Women and Political Decision Making: Perspectives from Ghana's Parliament

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Abstract:

There have been calls over the years, both at the international and national levels, for the inclusion of women in decision making. These calls are partly as a result of the argument that women played key roles in mobilizing people to fight for the independence of many countries in particularly Africa as well as the increasing realization their potentials should be tapped for purposes of national development. In Ghana, the contributions of women to the political process, with the inception of the 1992 Constitution are undoubted. Over the years under review, the entry of women into Ghana's Legislature has been slow but steady. This qualitatively designed paper looks at the participation of women in Ghana's Parliament from 1992 to 2008. Taking the perspectives of various groups of people such as current and former women Parliamentarians, gender equality advocates as well as the leadership of Parliament and copious references to official documents of Parliament, the paper focuses on women's participation in the august House especially in raising questions and engaging in debates. The paper argues that, among other factors, socio-cultural and political barriers impede the effective participation of women in Ghana's Parliament.

1. Introduction

Participation in decision making is one of the essential tenets of liberal democracy. As a result of this, there have been several studies which address issues of citizen participation in democracy such as state, legislative and local governance (Cole, 1975). Also, various international treaties and conventions, including those of the United Nations and the African Union provide opportunity for universal participation in decision making, especially the

participation of women. This is partly informed by previous studies on women in politics, which emphasizes gender as a potentially significant variable in determining elected officials' consideration of citizen input (Mansbridge, 1999) in politics. Based on this, the role of women in politics and public offices has over the years dominated international and national level discussions. These discussions have particularly been influenced and fueled by the acknowledged potential and contributions of women to governance. As Allah-Mensah (2005) argues, there is a growing realization that women have great potentials that can be harnessed for social, economic and political development.

Indeed, women's participation in the legislature and in politics in general has certain benefits not only to women but to the general society as a whole. For instance, Thomas (1991) in her study of women in US state Legislatures notes that women legislators were most successful in passing legislation dealing with women, families, and children. Accordingly, the participatory approaches of women in Legislative Assemblies have argued that women have made a difference on issues of concern to women. Indeed, women legislators have attached different weights and meanings to the notion of representing women (Reingold, 2000). Equally, Flammang (1985) argues that female politicians have been observed to approach their participatory roles as public officials more creditably. According to Flammang, women have been more responsive to constituents, being better at the human relations parts of politics and places more emphasis on constituency service.

Also, the Institute for Inclusive Security (2009) notes that, the participation of women in politics in general and especially in the Legislature brings important skills, attributes and perspectives to the governance process. According to the Institute, women who have successfully entered political governance have tended to build governance systems that are more stable and transparent. They have also more often been accepted as legitimate by society. They have demonstrated the ability to bridge political divides, highlight women's concerns, facilitate a consultative and an

all-inclusive approach to policy making as well as press for government accountability. The Institute notes further that transitions to democracy are strengthened when women actively participate in government. As elected or appointed officials also, they can increase the legitimacy of nascent institutions, decrease government corruption, broaden the political agenda as well as promote consultative policy making by engaging a wider range of stakeholders in the governing process.

The research by the Institute for Inclusive Security (2009) further asserts that a critical mass of women in governing institutions promotes collaboration across ideological lines and social sectors of the economy. Their increased participation also enhances public trust in new institutions and legitimizes the political process. Added to these, the effective and meaningful participation of women in the political decision making process have been argued to be a process of empowerment that in the longer run enhances the independence and self-worth of women. Generally, increasing women's participation in politics and securing their access to political life is of particular importance to democratic governance and sustainable development (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance {IDEA}, 2005).

Historically, the drive to promote women's decision-making worldwide started and gained momentum in the late sixties. In the 1960's for instance, feminist movements in various part of the world (developed and developing countries alike), advocated for the elimination of all kinds of gender discrimination and lobbied for change in the legal and administrative structures to ensure that women would be better integrated into economic and political systems. The United Nations (UN) decade for women (1975-1985) provided a space where women around the world discussed issues that specifically affect women in the world under the themes of equality, development and peace. Further impetus came from the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China, in 1995, which called for at least 30 percent

representation by women in national governments (Karam, 1998).

Within the context of the developing world, Amu (2005) notes that there have been the proliferation of policies, programmes and projects designed to assisting women, especially those within the low-income earning groups, in their bid to achieving economic independence and participation in decision-making processes at all levels of governance. The impact of these initiatives appears quite impressive. For instance, Amu argues that between 1987 and 1995, the number of countries where women held no ministerial positions fell from 93 to 59. Nonetheless, Amu (2005) also finds that not only did women hold less than 6 percent of the position of Cabinet Ministers in 1994, but also only in 16 countries did women hold more than 15 percent of Ministerial positions.

2. Crystallization of the Problem

In Ghana, issues of women's participation in political decision making have dominated the political landscape over the years. Allah-Mensah (2005) has for instance argues that it has been assumed in Ghana that the presence of significant number of women in Parliament can help improve the quality of debate and policy making, and since 1992 successive governments have pursued policies aimed at encouraging women's participation in political decision making. One popular option is to propel their entry into the legislative assembly. Through the combined efforts of political parties, NGOs and Civil Society groups, more women have entered Parliament from 1993 to 2008. For instance, the number of women seeking entry to Ghana's Parliament increased from fifteen in the first Parliament of the Fourth Republic in 1992 to nineteen in the Third Parliament of the Fourth Republic in 2001 and to twenty in the Fifth Parliament of the Fourth Republic in 2008.

While the increased number is commendable, there is a growing resentment from some quarters in society about the depth of their engagement in Parliamentary debates. Ballington and Karam (2005) argue that though women's contributions to the political process is enhancing the social and economic lives of people across the world and across different sectors, their access to legislative structures, learning how to work in them as well as the way and manner they impact on and through them, remain serious challenges for many societies/countries, including Ghana. Even though the dynamism that women display in the economic, cultural and social lives of their communities through their associations and informal networks have been channeled into creating new models of participation and leadership (Manuh, 1998), this has not been reflected in Ghana's Legislative Assembly. Thus, there is the perception within the public's eyes of the essence of women's representation in the Legislative Assembly. Concerns have emerged regarding women's leadership in Parliament. From the perspectives of some members of the public, debates on the floor of Parliament have featured men's activeness than women. Though this is to be expected considering the fact that there are more men than women in Parliament, the level of the pro-activeness of the women Members of Parliament (MPs) requires interrogation. This paper examines three key questions. These are (a) what are the historical and current trends regarding women participation in political decision making in Ghana's Parliament?; (b) to what extent have Ghanaian women Parliamentarians participated in debates on the floor of Parliament?; (c) to what extent have Ghanaian women Parliamentarians participated on question times on the floor of Parliament?; and (c) what challenges confront women in their participation, debates and question time on the floor of Parliament in Ghana?

3. Literature Review

3.1 Women in the Legislature: Global Perspective

There is a growing body of literature on the role of women in public policy making across the globe (Carroll and Taylor, 1989). When women in different parts of the world struggled to win the right to vote, they expected that this would inevitably lead to greater women's representation. On the eve of the 21st Century and more than a hundred years after women were enfranchised, the question of women's political participation is now on the international agenda, and permeating many regional and national plans of action (Karam, 1998). Ever since the success was chalked in enfranchising women, a lot has been achieved, at least modestly by way of women participation in legislative decision-making. Women's involvement in public decision making in general during the 19th century has been uphill (Karam, 1998).

Women constitute a greater proportion of the global population. As a result, it is only logical that the seed of democracy lies in the principle that the legitimacy of the power to make decisions about peoples' lives, their society and their country should be derived from a choice by those who will be affected. Therefore, the development of any political agenda that does not include the perspectives, views and experiences of those who will be affected is not credible (IDEA, 2005). These successes, though modest are however anchored on the global conferences on women over the years. These conferences include those international women conferences held in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995). These constituted the first, second, third and fourth international conferences on women's rights respectively. The period between 1976 and 1985 was also declared as the UN Decade for Women. The promulgation of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, often described as the bill of rights for women, further

boosted women political participation in decision-making within the Legislative Assemblies across the globe.

By way of numbers, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), statistics cited by Karam (1998), the percentage of women MPs worldwide increased four-fold from 1945 to 1995. In 1998, the world average of women in Parliament was 12.7%, with the highest percentage existing in the Nordic context at 37.6%, followed by the Americas at 15.5%, Asia at 13.4%, Europe OSCE member countries (excluding the Nordic countries) at 12.5%, Sub-Saharan Africa at 11.6%, the Pacific at 8.3%, and the lowest in the Arab states at 3.3%. Also according to the same statistics, since 1995, 6 countries acquired a woman speaker of Parliament for the first time; Ethiopia (1995), Latvia (1995), Peru (1995), Jamaica (1996), Malta (1996) and Poland (1997).

A report by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2009a) indicates that the world average of women members across all chambers of Parliament reached an all-time high of 18.3 percent in 2008. The report continued that a record number of women took seats in Parliamentary renewals in 2008. One out of five Parliamentarians elected was a woman. In all, 12,879 seats were up for renewal in 66 chambers in 54 countries. Women took 2,656, or 20.6 percent, of those seats, the highest annual renewal on record. Of these, 1,707 were directly elected, 878 were indirectly elected and 71 were appointed. Continuing further, the report showed that while 59 percent of chambers registered an increase in women's share of seats in 2008 (ranging from 27.7 to 0.3 percent), nine percent remained the same and one-third returned fewer women to Parliament than previously (losses ranged from one to 13 percent). This trend has been consistent for the past five years; on the average women gain 60 percent of Parliamentary renewals annually, while stagnation or setbacks are registered in 40 percent of cases. This brought the overall average of women in single/lower and upper houses of Parliaments to 18.3 percent at the end of 2008 – one percentage point more than a year ago. It is also a significant improvement on the average a decade ago when women held 13 percent of seats.

In the area of reaching the minimum standard set by the UN, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2009b) reports notes that the number of Parliaments that have reached the minimum target of 30 percent women members set by the United Nations has grown significantly in the past decade. In 1998, just six single/lower chambers had reached the target, all of which were European. Today the figure has grown four-fold, where 24 single/lower houses of Parliament have surpassed 30 percent women members. This distinction is no longer just limited to European parliaments. The lineup is now diverse and includes post-conflict and developing states from Africa, Asia and Latin America. In addition, 15 upper houses have reached the target, bringing the overall total to 39 out of 264 chambers (15%). The average number of women in Parliament increased from 11.8 percent in 1998 to nearly 16 percent in 2005 (IDEA, 2005). In the area of regional distribution, important progress has been made in some regions, notably the Nordic countries, where women's representation averages 40 percent in parliament. For instance, in 2005, women constituted over 45 percent of the members of parliament in Sweden, 38 percent in Finland, 37 percent in Denmark, 36 percent in Norway and 30 percent in Iceland following elections held between 2001 and 2005. The figure stands at 10 per cent in the developing world except in East Asia.

In Africa, Rwanda's Parliament made history when its lower house elected a majority of women members, 56.3 percent, while in Angola women took 37 percent of the seats in its first post-conflict election. The Rwandan case is a novelty in women's participation in the legislature. This is the first single lower house in history where women hold the majority of seats (IPU, 2009b). Other countries from within Africa that have made impressive gains are Burundi (30.5%), Mozambique (34.8%), South Africa (33%), Tanzania (30.4%) and Uganda (30.7%) as the seven African countries to have reached the target in single lower houses (IPU, 2009b).

In Latin America, from an average of 9 percent in 1990, by 2005 women's representation in the lower houses of the national parliaments of the region had increased to 17

percent. Women's share of seats in the senates grew from an average of 5 percent in 1990 to 13 percent in 2005. Some impressive gains were registered overall in Latin America: women took a 26.5 percent share of the seats in the 12 chambers that were renewed (IPU, 2009b). In the Arab world, women's representation in legislatures has been the lowest in the world with an average of 6.5 percent against the global average of 16 percent (IDEA, 2005). The IPU's 2009 report shows that the Pacific Island States remain the worst performing region, overtaking the Arab countries that recorded few changes or gains in terms of women's election to Parliament. No women candidates were successful in the single lower house races in the Pacific Island States such as Nauru, Palau and Tonga.

Also, overall, Asia registered the slowest rate of progress in terms of women's access to parliaments over the past fifteen years, reaching a regional average of 17.8 percent (IPU, 2009b). Some impressive gains were registered in the Americas in 2008. Women took 26.5 percent of the seats, on average, for the 12 chambers renewed. Overall, women hold 21.5 percent of all seats in the region, second only to the Nordic countries. The high annual gains are attributable to the success women registered in Cuba (43.2%) and the upper houses in Belize (38.5%) and Grenada (30.8%).

Other countries in other parts of the world have also made modest gains in women representation in the legislature. In India, after the enactment of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments in 1993, women's role in governance has increased at grassroots democratic institutions. The percentage of women parliamentarians increased from five in 1990 to 8.3 in 2005 in the lower house and to 11.6 in 2005 in the upper house (UNDP, 2005). In 2002, 15 women served in the new Northern Ireland Assembly: they comprised 14 per cent of the 108-member Parliament created in 1998 as an outgrowth of the peace process and constitute the largest group of women legislators in Northern Ireland's history (IDEA, 2005).

3.2 Women in the Legislature: Ghana's Angle

In Ghana, traditionally, women from both urban and rural settings have played varying and significant roles in the socio-economic and political development of the Ghanaian society. The Women's Manifesto for Ghana (2004) for instance argues that at all historical junctures, women in Ghana have contributed greatly towards Ghana's political life. Ghanaian women have been active especially in politics from the period of Ghana's struggle for independence. They have also contributed not only to the political process but also in the social and economic spheres (Tsikata, 2009). There is no denying the fact that the 1992 Constitution which serves as basis of democratic rule, rule of law, fundamental human rights and citizen participation in decision-making among others gave special recognition to women. For instance, the whole or Article 27 of the Constitution is dedicated to women. This serves as a form of encouragement and motivation for women's empowerment and participation in political decision-making at all levels of the Ghanaian society, including membership of the legislature. The new Constitution, according to Allah-Mensah (2005) serves as the backbone for governance and as the conduit for enhancing the participation of the citizenry in the governance and decision-making processes. She continues that, for otherwise voiceless people like women, this is a particularly rare opportunity for them.

The backbone of any democratic governance is participation by both sexes; men and women. Allah-Mensah (2005) notes that participation is one of the cornerstones of people-centered development and has gained attention as part of the push for effective development practice. Participation in the political sphere could stem from the executive, the judiciary and the legislature. Though these three arms of government are interdependent and mutually-reinforcing, having a voice at the legislative assembly is critical. This is so because this provides a platform for national law making, decision-making and accountability. It also provides a forum for the gathering of all shades of opinion and voices. Ideally, all sections of Ghanaian society are geographically represented in the House of Parliament. As a result of its importance, the participation of women in

the Parliament of Ghana provides a ground for women's empowerment and national development. The argument is how women have fared by way of numbers in the Ghana's Parliament since the return to multiparty democracy in 1992. The following table provides a summary of the number of women who contested and either won or lost legislative elections in Ghana from 1960-2008:

Year	Number of Women Contestants (In Numbers and Percentages)	Number of Women Elected (In Numbers and Percentages)	Total
1960	52	10 (10%)	104
1965	Figure not known	19 (18.3%)	104
1969	7 (1.5%)	1 (0.7%)	140
1979	23 (2.9%)	6 (4.3%)	140
1992	23 (5.2%)	10 (5%)	200
1996	59 (7.6%)	19 (9%)	200
2000	102 (9.3%)	18 (9%)	200
2004	104 (10.9%)	25 (10.9%)	230
2008	103 (10.7%)	20 (8.7 %)	230

Source: Culled from Tsikata (2009)

The figures from the table indicate that since the inception of the 4th Republic in 1992, there has a steady rise in women's representation in Parliament though quite slowly. While the number of women candidates was increasing, the percentage of those elected was going up very slowly (Tsikata, 2009). The 2008 elections showed a slight decline in the number of women. The figure which stood at 20, representing 8.7 percent of the total number of Parliamentarians and a reduction of 20 percent from the 2004 legislature (Tsikata) later reduced to 19 following the death of one of the female MPs, that is the MP for Chereponi in the northern region and the subsequent election of a male MP to represent the people.

4. Methodology

Qualitative research which Hancock (1998) describes as concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena was adopted for this study. With the strength of qualitative concerned with providing a complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given social phenomenon (Mack Natasha et al, 2005), this design was useful for this study because it provided grounds for exploring how women's participation in Ghana's legislature over the years has been viewed. Two non-probability sampling procedures comprising simple random and purposive sampling were used to select a total of ten current women parliamentarians and nine key informants. While the simple random method was used to select the women Parliamentarians, the purposive method was used to identify key informants. Two main instruments were used. These were in-depth interviews and non-participant observations. The later was essential in identifying how women Legislators contribute to decision-making on the floor of the House. It must be emphasized also that in this study, copious references are made to official Parliamentary documents such as Hansards and reports.

5. Findings and Discussions

5.1 Question Time

It has been argued that women MPs raise very essential issues when they are offered the political space to do so. Data from this study indicates that women were most likely to raise issues related to roads and transport, communication as well as peace and security sectors of the Ghanaian economy. For instance, on the roads and transport sector, a respondent emphasized thus:

> *"Given the important nature of the road and transport sector and the fact that women are largely the affected when the roads and transport sector is poor, I*

> *will be surprised if women MPs have relaxed in raising questions related to this sector...”*

A look at various official Parliamentary Hansards and debates indicate that women MPs have raised essential questions related to this sector. For instance, on the 19th of October 1999, a female MP asked the Minister of Roads and Transport when the roads in the Korle Gonno electoral area will be rehabilitated under the proposed Urban IV Programme. She also wanted to know from the Minister when the rehabilitation of the main Dansoman road from Hansonic to Last Stop will commence. Also, on the 11th of February 2000, another female MP asked the Minister of Roads and Transport what steps his Ministry was taking to improve upon the road works on Duaya Nkwanta-Dwomo.

Again, on 21st June, 2006, a female MP asked the Minister for Transportation when his promise to Parliament on Friday, October 8, 2004 to replace the old and dilapidated bridge connecting Kpando Agbenove and Kpando Dafor between 2005 and 2006 would materialize. On the same day, another female MP asked Minister for Transportation when Tarkwa town roads will be tarred. Finally, on the 7th of March 2008, a female MP asked the Minister for Transportation whether the Ministry had plans to install Toll Booths on the many reconstructed roads in the country for purpose of collecting revenue. Looking at these questions, it is quite clear that women MPs have been making efforts in asking questions related to the roads and transport sector by bringing the development concerns of their constituencies and the country as a whole to the fore. There is no doubt that the roads and transport sector is an important component of the economy, impacting on development and the welfare of people. Therefore, when a country's roads and transport systems are well developed, it provides economic and social opportunities and benefits that result in positive multiplier effects such as better accessibility to markets, employment and additional investments. Based on this premise, successive government of Ghana during the period under review and even before have increased expenditure on the road and transport sector. Thus, for some female MPs to

be concerned about this sector is quite important and significant.

On the communication's sector, this research gathered that women MPs have been key in arguing for the facilitation of the communication sector by raising important questions. For instance, between 15th May 2002 and 2nd July 2002, out of sixty (60) questions made within the above period on the floor of the House, four questions were posed by four women MPs regarding television and radio coverage and signals as well as the extension of telephone facilities to some areas of Ghana. These were periods when TV and radio signals to some areas were very poor. Specifically, on 15th May 2002 a woman MP asked the Minister for Information and Presidential Affairs when the Tarkwa and other towns in Wassa West district would enjoy full television coverage. Another female MP asked the Minister for Information and Presidential Affairs what steps he was taking to eliminate the interruptions in TV and Radio reception to the Volta and parts of the Eastern Regions. Furthermore, on the 23rd of October, 2001, another female MP asked the Minister for Communication and Technology whether his Ministry had plans to extend telephone facilities to the Adansi East District, especially New Edubiase, its capital. On that same day, another female MP asked the Minister for Communication and Technology when the 1000-line Kpando telephone exchange started about two years ago completed and commissioned. Finally, on 29th October 2008, another female MP asked the Minister for Communication and Technology what steps his Ministry was taking to extend private telephone facilities to Savelugu Township.

To highlight the role of women in raising questions regarding the communication industry, data available indicate that out of 98 questions raised on the floor of the House between 15th May to 2nd July 2002, women MP's were able to raise 15 questions and this largely led to the extension of telephone lines to some parts of the country. Hence the confirmation that though women's contribution in asking questions is marginal, the impact is highly significant (Ghana Parliamentary Hansard, 15th May to 2nd July 2002).

It is often argued that, when society's peace and security are breached, it is often women and children who suffer the most. Realizing this, at the international level, the passage of Resolution 1325 by the United Nations Security Council in the year 2000 that centre's on women, peace and security reaffirmed the centrality of women regarding peace and security. Compared to other countries in the sub-region, Ghana has undoubtedly enjoyed relative amount of peace and security. However, this is not to say that Ghana is a safe haven when it comes to peace and security. There are pockets of conflicts across the country.

It is often argued that since women are largely the victims of conflicts, women should be greatly concerned about the need to ensure peace and security in Ghana and should be overly concerned when there are reports of breaches on peace and security. The study sought to find out whether women MPs have played this proverbial social expectation. As is the case with the other sectors earlier highlighted, information on this sector was scarce. However, the little data found showed that women MPs raising questions on matters of peace and security are revealing. For instance, at a time that there were a number of ritual murders, described as gruesome in the Ablekuma area, a female MP on 25th May, 1999, judging from the alarming nature of the phenomenon, asked the Minister of the Interior what immediate steps the Ministry was adopting to arrest the situation and allay the fears and anxieties of residents. Also, on 22nd October, 2008, another female MP asked the Minister for the Interior what plans the Ministry had to construct permanent accommodation for the Police personnel in the Agortime Kpetoe in particular and the Adaklu-Anyigbe district general.

Also, an analysis of the views expressed by many of the respondents indicates that the general concern of most women MPs have again been on women and other vulnerable members of the society such as children, the disabled, domestic servants, sex workers, among others. Issues bordering on water and sanitation, healthcare also came up quite significantly. This finding has been supported by a

number of other research findings. For instance, Carroll and Fox (2005) note that women serving in legislatures at the state level were more likely than men to give priority to, introduce, and work on legislation related to women's rights, health care, education and the welfare of families and children. Carrol and Fox (2005: 6) point out that "women in public office stand as symbols for other women, both enhancing their identification with the system and their ability to have influence within it. This subjective sense of being involved and heard for women, in general, alone makes the election of women to public office important". Thus, "...attention to the role of gender in the electoral process, and more specifically to the presence of women among elected officials, is critically important because it has implications for improving the quality of political representation." Similarly, Hunt (2007) notes that female legislators as a group tend to concentrate on helping marginalized groups. From the perspectives discussed so far, a respondent indicated that:

> *"These show the exactness and the promptness of the questions most women MPs pose......they don't just raise or pose questions; they do so when it matters..."* (A female MP).

Many of the respondents further argued that women legislators over the years have been raising significant questions that have resulted in the passage of very useful bills. A respondent was very much particular about the efforts of women in the Legislature that resulted in the passage of the Children's Act 1998 (Act 560) and the Domestic Violence Act 2007 (Act 732). Generally, out of the 19 respondents for this study, 12 claimed women played very essential roles regarding asking important development questions. However, a lot more need to be done to further improve women's contribution in this respect. In June 2006 for example, out of 40 questions raised on various sectors and thematic areas regarding the country's development, 4 questions were raised by women. This shows that women MP's are doing their best considering the fact that women make up only 10.9% of representation in Parliament

compared to 89.1% men. In proportionate terms, the participation in raising questions is modest and a lot more could be done to enhance the trend.

5.2 Women and Debates

Data gathered revealed that women MPs' engagement in debates has not been encouraging. A respondent (A male MP) for example emphasized that:

> "…Most men have the resources and can go an extra mile to look for research assistances to assist them reshape their thought and debate on the Floor of the House. What is affecting some of our women MP's is the resource constrains. The surest way to overcome this problem is to assist them through special budget. In fact, most of them are doing their best but it does not matter if we commit ourselves as a nation to support logistically it will go a long way improve their quality of debate on the floor of the House…." .

Another respondent (a female MP) was also of the opinion that:

> "When we get up to debate in the House, you have to catch Madam Speaker's eye. The reason why most women MP's don't participate effectively in the debate is because most of the issues are more technically in nature. It is only when our capacity is built through workshops and seminars that we can participate effectively in the debate of the House"

Going through several Parliamentary Debates from official reports of the House, a lot of interesting and important matters that women legislators engaged in, in the course of the years where quite revealing. For instance, on 24th November, 2006, the then Minister of Women and Children Affairs Honourable Hajia Alima Mahama, in contributing to the debate on the domestic violence bill argued that before the passage of the bill, a lot of work was done in the area of conscientising the public on the need to give real and

practical support to the bill. She cited meeting with the Christian and Muslim as well as several traditional societies and communities such as chiefs and some of the efforts that were done in the course of public sensitization. She pointed out that the Domestic Violence Bill was a tool for developing and promoting the observance of solid human rights in the country. In contributing to the same debate, a female MP from the Ashanti region was of the opinion that the passage of the Domestic Violence Bill will promote harmony, dignity, respect as well as love in Ghanaian homes and the larger society. According to the MP, the bill will represent the voiceless in the society such as women, children and the aged. In the Domestic Violence debate, a female MP also urged members of the public to give it a massive support. She particularly cited female genital mutilation as one cultural practice that was humiliating to women and that with the passage of the bill, this obnoxious practice will pave way to a more humane attitude towards those people who go through the pains of female genital mutilation.

Even though the participation of women on debates on the floor of Parliament has been low, issues raised in debates by various women MPs have been significant to the development of the Ghanaian society. For instance, Ghanaians are usually noted for their poor maintenance culture. This put a lot of strain on the few resources that the country can boast of since the few available resources are invested in replacing/rehabilitating projects/programs which have gone bad because of the lack of maintenance attitude. Contributing to the debate on the Budget Statement of the Year 2000 on 11th February, 2000, a female MP emphasized before the House that it was high time Ghanaians changed their attitudes towards the care and maintenance of the scarce national resources. She posited that "*Mr. Speaker, when we are talking about the collapse of a bridge, then we have to look at the maintenance culture of this country. In many cases, we do not really maintain things that we have in this country. I do not know how long this bridge has been on that rive and how many time we have ensured that it is good condition*" (Parliamentary Debates, Official Report, 11th February 2000). Contributing to the same debate, another

female MP was concerned about the welfare of the poor, especially retirees noting that "*Mr. Speaker.....I am particularly touched by the projections of estimated rise in the Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT) contribution of workers in this country. This goes a long way to make the workers better, especially when they go to retirement or pension*" (Parliamentary Debates, Official Report, 11th February 2000).

On the health needs of the citizens of Ghana and in contributing on the debate on the National Health Insurance Scheme on 27th February, 2001, a female MP referring to the cash and carry system which was in existence before the passage of the health insurance scheme emphasized that "*Mr. Speaker, only the wealthy could access health services in this place. The president has assured us that we will have a Health Insurance Scheme. That is just like any Insurance that we take, whether fire, or whatever. Mr. Speaker, we were deceived into believing that pregnant women, children, elderly people could go to hospital and walk out free. I am yet to know when this is operating*" (Parliamentary Debates, Official Report, 27th February 2001). In a related debate on 3rd November, 2006, another female MP noted that "*....Health infrastructure has seen unprecedented improvement within the last four yes. The number of government health facilities increased from 674 in 1994 to 859 by the middle of 1999*" (Parliamentary Debates, Official Report, 3rd November 2006).

Women's contributions to development across the world have been greatly acknowledged by members of the international community by setting aside an international day to celebrate women and their achievements. Contributing to a heated debate on this on the 8th of March 2001, a female MP was particularly elated by the achievements women have achieved despite the difficulties that confronts them daily. She argued that "*....on this occasion of the International Women's Day, I also want to associate myself with the statement congratulating the women of Ghana for a good job done. Mr. Speaker, in doing so, I want to say to all women in Ghana that this is a day to rejoice, especially with the NPP government for giving recognition to*

women in Ghana. The climax of which is the establishment of the women ministry and at this juncture, I wish to congratulate Mrs. Gladys Asmah for being the first Minister for the First Women's Ministry in Ghana" (Parliamentary Debates, Official Report, 8th March 2001). Again, the family is seen as the basic unit of every society. Thus, the breakdown of the family has negative consequences for child development and socialization in particular and the general development of the society as a whole. When families breakdown, women are largely blamed for that especially when it relates to the waywardness of children. As a result of this, there have been concerns over the years about the breakdown of most Ghanaian families and the critical roles women can play in stemming the tide. During the various interviews with the respondents, it came out clearly that, this problem was growing and efforts were needed to be collectively facilitated to correct the situation. When we tried to find out what has been done by women MPs in debating this on the floor, one of the respondents (a male MP) noted that:

> *"They have been wonderful. They are mostly those who suffer when families break down and as such debate this in most situations.....cannot however remember one of such debates but I know they do..."*

In an Official Report of Parliamentary Debates for 15th May, 2003,a female MP for instance noted that *"Mr. Speaker, the family is a very important institution in our society and modernization and development has really rendered the family into such a state that these days, it is hard to find families together. The problem associated with such breakdowns is something too serious for nations and society as a whole"* (Parliamentary Debates, Official Report, 15th May 2003). Related to the breakdown of the families are the immediate consequences of child migration which in the long run have negative repercussions for children, the family as a unit and the country. One problem that have confronted the country over the years have been the migration of people, females from the north of the country to the southern part in search of better conditions of livelihood. The result of this

migration has been the development of the Female Porting "kayaaye" phenomenon which has over the years attracted the attention of some female MPs. For instance, contributing to a Parliamentary debate on the problem on 12th June, 2003,a woman MP noted she was part of the Committee on Gender who travelled to Tolon, Kumbugu and Bawku to interact with people in that area on the issue of Kayayee.

The Official Report of Ghana Parliamentary Debate of 18th January 2005 (Fourth Series, Vol. 49, No. 6, Column 107) outlines what we see as a summary of the contributions of women to Ghana's democratic process. Contributing to a debate, the MP for TarkwaNsuaem, began by arguing that *"....democracy and the parliamentary system are based on the principles of equality of political rights for all. However, in this country, women's representation in the elected bodies is far from equal.....In basic democratic terms, a government that is exclusively or predominantly made up of men cannot claim to government for the people and by the people".* Referring to a resolution on women and politics passed by the council of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in April 1992, the female MP quote part of the resolution as emphasizing that *"The concept of democracy will only assume true and dynamic significance when political parties and national legislation are decided upon jointly by men and women with equitable regard for the interest and aptitudes of both halves of the population"* (p. 108). She contends further that *"Women without doubt, are best placed to identify and articulate their needs and concerns. The entry of women into Parliament, no matter how slow and painful the process, has a significant broadening of issues under debate..."*

From the examples of the various debates highlighted above, it can be seen that women MPs have been concerned about the social services sectors and the vulnerable segment of the Ghanaian society, albeit slowly. This therefore calls for strategies to build the capacities of Female MPs to adequately participate in debates in all sectors of society and not restricted to 'women – social service' related issues on the floor of Parliament.

5.3 General Participation and Effectiveness

Regarding the effective participation of women MPs, several of the former women MPs contended that it is often difficult to describe the effectiveness of all MPs, including men. Some of them however described the participation of women as moderate which needs to be improved. They were of the conviction that women elected into the legislature should be encouraged to speak on the floor of the house since that is what Ghanaians want to see. Accordingly, one former MP from the Central Region remarked that:

> *"Was that not one of the things considered in the recent grading of Parliamentarians? They have to dance to the music of the public apart from engaging in what they are already doing in the house....May be tomorrow they will be rewarded with quite good marks in survey rankings"*

Relating low participation to the educational levels of women Parliamentarians as well as the dominant influence of men, two of the former MPs were of the opinion that women MPs should be motivated to further their levels of education. According to these former MPs, by acquiring higher level education, they will be able to stand before their intimidating male colleagues to raise practical issues, not only affecting women but the general society as a whole. The male colleagues, according to these two individuals, should also give women what they termed as "the break". In an interview with a male former MP, he described the male dominated legislature as:

> *"A tough environment for women...Even if they are willing to speak, they are intimidated or ridiculed by the men. Even the choice of words and language is gendered in favour of men..."*

In relation to this, Carroll and Fox (2005) note that beyond the continued dominance of men in politics, gendered language permeates the political landscape. Politics and elections are most often drawn from the traditionally

masculine domains such as war and sports. Again, most of the respondents were of the view that a lot of things go on 'behind the scenes' (such as at Committee sittings) in which women are key participants but because these are not in the public's eye, they are most often undervalued and less appreciated by members of the general public. Similar to this finding, a woman MP in the Ashanti Region notes in the Parliamentary Hansard of November, 2010 that contributions in debates do not simply constitute getting up in the gallery to talk. She notes also that women MPs usually give their questions to the male counterparts to put before the House for deliberation. The question then is why do some women MPs give their questions to their male colleagues when they can equally do so?

5.4 Barriers Limiting Women Participation in Debates and Question Time

Findings from this study indicate women are confronted with a lot of challenges in their attempts to get into political decision making (debates and question time). The findings show that these challenges are not different from the challenges that confront other women in other countries. The study also found that nothing significant has changed despite the hue and cry about the need to ensure greater women representation in the legislature. It is important to emphasize the fact that even though women have made significant strides over the years in asking questions and debates in the legislature, the trend line has not been encouraging and that politics still remains a man's world. This assertion indicates that women in politics and public life have increased quite greatly, but this was achieved under serious difficulties and serious challenges that still confront women in politics today. Accordingly, IDEA (2005) found that women who want to enter into politics find that the political, public, cultural and social environment is often unfriendly or even hostile to them. A quick glance at the current composition of political decision makers in any region provides evidence that women still face numerous obstacles in articulating and shaping their own interests. These

usually, to a large extent, affect the participation of women in debates on the floor of the House as well as question time. There is therefore the need for women to be trained to be able to articulate and shape their interest especially when it comes to debate on the floor of the House. The barriers affecting women participation in question time and debates on the floor of parliament have been categorized into socio-cultural barriers, economic barriers and political barriers.

5.5 Socio-Cultural Barriers

Socially and culturally, this study found that the dominant nature of men in the political landscape and in general decision making have had a negative influence on women participating in the debate on the floor of the House. Women globally are socially and culturally expected to perform certain responsibilities at the domestic level. The standard of most Ghanaian cultural practices frowns on women leaving their marital homes and going round campaigning for their various political parties. This serves as a serious bottleneck affecting women's participation in electoral politics in Ghana, the study discovered. In some instances, a respondent noted that:

> *"Those women who venture into it are often suspected as flirts and prostitutes....satisfying politicians always...., A female MP from the Ashanti region noted during one of the interviews".*

In line with this finding, Tripp (2008) highlights that campaigning and being a leader often involves travel, spending nights away from home, going to bars to meet people, and meeting men, all of which put women politicians at risk of being thought of what Tripp described as "loose women" or "unfit mothers." This tends to affect their marital lives as well as confidence to debate on the floor of Parliament. Also, the nurturance and caring roles that most Ghanaian women are traditionally required to perform also came out quite significantly as a serious barrier to the participation of women in politics. The study found that women in most traditions and cultures in Ghana are still

viewed as belonging to the kitchen and that women were biologically made to give birth and take care of the home. A male MP for example emphasized that:

> *"...how do you expect women to rise up with confidence to debate and ask questions when they are still seen as home keepers and child bearers... this belief must change if not, it will continue to affect women not only in Parliamentary debate on the Floor of the House but other equally important areas in the political decision making..."*

In line with this finding most literature show that women are expected to perform nurturance and caring roles whilst men are responsible for the financial upkeep of the house. According to Tripp (2008), the popular perceptions often suggest that women's "proper" place was still in the home rather than in politics. This applied to Ghanaian women as this research has found. Citing Kuwait as an example, Hunt (2007) also notes that the pressures to take care of children at homes and fend for their families are further compounded by conservative religious beliefs where women are not expected to challenge (debate) their husbands or male counterparts.

Though the respondents could not specifically mention women who have been negatively portrayed in the light of marital difficulties and that idea did not come out clearly, three of the interviewees were of the opinion that most Ghanaian women who enter politics have on several occasions complained of marital problems as a result of their involvements in politics and all these affects them psychologically when it comes to debates on the Floor of the House. In support of this finding for instance, Tripp (2008) found in Zambia that most women who were active in politics claimed they experienced marital problems. In furtherance of this, Tripp (2008) also notes that prohibitive cultural attitudes against women's involvement persist among both men and women. According to Tripp, these attitudes are reflected in voting patterns, media coverage of female politicians, and even in blatant attempts to suppress

women's assertion of their political rights and views. Because of the patriarchal nature of the world since the creation of man, most Ghanaian women themselves have come to believe and accept this 'standard' thereby further inhibiting their entry into the political arena, the study further found. One of the respondents (a male) retorted that:

> *"...how do you think of the poor Ghanaian woman to leave the house and go around to campaign for political office? This applies to most women even in urban areas....it is a sacrilege in most communities in the country.....since men dictate the good and the bad at the home domestic level, this is extended to the political game outside..."*

Also, the level of education achievements by Ghanaian women, the study identified impacts women's participation in the Legislature. Globally, and specific to developing countries, women have received low level of education and thus, it run across all countries as a serious contributory factor to the low level of participation in debates on the Floor of the House at all sectors of social life including business. Specifically in Ghana, a female MP that *"...in this country, right from the colonial days, women's limited access to education has contributed greatly to their low participation in politics. Even though more girls enjoy equal opportunities in elementary schools, there is high dropout in secondary and tertiary level due to institutional, domestic and societal obstacles..."* (Official Report of Parliamentary Debate of 18th January 2005, Fourth Series, Vol. 49, No. 6, Column 107, p. 108). Referring to the kind of educational training and choices that were offered to men and women, the MP emphasized that the differential treatment given to both sexes whereby girls were encouraged to do needle work, crocheting and cooking as well as to acquire skills in dressmaking and catering among others and boys encouraged to do law, medicine, engineering and architecture placed girls and women in subordinate positions. According to her "Such achievement boosted the male ego, intellect and oratorical skills, which are all effective assets for political office..." Other socio-cultural factors that

the MP raised during the presentation of her statement centered on religious and standard of morality and lack of women mobilization. Also, it came from the various individual interviews that women have difficulty being taken seriously, being listened to, and are frequently subjected to humiliating stereotypes and derogatory remarks in a male dominated political legislature and decision making as other factors militating against women's political participation in the legislature.

Finally, it is evident from the study that society has placed men in professional, technical and oratorical skills positions which prepare men for political office and this largely affects some women who do not have the opportunity as men. All these affect women MP's in debate on the Floor of the House.

5.5.1 Economic Barriers

"....we are in trouble as women try to get into Parliament. Many of us have not got the resources to fight..." (Official Report of Parliamentary Debate of 18th January 2005, Fourth Series, Vol. 49, No. 6, Column 107, p. 114).

These were the words of a female MP in her contributions to a statement by a colleague female MP on the participation of women in politics in Ghana. This statement adequately shows the importance of financial resources in politics in Ghana. It also summarizes the economic difficulties that confront women in their persistent efforts to engage in politics because realistically, financial resources often determine whose voice is loudest. Several economic issues came out as barriers to women participation in debate on the Floor of the House. However, the greatest challenge that all the respondents in this study identified was the issue of finance or money. Like other women elsewhere, Ghanaian women politicians are confronted daily with several economic challenges and all these affect their quality of debate on the Floor of the House. Political matters such as payment of party dues, filing fees, funding campaigns, among others,

require huge amount of money which most Ghanaian women do not have, the current study has found. This, the study discovered, discourages most women from venturing into politics although they may have several other qualifications and good political attributes which can spur them on to win elections. Accordingly, Hunt (2007) found that coming out with money or fees to file as a candidate by women in an election can be very daunting. The difficulty is further compounded by the inability of the various political parties to fund the parties. This brings the question of the funding of political parties that has dominated public discussions in recent times in Ghana. Most of the respondents were of the opinion that these discussions should lead to more concrete outcomes noting that Ghanaians should decide on the matter once and for all. One of the respondents noted that:

> *"Ghanaians need to define where they want to get to regard the funding of political parties. The debate of the funding of political parties should be facilitated so that we women will know where the acceptance or non-acceptance of funding will help women in politics and ultimately debates or not..."*

The respondent further emphasized that:

> *"Left onto me, I will go for the funding since it will help women a lot. This is because women are the most disadvantaged when it comes to resources, especially money..."*

The findings of this research is not far different from Ninsin's (2006) argument that since men are socially the most rich and powerful in the Ghanaian society and thus exposes them to massive influences in the political party arena. Even situations whereby women have the required resources to fund parties, they are discouraged since they may be still lack the power to challenge and debate because of the dominance of men over women in this area does not only rest on who has the purse, but that, the dominance is socially constructed and determined. If women are to make significant contributions to debates on the floor of the house,

the issue of funding of the various political parties should be given priority. As Tripp (2008) notes, if women were going to make significant headways in economic and other fronts, they needed to have a physical and mental presence in legislatures and other political institutions. Even if at the national level, Ghanaians are not able to decide the way forward in funding political parties, internal party organization and management may fashion out ways out to fund their candidates, particularly women since women, compared to men, are those in the most financially precarious position. It is clear that some women MP's are not financially sound as compared to their male counterparts in Parliament. For the women MP's to be able to deliver effectively in the area of debate on the Floor of the House, there is the need for some special budgetary allocation to be made available to women MP's to build their capacities to meet the challenges.

5.5.2 Political Barriers

On issues relating to the bottlenecks within the political angle, most of the respondents noted that the dominance of men in Parliament tends to have a negative effect on women participation in debates on the Floor of House. Most of the Chairperson and Leadership of the various Committees are managed by male MP's. A cursory glance at the percentage of men MP's as against women MP's since 1992 to 2008 indicate that the highest number of women MP's ever recorded in the history of Ghana's Parliament was 2004 where the Women MP's were 10.9% as against 89.1%. In Ghana, a greater number of the interviewees noted that men dominate all the activities of the legislature and this tends to affect the effective participation of women in debates because they feel overwhelmed by the numbers. Over the years, it is the Gender Committee that is chaired by a woman MP. Majority if not all the other Committees are chaired by men. The study further revealed that most of the Committees such as Government Assurances, Subsidiary Legislation and Judiciary Committees have no woman representation and these tend to affect women MP's participation when it comes to these matters related to these Committees. It is important

to emphasize also that men dominate almost everything in Parliament and Political Party activities and therefore have much greater say in all matters of Parliamentary Debate and Political Party decisions. In a related study by Hunt (2008), the writer found that in most countries, male political party gatekeepers determine candidates' lists. Meanwhile the ordering of these lists is a fundamental factor in deciding who goes to the legislative assembly (Hunt, 2008). For instance, in deciding the selection of candidates for political parties, the men decide because they hold the numbers.

A number of research works indicate that political structures can play a significant role in women's effective contribution in Parliament (IDEA, 2005). The study by IDEA shows that since the decision lies on the ambit of men, they tend to marginalize women because men who were described by one of the respondents as the 'movers and shakers' of Parliamentary Debate. A respondent in this study emphasized that:

> *"...even though, women play some roles in parliamentary debate since 1992 we think that considering their numbers and its impact it is not encouraging there is therefore the need for the stakeholders to come out with policies that will enhance their contribution on the Floor of the House..."*

To sum up the frustrations of women MPs, a female MP noted that*"...women in Parliament have gone through a whole lot.....as you might have heard, during the last four years we had problems and we could not have set up the caucus....it became a worry for everybody in this country, especially the women's organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which took these problems upon their shoulders, they were all worried..."* (Official Report of Parliamentary Debate of 18th January 2005, Fourth Series, Vol. 49, No. 6, Column 107, p. 108)

6. Conclusion

Globally, women have contributed to the growth and development of human societies even from ancient times. Ghanaian women have traditionally played very important roles in Ghanaian communities as queen mothers. The role of Ghanaian women in Ghana's march towards self-rule is undisputed. They served as mobilizers and fund raisers to attain independence. No wonder, studies from the literature have revealed that Dr. Nkrumah was to 'compensate' them for this difficult and daunting task they engaged themselves in; in Ghana's efforts to attain self-freedom. Previous political administrations especially the military regimes paid little attention to the role of women in decision making and in the political system. Many were those who believed, contended and even argued that the return of Ghana to multi-party democracy in 1992 will see Ghanaian women take up their rightful places in the political affairs of the country. This contention was further enhanced because of the role of women in politics and public offices elsewhere in the world. It became what Allah-Mensah (2005) described as the 'burning governance issues'. Participating effectively and meaningfully according to Allah-Mensah was to encourage women to have an impact in politics and decision and a process of empowerment that would in the end enhanced the self-worth of women as individuals and as a group. Yet the picture at the legislative level (Debate and Question Time) as this study has demonstrated, has not been encouraging. Women still constitute less than 20% percent of legislative representation in Ghana. The challenges as the study has shown are many, varied and huge.

Though efforts have been made over the years by individuals as well as groups, the problem still persists and appears unending in the near future. It therefore requires the collective efforts of all stakeholders, with political parties as key players. It is time society sees women as not just recipients of decisions and development but as partners and contributors to development; and this should start from the legislative level since it plays an important role in political

and policy decisions affecting women and other members of the public alike. It is therefore the contention by this study that government and other interest groups such as NGOs should play important roles in equipping women MP's to build their confidence and to enhance their debating skills on the floor of the House, this is critical if women are to run for office. Grass-root programmes could assist to recruit women and train them to take up political offices in the future.

Equally, government through the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs should create a special budget to train the women MP's on some of the technical issues that will improve not only the service delivery but enhance the quality of debate on the Floor of the House. This can be done through workshops, seminars and fora. Again, political parties should introduce gender-based reforms that aim at increasing the representation of women in Parliament as has been done in South Africa and Rwanda. Added to these, there should be a serious affirmative action in the area of education for women. It is believed that when a large number of elected women get elected into the Legislative Assembly, they will be better placed to play effective and pioneering roles in influencing gender sensitive decisions and development-oriented decisions. Finally, members of the general public should be sensitized by the state and civil society organizations to view women differently. Social and culturally stereotyped beliefs should pave way to a more positive understanding and contribution of women to development after all 'behind every successful man, there is a woman'. This should however be conducted in a more sensitive manner since issues about culture and tradition are emotional and hard to confront. It is often not easy to change the status quo.

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