



## GENDER, POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN THE BUILSA NORTH DISTRICT OF GHANA, GHANA

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### Abstract

*As a basic level of formal decision-making, the local government system of Ghana, referred to as the Assembly within the context of decentralization, has become the basis for development planning and, resource mobilization. While setting and driving the national agenda remains an issue, the Assemblies are key to the implementation and initiation of development interventions at their level. Since starting in 1988, significant progress has been made in empowering actors to take up and play key roles towards the development of their jurisdictions. As social systems, the Assemblies have not been insulated from the gender inequalities confronting the Ghanaian state. This paper sought to understand the ways and extent of gendering in local governance. It is based on an empirical study conducted in the Builsa North District of Ghana. A cross-sectional survey involving the use of questionnaire, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and desk review served as the tools for data collection. Data analysis was both qualitative and quantitative. The study revealed that women were under-represented at both the general assembly (one out of 45) and unit committee (seven out of 119) levels. There were no women in the Area and Town Councils. This situation was attributed to women's inability to contest and win elections and the role of traditional and cultural factors resulting in the conclusion that under such constrictions, women compared to men, were limited in their political participation and that when such obstacles are removed women's fortunes could improve.*

**Keywords: Political Participation, Democracy, Local Governance, Gender Equality, Decentralization**

### Introduction

The issue of women's participation in local governance has over the past few decades received international attention because of the perceived and acknowledged contributions of women in local, regional, national and international development. Minoletti (2014) states that women's participation in governance has received increasing attention from international policy makers and researchers on grounds of equity and performance. By extension, there is an added value to governance when women and men participate equally and effectively. Ihemeje (2013) emphasizes this by saying that women's place in governance is relevant in relation to their role in nation building. Thus, the need and desirability of women's political participation is incontestable (Basu, 2004). Research by the Government of India and the UN Women (2012) found that there was growing recognition among governments and civil society to promote the participation of women in the

political arena, especially in local government structures. On its part, the Asian Development Bank Report (2014), claimed that there had been substantial improvement in women's political participation in national and local governance structures over the last decade. Citing the case of the Asia and Pacific regions, it explained that there was an increase in the number of women in Parliament, local level decision-making structures and local women leaders. However, the picture has not always been the same for all regions.

In a similar study, Ihemeje (2013), noted that women were yet to attain the 30% threshold representation in decision making globally, nationally and locally. This has been confirmed by the Coalition on the Women's Manifesto for Ghana (CWMG, 2016). A much earlier study by Agbalajob (2009), found that the underrepresentation of women especially in the local decision making structures was not only a

continental but also a global challenge. Nath (2013: 3), shared a similar view that: “At the local government level, women account for only 20% of elected councilors; and they hold mayoral positions in only 10 of the world’s 195 capital cities.” Undoubtedly, the growing awareness of the importance of women’s political participation in governance is yet to reach the critical mass for making meaningful change impact. With men still dominating the governance processes at all four levels, women’s voices and experiences remain largely peripheral. Without a critical mass of a 30% representation, the few women in the system can neither make the required impact nor reap expected dividends.

The World Bank (2001) opines that in developing countries, women as compared to men, are yet to obtain legal, social and economic rights. The Bank found evidence of the yawning gaps in access to and control over resources, economic opportunities, power and political voice, especially at the local level and pointed out that the situation was particularly worrying in Africa. Also, Bratton and associates (1999), cited Mali as having registered the lowest percentages worldwide in enhancing women’s political participation especially at the local level.

## **Conceptual and Contextual Analysis**

### ***Political Participation***

Agbaje (1999:193) has stated that “political participation is one of the fundamental ideas of a democratic society. It is a *sine qua non* for democracy because democracy involves a commitment to equal opportunity for men and women to develop their individual capacities.” This suggests that political participation is a democratic imperative where social inclusion rather than exclusion is the norm. Within the context of gender, men and women should be proportionally included in a governance system. Odame (2010) advances this idea by explaining that political participation is the equal involvement in decision-making, whether in policy making, planning or administration. Within a political context, this could mean involvement in needs assessment, project formulation, implementation or evaluation. For Odame (2010),

political participation is not an event but a process that traverses all facets of a system or even society. In the context of local governance, this should entail assuring equality of opportunity and outcomes for both men and women regarding staff recruitment and development, salary/pay and allowances equity, material resource access and distribution, promotion procedures and institutional climate. It also extends to equal voice, safety and security for women and men workers of the Assembly as well as projects and programmes of the Assembly in the communities. Odame’s (2010) view of political participation informs this study, although the focus has been on assembly members.

Verba and Nie (1972) cited in Allah-Mensah (2005:26), see political participation “as legal activities which directly or indirectly point to influencing the selection of and the actions of government officials.” Similar to Odame (2010), Allah-Mensah (2005) states that it involves partaking in the formulation, passage and implementation of public policies with more emphasis on representative democracy. It is therefore, an empowering process that allows people to do their own analysis. She draws from Nelson and Chowdhury (1994) to distinguish between two forms of participation: participation as a means and participation as an end. As a means, participation in her view is used to accomplish the aims of a project more efficiently, effectively or cheaply; and as an end, it has to do with a community setting up a process to control its own development. In spite of its diversity, it implies power relations between members of a community on one hand and between them and the state and its institutions on the other.

Yartey (2012:26), has stated emphatically that “...any democratization process will be incomplete without the active involvement and participation of the two sexes. Notwithstanding how the society perceives women, no matter the societal constraints, if politically educated and made aware of their rights, women’s level of political contribution can be enhanced...” However, this is not the case in practice at both the national and local levels. Table 1 depicts the gender situation in local governance (Assemblies) in Ghana.

**Table 1: Gender Representation in District Assemblies in Ghana (1994-2015)**

Year	CONTESTED			ELECTED		
	Female (%)	Male (%)	Total (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Total (%)
2015	1182 (6.2)	17756 (93.8)	18938 (100)	NA	NA	NA
2010	1376 (7.9)	15939 (92.1)	17315 (100)	412 (7.95)	5681 (92.05)	6093 (100)
2006	1772 (11.9)	13084 (88.1)	14856 (100)	478 (10.1)	4254 (89.9)	4732 (100)
2002	965 (7.1)	12625 (92.9)	13590 (100)	341 (7.4)	4241 (92.6)	4582 (100)
1998	547 (3.6)	14696 (96.4)	15243 (100)	196 (4.1)	4624 (95.9)	4820 (100)
1994	N/A	N/A	N/A	122 (2.9)	4082 (97.1)	4204 (100)

*Source: Adopted from Boateng and Kosi (2015).*

Table 1 above shows that in 1998, the percentage of women contesting was only 3.6%, this increased to 7.1% in 2002 and to 11.9% in 2006 before decreasing. In 2010, it decreased to 7.9% and further to 6.2% in 2015. The table also shows that the number of women who contested had increased dramatically from 1994 (547) to 2015 (1182), however, the numbers are insignificant compared to that of men at the minimum of 88.1% and maximum of 96.4%. This correlates with those elected, as it should. The figures also show a growth spurt for women in 2006 in terms of those contesting. In the case of men contesting, there were decreases in 2002 to levels below the 1994 levels but considerable increases in 2010 and 2015 above that base year (i.e., 1994). In 2010 and 2015 when men were showing increased growth, women were registering decreased growth.

The skewed picture is worrying in view of the fact that Ghana has since 1993 embraced democracy as its system of political governance and against the back drop that women are in the majority, forming 52% of the population (GSS, 2012). Given the analysis above, the skewed gender picture compromises on Ghana's political credentials as a beacon of democracy while diminishing the benefits of a gender and socially inclusive political system.

As argued by Udombana (2003:70), “the presence of women makes the political process broader and richer as well as more honest and transparent. There can be no meaningful and sustainable democracy in this country, if women are not given the fair opportunity of working in partnership with the men in determining the political progress and consequently the development of this nation.” If for nothing at all, Ghana's political space, especially at the local level, is missing out of the added value of gender inclusiveness.

#### **Local governance**

Fukuyama (2012) has defined governance as the ability of a government to make and enforce rules, and to deliver services, regardless of whether that government is democratic or subject to the rule of law. Thus, in his view, governance is about the performance of agents in carrying out the wishes of principals, and not about the goals that principals set. Taking from Fukuyama (2012), Hyden, Court and Mease (2003) have defined local governance as the formation and stewardship of the rules that regulate the public realm; it is the space where state as well as economic and societal actors interact to make decisions.

Shar (2005) also argues that although the concept of local governance is as old as the history of humanity, it is only in recent times that it has entered the broad discourse in academic and practice literature. Shar (2005) explains that local governance is:

*....the formulation and execution of collective action at the local level. Thus, it encompasses the direct and indirect roles of formal institutions of local government and government hierarchies, as well as the roles of informal norms, networks, community organizations, and neighborhood associations in pursuing collective action by defining the framework for citizen-citizen and citizen-state interactions, collective decision making, and delivery of local public services. Local governance, therefore, includes the diverse objectives of vibrant, living, working, and environmentally preserved self-governing communities. (p.1)*

This means that local governance unlocks opportunities for people at that level to make inputs on the issues that most affect their lives inasmuch as it fosters greater inclusion. It also makes available the needed resources that local actors require to propel their development. Furthermore, it provides chances for marginalized groups such as women to have a say on things that bother them in their communities by empowering them to become active and interested decision makers.

Siyabonga and associates (2008) explain further that local governance is not just about how a government and social organizations interact, and how they relate to citizens. It concerns the state's ability to serve citizens and other actors. This includes the manner in which public functions are carried out, public resources are managed and public regulatory powers are exercised. They push the concept further to encompass relationships, functions and regimes. This demonstrates that inputs and processes are as important as products in governance.

Evertzen (2001), has defined local governance to include the processes through which local stakeholders interact in determining local agenda, managing resources and implementing development

priorities. Thus, underpinning the overall strategy of local governance is the anticipation that by bringing citizens and institutions closer to one another and allowing the citizens more agency in decision-making processes, there would be improved service delivery, social services, primary health, education, and municipal services. This view assumes that devolution is taking place within an environment that provides clear political, administrative and fiscal authority to local governments and effective channels of accountability (Jawziya, 2007). Local governance links the processes of democratization and decentralization at a sub-national level. Although, strictly local governance does not require local democracy, it is believed that decentralization without local democracy is less effective. Hence, Abubakar *et al.* (2014) have said that local governance could be seen as a means of spreading authority and responsibility among all including local interest groups and thus ensuring effective representation of views. The Law establishing the decentralized system of governance in Ghana is clear on promoting local participation and citizen voice (Ahwoi, 2010; ILGS, 2008).

According to ILGS (2008), the first level of local governance in Ghana is the Assembly. The structure of a District Assembly (DA) is made up of the General Assembly, the Executive Committee and Sub-committees as well as the Coordinating Directorate and the Decentralized Departments of the DA. The ILGS (2008) has indicated that the Assembly is the highest decision-making body of the District. They perform deliberative, legislative and executive functions under the leadership of the Presiding Member (PM). In the performance of its functions, the DA works through the Executive Committee and its subsidiary committees of development planning, social services, works, finance and administration, justice and security and others (ILGS, 2008).

As spelt out in the Local Government Service Act of 2003 (Act 656), the office of the coordinating directorate is the administrative and technical unit of the DA. The office is headed by the District Coordinating Director (DCD) and it is responsible for assisting the Assembly in the performance of its

duties such as coordinating and harmonizing the programmes of the decentralized departments of the Assembly (ILGS, 2008). The Local Government Act 462 of 1993 also establishes 16 departments of Metropolitan Assemblies, 13 departments of Municipal Assemblies and 11 departments of DAs. The decentralized departments perform the technical function and therefore provide the technical expertise for local level development (ILGS, 2008). Post (2001) is of the view that decentralized structures offer greater opportunities for participation and subject public officials to popular control.

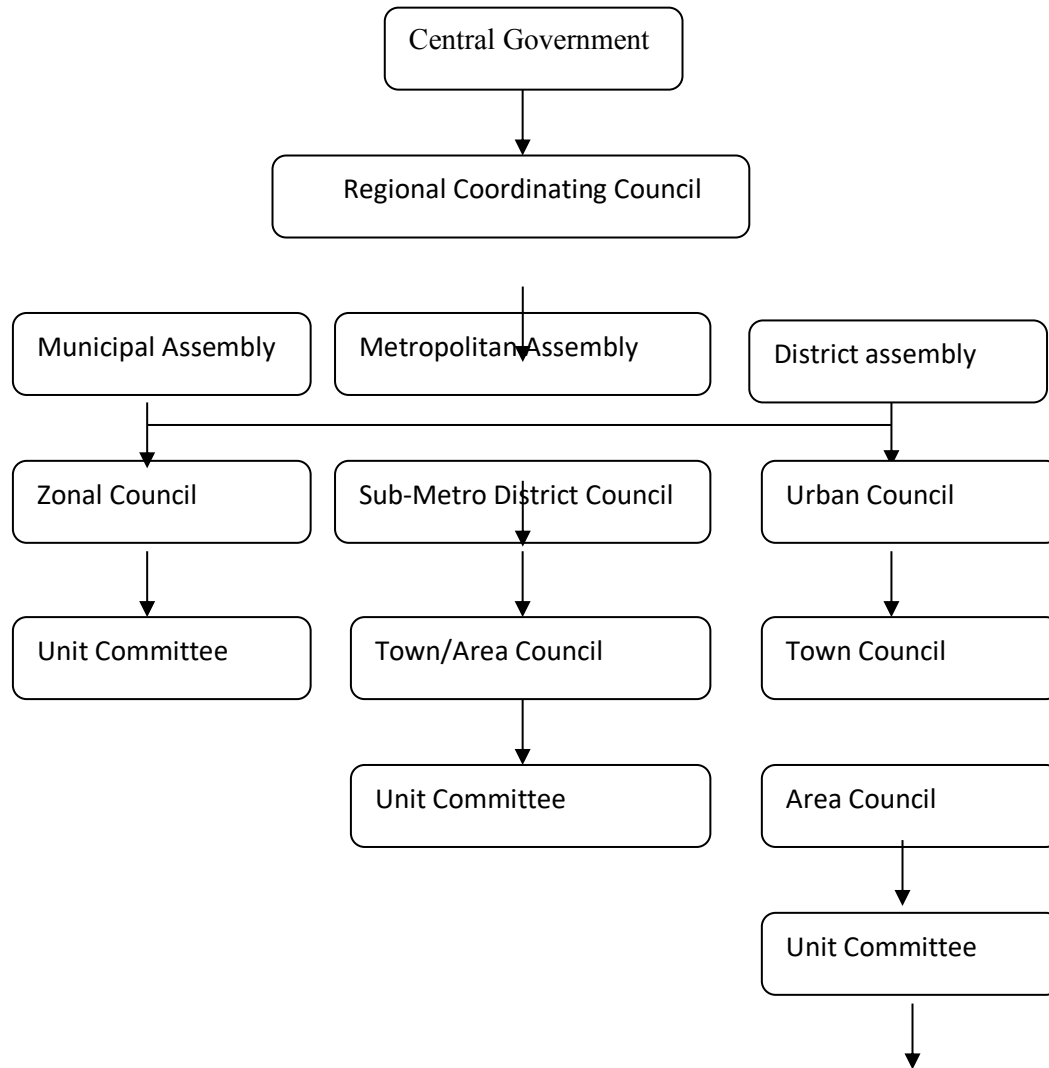
Below the DAs are the Town and Area Councils (TACs) (ILGS, 2008). In the DAs, Town Councils (TCs) are established for settlements with populations between 5,000 and 15,000. Area Councils (ACs) exist for a number of settlements or villages which are grouped together but whose individual settlements have populations of less than 5,000. They cover areas with predominantly rural populations and in some cases can be identified with spheres of influence of a particular traditional authority. They serve as rallying points of local enthusiasm in support of the local government system. The TACs consist of not less than 15 and no more than 20 members comprising of not more than five elected members of the DA, not more than 10

representatives from the Unit Committees (UCs) and not more than 5 persons ordinarily resident.

The functions of the TACs include the following: to enumerate and keep records of all ratable persons and properties in the zone or town; to assist any person authorized by the DA to collect revenues due to the Assembly; to recommend to the Assembly the naming of all streets in its area of authority and all buildings to be numbered; to plant trees and to erect tree guards to protect them so that streets are not unduly obstructed; to prevent and control fire outbreaks including bushfires; and to prepare annual budgets of revenue and recurrent, as well as, prepare development budget of the area for approval by the DA (Ahwoi, 2010).

At the lowest level is the UC, which forms the basic unit of the local government structure. A Unit is normally a settlement or a group of settlements with a population of between 500 –1,000 in the rural areas, and a higher population (1,500) for the urban areas. UCs play important roles for legislation compliance and resource mobilization as they are closer to the people. In theory, the UCs provide structured mechanisms of representation, participation and accountability from the village upwards (Ahwoi, 2010). Fig. 1 below is the local government structure in Ghana.

Fig. 1: Local Government Structure in Ghana



*Source: Adopted and modified from (Ahwoi, 2010 and Boateng and Kosi, 2015)*

The diagram above shows that the DA level provides opportunities for political participation at five levels: The DA itself, TACs and UCs. This shows that there is a wider chance for the political participation of men and women in the respective levels with the potential of deepening and sustaining Ghana’s democracy. However, this is not the case as seen on Table 1 and the analyses above. Thus, all the levels are male-dominated rendering the local governance male-centric.

**Gender and Local Political Participation**

Gender is about the relative positioning of women and men in society; its systems and structures, policies, programmes and projects (Yartey, 2012; Odame, 2010; Apusigah, 2004; Allah-Mensah,

2005). It is about how the social roles, responsibilities and expectations of males and females are valued, accounted for and represented in society and its systems and structures. Gender determines the positions of women/girls and men/boys in society as privileged/underprivileged or superordinate/subordinate. As a socially constructed phenomenon, gender is framed around the politics of social relations and interactions as well as the extent to which men and women are empowered or disempowered or accounted or unaccounted for in all facets of society. Additionally, questions of voice, opportunities, outcomes /benefits are core to gender analysis. The point of gender equality, equity and/or justice is to ensure that women and men enjoy their

rights as citizens and live dignifying lives free from violence, poverty and disease.

Kandawasvika-Nhundu (2009), argues that no discussion is more important for gender equality than that of democracy and gender. This is because it is about power and influence exercised over political processes, systems and structures that determine development, peace and security, and human rights. For her, democracy and gender equality are two of the most universally accepted notions in today's world. Kandawasvika-Nhundu (2009), argues that democracy cannot be fully realized unless there is equality between citizens including equality between women and men. Democracy will also not be realized if there is numerical equality but no popular control over public decision-making and resources. The ideal for democracy and for that matter sustainable democracy is that it is inclusive, participatory, representative, accountable and transparent.

As explained by ILGS (2008), any attempt at promoting gender equality, especially at the basic level of governance is a move in the right direction towards social justice and ensuring that in all we do men, women, boys and girls do exercise their right to a life of dignity. Yet, the extent to which this admonition, coming from an institution at the core of local governance, leaves no doubt about the weaknesses of Ghana's political governance mechanism. A glimmer of hope is however offered by Baveng (2011) who argues, among others, that women's participation in formal local decision making structures has seen a steady increase since 1992 although a lot of effort is still needed to reach gender equality. She explains that women have been taking part in local government activities through the operations of the DAs as elected and appointed members. The elected positions are keenly contested, though without the political party furore characteristic of national elections, due to their supposedly non-partisan nature. Sadly, women's performance at the DA level since 1988, like the national level, has been steady but slow regarding the number of contestants and winners.

Kandawasvika-Nhundu (2009), and Adatuu (2015) have attributed the weak participation of women at the local level to impediments stemming from

outmoded traditional/cultural norms, beliefs and values. African traditions seem to define and ascribe separate spaces for women and men's political participation with men in the dominant public while women are expected to operate on the quiet; in the domestic space. This has been corroborated in a Final Report on *Ghana Democracy and Governance Assessment*, of the USAID/Ghana (2011), which argues that the major setback to gender equity in Ghana is the existence of traditional authorities. Chieftaincy is overwhelmingly a male-dominated institution. This is particularly problematic in the north of Ghana and in rural areas, where the structures of the state are at their weakest. Here, the powerful traditional authorities contribute to gender-based discrimination and social exclusions. The male dominance of such traditional systems and institutions inflame machismo and chauvinistic sub-cultures to further deepen inequalities and undermine women's political aspirations and participation in decision-making.

### Methods

The analysis is based on a cross-sectional survey conducted in the Builsa North District in 2016. The simple random sampling technique was used to recruit 141 men while nine women were purposefully selected among actors within the local government system who were of voting age. These included assembly, executive, area, town and unit committee members as well as the district administration. The skewness of the sample in favour of males is reflective of the gendered nature of the system. Data collection was done mainly through the use of a questionnaire. This was then supported with key informant interviews, focus group discussion and desk review as shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Research tools and respondents covered in the sample**

Research Tool	Male	Female	Total
Questionnaire	141	9	150
FGD	0	7	7
KII	2	5	7

*Source: Researcher's construct, Field Data (2016).*

As a result of the small numbers of women in the local government system, the FGD and KII were done among women who were already recruited for the questionnaire. Both the KII and FGD were the used tools for triangulating and deepening women’s voices while creating alternative spaces for the participating women to share their experiences. In the case of the FGD, only one conducted consisted of the seven women.

The data was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative techniques as complements for deeper, evidence-abased analyses. The qualitative data was analyzed using the constant comparative method which allowed for the sorting, coding and reviewing of data into various thematic categories. The literature was useful for drawing inferences around the themes and situating the issues. The quantitative data was analyzed through the use of the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS). SPSS was used to generate tables and figures for presenting and discussing the results. The tables present cross-tabulated data involving simple statistical averages (mean) which are used for the thematic discussions.

**Findings: Gender and Local Political Participation**

**Representation**

For the DA as a local governance structure, representation is key to its decision-making. Hence,

the study examined statistics on representation at that level. This entailed examining the total number of representatives, elected and appointed, at the various levels. On the whole, there were 45 members comprising 31 elected males, 13 appointed males and one (1) appointed female. The TCs had 10 members, all male with no female. Similarly, the ACs had 25 all male members. In the case of the UCs, there were 119 members comprising 101 males and eight (8) females. This shows that overall males were in the majority. Of the 189 members, elected and appointed, only 9 were female. Of the 158 (83.6%) appointed members, there was only one (1) female and as many as 157 males, this is inconsistent with local government regulations requiring government appointment of 30% of members. Above all, it defeats the essence of democratic governance when a sitting government appoints an overwhelming majority, 83.7% (158) of the total (189) membership for all levels. What is the point of representation if it is only for a political party and not the people (communities) to exercise choice and voice effectively? It is also the case that representation was largest at the lowest level at the UC level where 109 (57.7%) members were appointed including only eight (7.3%) women. Compared to those appointed, the appointing authority was generous but in the interest of democracy this was woefully inadequate. See Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Builsa North Assembly Members by Gender and Type of Representation.**

Unit	Male		Female	
	Elected	Appointed	Elected	Appointed
Assembly	31	13	0	1
Town Councils	0	10	0	0
Area Councils	0	25	0	0
Unit Committees	0	101	0	8
Total	31	149	0	9

**Source: Field Data (2016)**

The study also found that since its inception as a DA, no woman has served as a presiding member or District Chief Executive (DCE). The PM, who is elected from the DA, chairs all proceedings. She or he heads the highest representative decision-making

body, the DA. On the other hand, it is the DCE who is the political representative of the District. He or she is appointed by the ruling government and confirmed by the DA. No government, under the NPP or NDC, the two leading parties who have



headed government since the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic, has nominated a woman to head the Builsa North District. Hence, neither the DA nor District has had the opportunity to vote on a female nominee. In the technocratic administrative category, are important positions such as the DCD, who heads that category; and the District Planning Officer, District Budget and/or Accounts Officer, who work under him or her. All those positions have been occupied by men since the establishment of the Assembly in 1988. The only position that has been readily available to women is the Gender Officer. This situation goes to confirm that the executive committee of the District and Assembly has been male-centric.

### ***Inclusion***

Beyond representation, the study also sought to understand the general level of inclusion in governance or involvement in the activities at the various levels. Majority, 143 (95.3%), of the respondents stated that both men and women participated actively in local governance activities while only seven (4.7%) stated that women were inactive. All the respondents, 150 (100%), also indicated that women were more active at the DA and UCs with none at all at the TACs. Indeed, there were no women in the TACs. As noted above, this was because the membership of the TACs comprised elected members only and since the Builsa District did not have any elected women representatives, they were systematically excluded. By definition also, the men who had higher fortunes at elections dominated the electoral process. Hence, they had an enhanced chance of inclusion. Added to that is that whether by nomination to serve in the DA or public service appointment to the technocratic wing, women were severely excluded.

Due to their small numbers at all levels of the governance structure, women remain mostly invisible and at best marginal in the formal structures and subcommittees of the Assembly and as such their functions; legislative, executive and/or deliberative. The few women are either over stretched or forced to get involved in selected activities, programmes and events. For the women, who also have concentrated domestic demands in terms of their reproductive

roles, their involvement has been limited. The extensive demands on Assembly members within and beyond their jurisdiction, is often a challenge to women due to their domestic obligations, which often are non-negotiable. Children, husbands, disabled, sick and elderly members of the family rely on the support of women more than men in their care needs. This tends to take a toll on their time and energy, thus constraining their full involvement in the work of the House.

On decision-making, the study revealed that although both men and women members were expected to participate actively in the House and its structures, there had been discrimination regarding how men and women have been involved. They identified the areas of decision-making to include health, education, infrastructure provision, finance, transparency and accountability, domestic violence against women, early child marriages and abuse. The respondents explained that men have tended to participate more on issues concerning education, health and infrastructure as all the respondents (150) indicated this. They also indicated that women tended to participate more than men on issues of violence against women, child marriages and child abuse. One hundred and twenty (120) respondents made this latter assertion. This implies that men are more interested in issues that affect their own lives and that of society in general than those affecting women in particular.

Naturally, such issues which border on gender, justice and women's rights are as such less attractive to men, who are often the abusers or beneficiaries of such abuse. On the other hand, while women were interested in issues for general socio-economic progress they also pushed for greater inclusivity as a means to extending the benefits. Abantu for Development/Ibis's (2003) publication on women's voices in local governance is revealing. The stories that were captured showed that apart from working with male members to improve infrastructure development and the socio-economic wellbeing of all, social inclusion and gender equality or women's empowerment were high on women members' agenda. The women's social justice interests were said to have motivated them to take keen interest and

get involved in Social Services Committees and particularly special task forces and committees on child labour, child marriage, child protection, and violence against women, teenage pregnancy, school drop-out and girls' education.

### ***Nature/Areas of Contributions***

The study also sought to determine gender differentials in their contribution to issues before the House. The data revealed clear differences in issues on which women contributed. It was clear that women were more interested in issues on welfare, rights and justice while men were keen on service delivery and infrastructural development. The analysis revealed that women only contributed more in some specific areas, as already noted above. Seventy (70) respondents representing 46.7% indicated that women contributed much more in the area of women and child welfare issues in the District. Also, 40 (26.7%) respondents mentioned that it was in the areas of gender and finance that women members contributed the most. A further 25 (16.7%) respondents stated that women contributed more on issues of rights while 15 (10%) agreed that women contributed also in the areas of transparency and accountability. This shows that women contribute much more on women and child welfare issues followed by gender and finance issues, women's rights and then transparency and accountability. All the respondents (150) stated that men contributed much more on service delivery and infrastructural development.

Yartey (2012) has pointed out that several studies show that women give priority to women's issues such as violence against women and children and women's property rights when they participate in decision-making. She went further to assert that the studies found women to have had positive impacts on accountability in politics, while other studies suggest that women make positive impact on the delivery of services to women and children. In the case of the Builsa North District, as presented here, both men and women contributed in local governance decision-making. However, men more than women, tended to be interested in issues of general interest while women paid particular attention to those social

in nature especially in relation to ethics, women's right and children's welfare.

Pushed to compare the overall contributions of men and women, one hundred and forty-four, forming 96% of respondents stated that men contributed much more than women while only 6 (4%) stated that women contributed more than men. But of course, numerically, men were more than women in the House and so would their contributions. This picture gives credence to the works of Abantu for Development/Ibis (2003) and Yartey (2012).

### ***Factors and Forces Differentiating Women and Men's Political Participation***

Both positive and negative factors were found to have influenced and shaped the differentiation in women and men's political participation.

On the positive side, the study found a number of factors and forces that worked in favor of both men and women's participation yet differentiated them. These included increased gender awareness and sensitivity. The respondents explained that increasingly, communities were seeing the benefit of having men and women in decision-making spaces. Although this has not worked fully to the benefit of women as can be expected and shown in the statistics above, the reality that there are women in these structures at the most basic level testifies to change in thinking. Traditionally, decision-making has been the preserve of men and this has worked well in their favour when being considered for formal sector participation such as the Assembly. However, the communities are also beginning to appreciate that women as citizens and members of society should also be involved in its decision-making structures. The respondents explained that traditionally, bringing women into men's spaces of decision-making would have been an abomination but now through education and advocacy women were slowly making inroads.

Education and training was considered another important set of factors. Eighty (80) respondents identified it and explained that when men and women have education and training they are able to present themselves for election or even appointment. They

said the kind of work expected of Assemblies required some minimal level of skills and knowledge either through formal education or practical exposure. It was only those women and men who demonstrated such skills and knowledge that got appointed or elected. Unfortunately, the women among them were very few as, men compared to women, have had the most benefit of education and training in the families and communities. This can be confirmed from the Ghana Population and Housing data (See GSS, 2012).

Also, according to the respondents, family support has been an important factor and especially so for women. They explained that women, especially when they were married, required the permission of their husbands before they could present themselves for political positions. Men only needed to inform their families. Where and when women, married or unmarried, have had the support of their families and communities, they have been successful in their political aspirations. Such families become their backbone and defend them in the face of adversity. Sixty (60) respondents said family and community support for women during electoral campaigns helps them to win elections. They also explained that women whose families encourage them to pursue their political interests and aspirations get all of their support during their campaign and term in office. They explained that women and men's family standing was critical in their getting support or not in politics, although the pressure was more on women. Access to and control over resources was another factor. The respondents explained that when candidates have access to financial, human and other material resources, their political fortunes were enhanced. Both women and men require financial resources to run campaigns, participate in political activities and sustain themselves and their support base. At that local level in particular, members or aspirants are expected to pay certain courtesies during social events such as funerals, out-doorings and festivals. Where women and men wield resources and have generously spread them to the benefit of their supporters, they have been successful. In an era of costly elections, financial ability plays an important role in electioneering

campaign and political appointments. Naturally, those who are able to support party campaigns are considered for government appointments.

Finally, favourable government policies were considered positive and especially so for women. They said when such policies were explicit on women's participation and provided quotas and other affirmative action regulations, they helped in the promotion of gender equity in local governance. For instance, the policy allocating 30% of government appointees to Assemblies compel both the local authorities and government to include women in their nominations and appointees. Although poor regulation and enforcement has allowed some Assemblies to get away, it is still useful especially in cases when women have not presented themselves or have not been elected. In the Builsa North District, where elected women were marginal, that policy worked somehow to improve women's representation and participation. When asked, nine (9) respondents said that government policies toward women's participation in politics and decision making must be complied with so as to give women more opportunity to contest and win elections.

In contrast, the respondents identified a number of barriers to men and women's political participation. All the respondents, that is 100%, stated that both men and women faced barriers to their political participation. However, further interrogation and analysis show a differentiation. The analysis showed that level of education and training, disability, ill-health, voter choice and financial requirement were shared barriers for men and women. However, women faced many other socio-cultural barriers.

Ninety respondents, that is 60%, said that more men than women contested elections and as such were already limited in their chances of winning and participating. Also, 60 (40%) said culture and financial issues constrained women more than men from contesting and involving themselves in local governance. Some cultural barriers were that women were expected to be married yet married women were sometimes considered outsiders and thus would not be supported. They also said that married women were more respected than unmarried ones. Also, married women compared to unmarried women with

children had better chances. Women were expected to have children with husbands. Those without husbands had limited chances. Also, widows and widowers were disadvantaged.

As noted above, finance is a huge factor in politics. Not only are politicians expected to present themselves at social occasions, they are expected to make contributions in cash and kind. With resources, such expectations could be readily managed. Unfortunately, women at that level do not often have access to or control over the same level of resources as men to be competitive. Customary inheritance regimes and formal sector work spaces exclude them. Hence, they are often not able to make the required contributions that can put them forward. From the investigations, 20 (13.3%) respondents said limited finance posed a barrier to women's political participation.

It was also revealed that women faced social and attitudinal barriers such as intimidation and discrimination. This was noted by 45 (30%) respondents. Also, 35 (23.3%) respondents mentioned barriers such as the general perception that women were not fit for leadership positions and thus were not given the chance. Also, 41 (27.3%) said women were not self-confident and therefore shy while 9 (6%) stated that women lacked knowledge of the local governance system. In the case of the men, all the respondents noted that it was illiteracy that posed as a barrier.

Furthermore, as noted above, women's domestic duties and family standing posed further challenges. Required or expected to get permission or endorsement from husbands or other family members, bear and care for children, take care of the elderly and sick and portray submissive attitudes, women are often limited in the extent to which they can take up and play formal level roles, commit to duties outside of home other than work but also participate fully in the activities that their membership of DAs demand.

### ***Mitigating Change***

In line with the above, Yartey (2012) suggests that women need to rally behind one another for their increased participation in local governance. Yartey

(2012) calls for women to be one another's keeper; however, it is also the case that women are not the only aspirants and that women may have interests driving their choices other than gender. All the women members of the DA, nine (9) in number, indicated that one way to increase their participation in local governance was to support one another in terms of resources, campaigns and votes during local government elections. However, when women understand that females compared to male politicians will more likely pursue social justice and gender equality interests, it makes logical sense for them to opt for women candidates.

Yartey (2012) also calls for more education and training for women and girls. Education and training for girls is expected to create a pool of literate and interested women who could aspire to political positions and contest elections in the future. Government, donors and NGOs have pushed this agenda. The women's movement in particular invests a lot in women and girls' education and training as a way of enhancing women's political future. All the women members also indicated that they would promote girl child education so as to provide a pool of educated women to contest in local level elections to represent women's interest in those structures. Seven of the women, that is 4.7%, also said that women in the local government structures will educate all women in the District on the procedures and importance of vying for positions at the local governance structures.

There is also the further call to remove those traditional and cultural barriers that inhibit women's political participation through constitutional and legislation reforms and education. Involving not just traditional authorities but also families and communities is important for negotiating change. In the past, TAs have been involved in various campaigns with some even passing bye-laws forbidding some practices. However, it is only when families and communities have understood and accepted change that such interventions have worked.

Male support for women at all levels and especially in politics is another important way of promoting equitable governance. All the respondents (150) said

that to increase the participation of women in decision making at the local level, there was the need for male support. They said women required the support of husbands, fathers and brothers. They expected that they would make conscious and deliberate efforts to support them in their daily chores to reduce their burdens and help with their campaign during elections. This has been championed by UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, who called for men to take greater responsibility in the promotion of gender equality (Kwapong, 2009). There is also the need for tough legislation and enforcement of existing legislation on electoral influencing. Relevant government agencies should exercise their mandate to arrest and prosecute candidates who fall foul. This will ensure a level playing field for candidates to contest elections and also allow the electorate to elect candidates based on the issues they present.

Finally, government should account for and hold its agencies accountable to existing affirmative action provisions such as the 30% reserved government appointees to the Assemblies. Constitutional and legislative reforms should make good national commitments to global, regional, national and local policies on gender equality and women's rights. The relevant structures, systems and regulations should be put in place, resourced and implemented in order to enforce compliance. Above all, the MGCSP and relevant civil society organizations should be resourced to actively engage effectively in monitoring and advocacy to assure accountable governance.

### Conclusion

The analysis confirms the literature above that women have been disadvantaged in their political participation even at the local government level. The empirical data demonstrate that political participation at the local governance level has been differentiated along gender lines and that whether in representation, inclusion and contribution, men have dominated the local government system. This suggests that women have suffered various forms of discrimination which have hindered their participation in local governance.

Thus, in the Builsa North District, political participation has been differentiated along gender lines in the areas of representation, inclusion and contributions due to various factors. It was revealed that various factors and forces, positive and negative, have worked together to cause and maintain the differentiation. Specifically, the study indicated that women in the Builsa North District have low numbers in the local structures that provide opportunities even as they have suffered from intimidation and discrimination, unfavorable cultural practices, low self-confidence, low level of education and training and limited resources. These have limited their political fortunes in the Assemblies. However, where both men and women have had comparable levels of education and training as well as access to and control over resources, their political participation was likely to be equitable. Again, where communities and electorates were sensitized on gender equality and women's rights and where there were favorable government policies and programmes, they enhanced the political fortunes of both men and women.

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