shows the ratio at the tertiary level. It is important to note a decrease in the gap of female to male ratio at that level too.

**Figure 6. Ghana - Ratio of Female to male Tertiary Enrolment**

Source: The World Bank

### 5.4. Policies on Capital to Women Cooperatives and Entrepreneurs

In order to boost the operations of women entrepreneurs, cooperatives and politicians, policies were introduced to enable commercial banks and micro-finance companies to extend credit at low interest rates to them. With the capital availability, these women were able to increase their outputs and expand their businesses.

Figure7. Ghana - credit From Micro-Finance Companies to Women Entrepreneurs and Cooperatives (1990 - 2005)
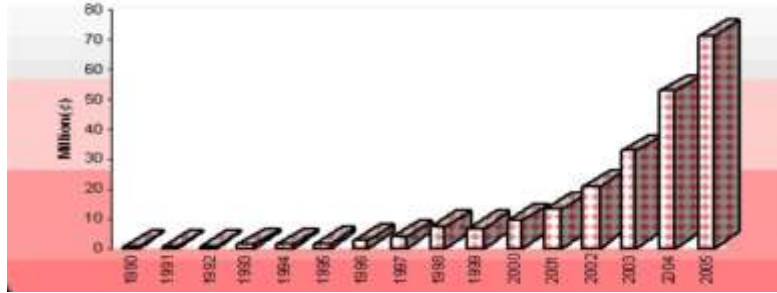
Source: adapted from economicswebinstitute.org

Figure 8. Ghana- Lending to Women Entrepreneurs and Cooperatives as % of GDP from 1990 - 2005
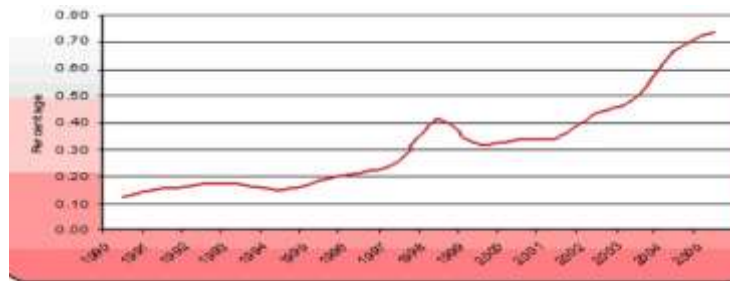
Source: adapted from economicswebinstitute.org

5.5. Policies to Increase Women's Political Participation

Women constitute about 20.3% of parliamentarians in the world and for sub-Saharan Africa the figure is 20.4%. Ghana therefore decided to introduce policies and programs aimed at increasing women participation in political affairs at the local, district and national levels. Those policies even though did not increase their political participation significantly. The awareness has however been created for the participation of women taking part in public affairs.

Figure 9. Ghana - Women Representation in District Assemblies from 1994 - 2015

	Contestants			Elected				
Year	Female	Male	Total	Female	%	Male	%	Total
2015	1182	17756	18938	282	4.65	5779	95.35	6061
2010	1376	15939	17315	412	7.95	5681	92.05	6093
2006	1772	13084	14856	478	10.1	4254	89.9	4732
2002	965	12625	13590	341	7.4	4241	92.6	4582
1998	547	14696	15243	196	4.1	4624	95.9	4820
1994	N/A	N/A	N/A	122	2.9	4082	97.1	4204

Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana

Figure 10. Ghana - Number of Seats Held by Female Parliamentarians From 1996 - 2020
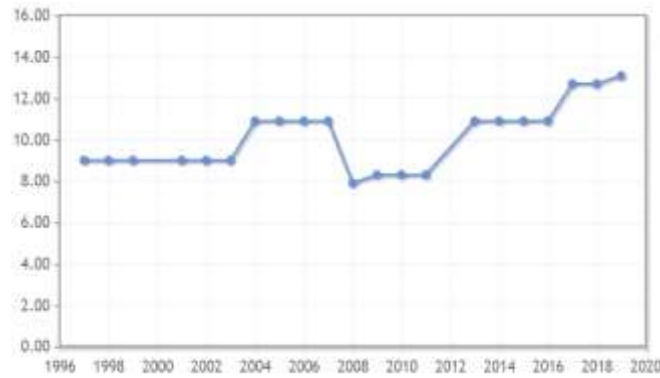
Source: indexmundi.com/facts/Ghana.

6. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

From the data extracted, as women empowerment increases, women's participation in political activities also increases. There is therefore a positive correlation between the independent variable, women empowerment, and the dependent variable, that is political participation. In other words, as women become empowered, they begin to take active role in political activities. We therefore accept the null hypothesis that women empowerment leads to political participation. As a result of this, we reject the alternative hypothesis that women empowerment does not lead to political participation. In other words, the study has established that women empowerment leads to political participation and from the data analysed so far, one can safely conclude that:

1. There were socio-cultural barriers to women empowerment and political participation in Ghana.

2. Also, the government of Ghana and stakeholders decided to use well planned and meticulously executed policies and programs based on the political settlements approach to nip these barriers in the bud.

3. Moreover, these programs were successful due to improvements in key indicators.

4. Finally, women empowerment leads to political awareness and participation.

Based on the findings of the study the following are recommendations:

1. Governments and stakeholders should intensify the education on women empowerment and political participation.

2. Scholarship schemes should be set-up to facilitate the education of the girl child.

3. Legal steps should be taken to guarantee the rights of women in the form of enacting affirmative action and women-friendly legislations.

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