Women Representation and Policy Outputs in Ghana And Liberia

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Abstract

Women representation and gender equality have been in the front burner of global political discourse for some decades, with several scholars linking the level of women representation to women empowerment and attainment of national development. However, the level of women representation in Ghana and Liberia remains low. The study investigated the effect of women representation on social welfare and women empowerment in the two West African countries. Survey design was employed in the study. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed in data analysis. The study found that women representation had a positive significant effect on policy outputs in social welfare and women empowerment in Ghana and Liberia, $F(1, 677)=4.435$, Adj. $R^2=.705$, $p<0.05$. Women representatives in Ghana and Liberia facilitated policy outputs in social welfare and women empowerment sectors. There is need for adoption of quotas that would facilitate election of more female representatives into the National Legislatures of both countries.

Key words: Women representation, policy outputs, social welfare, women empowerment, affirmative action

Introduction

The level of women representation in public space, especially in national parliaments across the globe has been a subject of major discourse since the Beijing Conference of 1995. Although most countries of the world have adopted universal adult suffrage as part of their constitutions the level of women participation at gladiatorial levels of politics, especially their representation at national parliaments remain low. Despite the fact that globally, women's parliamentary representation increased from 11 per cent in December 1995 to approximately 19 per cent in December 2010, the percentage of female representatives remains low when compared to their proportion of the global population (Paxton and Kunovitch 2003).

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2019) only fifty countries have attained the critical mass of 30% women representation in national parliament, with the first 10 countries having more than 42% women representation in national parliament. However, in spite of the adoption of the affirmative action policy of 35% female representation at the national legislative bodies (by all African countries), only few countries in the continent such as Rwanda, Namibia, South Africa, Mozambique and Lesotho have met the target (Nwogwugwu and Odedina, 2018). Table 1 below, shows the ten leading countries in women representation in national parliament across the globe.

Although three African countries are among the first 10 countries in the world, Ghana and Liberia are very low in the ranking. Ghana is ranked 145th in the world. Of the of the 275 seats in Ghana's national parliament, women occupy 36 (13%). Liberia is ranked 151st in the world, as women occupy 9 (12.3%) of the 73 seats available in the House of Representatives of the country (IPU, 2019). Both the law making and public policy processes in both countries are also dominated by men with attendant consequences on the policy outputs of government.

In spite of the low representation of women at parliamentary levels, there is growing evidence that at the grassroots level, women are increasingly becoming active in the political process through their organizations and associations. In some wards, women comprise the majority of members of various political parties as evidenced in the usual mammoth turn out of women at political rallies and campaign venues. The challenge however, remains the transformation of such participation to the formulation of pro-women policies and programmes by elected officials after the campaign periods. It is on this basis that Nwogwugwu and Iyanda (2015) stated that:
There is a need to go beyond the pockets of female representation at national and state level by
creating the enabling environment for a larger number of women to participate in decision making and

governance at various levels. This is pertinent given the large population of women in our societies (p. 446).

Table 1: The first ten Countries in the world on women representation in Lower Chamber or Single House (National Parliaments) as at 2019

Rank	Country	Date of Last Election	Number of Seats	Seats Occupied by Women	%
1	Rwanda	03/09/2018	80	49	61.3
2	Cuba	11/03/2018	605	322	53.2
3	Bolivia	12/10/2014	130	69	53.1
4	Mexico	01/07/2018	500	241	48.2
5	Sweden	09/09/2018	349	165	47.3
6	Grenada	13/03/2018	15	7	46.7
7	Namibia	29/11/2014	104	48	46.2
8	Costa Rica	04/02/2018	57	26	45.6
9	Nicaragua	06/11/2016	92	41	44.6
10	South Africa	07/05/2014	393	168	42.7

Source: IPU (2019)

Although international searchlight had been beamed on women political participation at the national level, with the belief that it would orchestrate to the lower levels, Albrights position highlights the imperative of gender equality in political participation at all levels of governance. This is orchestrated by Huq (2016 cited in Nwogwugwu and Odedina, 2018) who write that the goals of equality, development and peace are not achievable without the active participation of women at all levels of decision making.

Large number of women besides voting during general elections are active politically through their membership of various women organizations. The mechanisms through which these women organizations participate actively towards ensuring that women issues are addressed by government policies are; access to public officials and institutions, agenda setting and accountability measures to hold public officials and agencies responsible for addressing women issues (Walby 2005; Jahan 1996).

Why is gender-balanced political representation important? First, there is the notion of 'justice': since women represent half of the population, it is only fair that women should occupy half of the parliamentary seats. Second, there is the argument of 'different experience': as women have different gender roles, they also have different experiences, which should be acknowledged. Third, some argue that only women can represent women's interests, as women and men have different and conflicting interests. Fourth, women in politics may serve as role models for girls and other women. Fifth, without balanced representation there is no democracy; thus women in politics foster the development of democracy (Madsen 2019).

In studies of several countries, increases in women's descriptive representation have been shown to increase women's substantive representation in the policy process (Burrell 1997, Thomas 1991, Celis 2006, Tremblay and Pelletier 2000, Schwindt-Bayer 2006). Feminist scholars such as Squires (2008) and Phillips (1998) widely assert that women are best equipped to represent the interests of their gender. This argument entails that advancements in policy areas that are important to women, such as Education, health, social welfare, protection against violence, women empowerment, which can only be achieved, if women are represented adequately (Childs, 2008; Krook, 2009, 2010).

Stockemer and Bryme (2011) write that studies such as Wangnerud (2009) and Norris (2004) were   motivated by arguments for fairer descriptive representation and the envisaged substantive political changes it represents, sought to find the key factors that influence the number of women in national legislatures. The belief is that

when you have more women in decision making roles, there will be greater emphasis in those sectors that are of key interest to women in terms of policy outputs.

Greater Women representation in parliament is believed to lead to prioritization of women issues leading to enactment of legislation and policies that positively affect girls and women (Devlin and Elgie 2008). According to DiLanzo (2016) when women are elected or appointed to public office they actively work towards achieving positive change in such sectors as education, health, social welfare, reduction of violence against women, poverty reduction, gender equality as well as working towards attaining consensus in the policy processes.

In efforts to ensure greater women representation in national legislature and executive positions, some African countries in implementing affirmative action have already introduced a quota system for women in parliament – Rwanda (2003), South Africa (1994) and Uganda (1989). However, Ghana and Liberia are yet to move in that direction. Several reasons have been put forward for the low representation of women in parliament. *First*, the 'first-past-the-post' electoral system with its in-built winner-takes-all bias, *Second*, the substantial monetarisation of politics which puts women at a disadvantage, third, the culture of parliament where women are seen as inferior, and fourth, the stereotyping of women, with women representatives being subject of abuse on account of their gender (Madsen 2019). This may have affected policy outputs in education, health and social welfare which are areas where women are known to pay particular attention (Childs, 2008; Krook, 2010, 2009)

However, there had been progressive marginal improvement in women representation in national parliament. By 2016, there was an increase in the number of female Parliamentarians from 10% (2012) to 13% (2016) (i.e. from 29 to 35), which is still below the 30% threshold set by the United Nations for effective representation in decision making (Munemo 2017).

Albrecht and Arts (2005) suggest that policy output is characterized by two basic elements, namely "the launching of policies and measures (PAMs) as well as the organization and mobilization of resources to execute these" (2005, p. 888). The political actions of launching the policies and the mobilization of resources in ensuring effective implementation of the policies are encompassed in the policy output. Knill et al. (2012) argue that to analyze the policy output in any given context, there is a need to examine the "density" and "intensity," of the policy. By this the authors mean, an interrogation of the number of policy instruments that are utilized in the specific policy being analyzed.

Scholars propose that analyzing policy output through the examination of the policy instruments is vital in undertaking comparative studies of policy output. This would involve a focus on policy density, e.g., by counting policies related to specific regulatory problems or types of policy instruments (Jahn & Kuitto, 2011; Albrecht & Arts, 2005). However, in the words of Grant and Nathan (2008) "simply counting (policy instruments) without accounting for their content is likely to produce measurement error" (p. 306). This content is conceptualized by "intensity."

Empowerment can be defined as a "multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important" (Page and Czuba, 1999, p. 26 cited in Nwogwugwu 2020). Also, Kabeer (2005) has defined empowerment as "a process of change' or 'the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability" (p. 437). The implication of Kabeer's definition for the context of this chapter, is that empowerment for women must target their having the capacity to make social, political and economic choices without being guided or influenced (Nwogwugwu, 2020).

Women empowerment involves the action of boosting the status of women through qualitative education, training and raising awareness (Alvarez and Lopez, 2013). Hence, women's empowerment is putting in place mechanisms and structures that allow and equip women to make right decisions/choices that affect their lives and the society across different issues in the country (Bayer 2016).

Although Liberia was the first African country where a female was elected as President, as at 2018, a study conducted by USAID and NDI showed that the level of women political empowerment in the country is still low. A large number of women occupying key government positions are in the Judiciary, with very few women in the executive and legislative sectors in the country (USAID and NDI 2018). This could have implications for policy output as the executive and legislative arms of government are the predominant actors in the policy making processes.

It is the light of the low level of policy outputs in social welfare and women empowerment sectors in the two countries that this study examined how women representation affects policy outputs in the social welfare and women empowerment sectors in Ghana and Liberia.

Theoretical Framework
Theory of Political Representation
The study adopted the political representation is an important attribute of democracy, especially liberal or representative democracy. The major proponent of theory of political representation is Hannah Pitkin (1967). Pitkin (1967) argues that representation in principle implies the "making present" what is not, as well as an "acting for." The representative should be responsive to the represented. At the same time, a representative cannot be that when it purely executes orders or demands. He or she is not a "mere instrument" (Pitkin, 1967, p. 126) or servant, but the represented should be present in the representative.

Political representation is composed of three conceptually distinct, but related, dimensions: descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation (Pitkin 1967). Descriptive representation refers to the composition of the legislative body: does the legislature represent the electorate demographically? Substantive representation refers to the representation of group interests in the policymaking process. For example, do increases in the number of women representatives produce differences in policy outcomes? If we have more female congress members will we have better maternity leave policies? Finally, symbolic representation "emphasizes that representation is a symbol that generates emotional responses among constituents" (Schwindt-Bayer 2010, p. 6).

Pitkin's (1967) seminal treatment identifies four distinct, but interconnected meanings or dimensions of representation including: formal representation, referring to the institutional rules and procedures through which representatives are chosen; descriptive representation, referring to the compositional similarity between representatives and the represented; substantive representation or responsiveness, referring to the congruence between representatives' actions and the interests of the represented; and symbolic representation, referring to the represented's feelings of being fairly and effectively represented.

Women representation provide an ideal focus for testing an integrated theory for three reasons. First, women are a large and easily identifiable group whose members possess many and varied political interests but also are widely perceived as sharing some common, identifiable women's interests (Sapiro 1981). Second, although women's representation has improved markedly in recent years, women remain underrepresented in most countries according to many definitions and measures. Third, while many minority groups also have identifiable interests and are widely underrepresented it is much more difficult to compare them systematically because these groups are so varied; a group that is a minority in one country can be a majority in another and absent altogether in a third. Women, however, constitute approximately 50% of the population virtually everywhere.

Are characteristics of representatives relevant in representation and should they mirror those in society? By arguing that representation includes both a "making present" and an "acting   for," Pitkin (1967) suggests that it does not matter greatly *who* represents, as long as the ideas   and preferences are represented. Representation in her view is not about the representative, for   example, *being* a woman, but rather about the representative capturing relatively accurately   whatever ideas and preferences the women constituent has that relate to policies (Arnesen and Peters 2018).

Methodology
The study adopted survey research design. The population of the study is women organizations in Ghana and Liberia. In Ghana, there are 45 registered women organizations (with combined membership of 22,255) that are active in the policy processes of the country, while there are 47 registered women organizations (with combined membership of 15,521) that are actively involved in the policy processes in Liberia. Grand total for Ghana and Liberia is 22,255 + 15,521 = 37,776. The population of the study will be the 37,776 members of the registered women organizations in Ghana and Liberia. The sample size is determined using the Taro Yamane (1970) formula as presented below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n is the sample size, N is the population size and e is the level of precision (0.03)

$$n = \frac{37776}{1+37776(0.04)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{37776}{1+ 60.4416}$$

n =   614.82774

n = 615

In order to account for expected attrition, additional 10% was added

615+61.5= 676.5 = 677

The method of data collection was field survey (questionnaire administration). A total of six hundred and seventy-seven copies of the questionnaire (399 for Ghana and 278 for Liberia) will be administered. Respondents were selected using stratified random sampling. The national capitals and three other cities were selected from each country. In Ghana, Accra, Kumasi, Ho and Obuasi were selected for study, while in Liberia, Monrovia, Bong, Grand Cape Mount and Fish Town were selected. Descriptive and inferential statistics (linear regression) were employed in the analysis of data.

Results and Discussion
Table 2: **WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN POLITICAL SPACE**

		Countries	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	U (%)	Mean	St.D
1.	Women representatives are active in policy process	Ghana	252 (63.2)	112(28.1)	13(3.3)		22(5.5)	4.4336	.98734
		Liberia	84 (30.2)	156 (56.1)	28 (10.1)	10 (3.6)		4.1295	.72932
		Combined	336 (49.6)	268 (39.6)	41 (6.1)	10 (1.5)	22 (3.2)	3.3087	.90240
2.	Women representatives provide descriptive representation	Ghana	59 (14.8)	249 (62.4)	23 (5.8)	2 (.5)	66 (16.5)	3.5840	1.24301
		Liberia	82 (29.5)	158 (56.8)	28 (10.1)	10 (3.6)		4.1223	.72561
		Combined	141 (20.8)	407 (60.1)	51 (7.5)	12 (1.8)	66 (9.7)	2.8050	1.09346
3.	Women legislators provide substantive representation	Ghana	49 (12.3)	59 (14.8)	29 (7.3)	194 (48.6)	68 (17)	2.5664	1.27401
		Liberia	82 (29.5)	156 (56.1)	28 (10.1)	12 (4.3)		4.1079	.74747
		Combined	131 (19.4)	215 (31.8)	57 (8.4)	206 (30.4)	68 (10.0)	2.1994	1.32683
4.	Women in executive positions influence decision making on critical policies	Ghana	132 (33.1)	225 (56.4)	24 (6)	8 (2)	10 (2.5)	4.1554	.82115
		Liberia	95 (34.2)	182 (65.5)	1 (.4)			4.3381	.48148
		Combined	227 (33.5)	407 (60.1)	25 (3.7)	8 (1.2)	10 (1.5)	3.2304	.70716
5.	Women representatives work towards women empowerment	Ghana	130 (32.6)	218 (54.6)	25 (6.3)	4 (1)	22 (5.5)	4.0777	.95973
		Liberia	95 (34.2)	182 (65.5)	1 (.4)			4.3381	.48148
		Combined	225 (33.2)	400 (59.1)	26 (3.8)	4 (.6)	22 (3.2)	3.1846	.80853

Table 2 reveals the respondents' view on women representation in political space. The table reveals that, on the average Women representatives are active in policy process (mean=3.3087; St.D= .90240), Women representatives provide descriptive representation (mean= 2.8050; St.D= 1.09346), Women legislators do not provide substantive representation (mean= 2.1994; St.D= 1.32683), Women in executive positions influence decision making on critical policies (mean= 3.2304; St.D=.70716), and Women representatives work towards women empowerment (mean= 3.1846; St.D= .80853).

Table 3: POLICY OUTPUTS IN THE SOCIAL WELFARE AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

S/N	Statements	Countries	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	U (%)	Mean	St.D
1.	Women representatives facilitated the formulation of social welfare policies	Ghana	8(2)	79(19.8)	142(35.6)	151(37.8)	19(4.8)	2.1253	1.17740
		Liberia	82(28.5)	32(11.5)	84(30.2)	80(28.8)		2.8273	1.65173
		Combined	90 (13.3)	111 (16.4)	226 (33.4)	231 (34.1)	19 (2.8)	2.0325	1.07230
2.	Women representatives facilitated the formulation of policies on gender equality.	Ghana	24(6)	73(18.3)	137(34.3)	144(36.1)	21(5.3)	2.2381	1.27833
		Liberia	82(29.5)	32(11.5)	84(30.2)	80(28.8)		2.8273	1.65173
		Combined	106 (15.7)	105 (15.5)	221 (32.6)	224 (33.1)	21 (3.1)	2.0753	1.11017
3.	Female legislators supported the formulation of policies on women empowerment	Ghana	233(58.4)	95(23.8)	41(10.3)	6(1.5)	24(6)	4.2732	1.05766
		Liberia	164(59)	112(40.3)	2(.7)			4.5755	.53712
		Combined	397 (58.6)	207 (30.6)	43 (6.4)	6 (.9)	24 (3.5)	3.3988	.92012
4.	Female legislators facilitated affirmative action policies.	Ghana	231(57.9)	52(13)	84(21.1)	8(2)	24(6)	4.0376	1.29012
		Liberia	83(29.9)	84(30.2)	106(38.1)	5(1.8)		3.4820	1.31282
		Combined	314 (46.4)	136 (20.1)	190 (28.1)	13 (1.9)	24 (3.5)	3.0384	1.06796

Table 3 shows the respondents' opinion on policy outputs in the social welfare and women empowerment. The table reveals that, on the average Women representatives facilitated the formulation of social welfare policies (mean= 2.0325; St.D= 1.07230). The low performance on this variable may be because of the fact that there is limited women representation, which implies that greater number of women representatives would have had higher impact on the formulation of social welfare policies in the two countries. Women representatives facilitated the formulation of policies on gender equality (mean= 2.0753; St.D= 1.11017). The fact that most of the policy makers are male, some of whom do not regard their views and position of women as priority, may have accounted for the limited level of success that was made of the efforts of the women representatives towards formulation of policies on gender equality. Female legislators supported the formulation of policies on women empowerment (mean= 3.3988; St.D= .92012). Female legislators facilitated affirmative action policies (mean= 3.0384; St.D= 1.06796). This is line with extant literature that posit that women are usually at the forefront of formulation and implementation of pro-women policies and programmes. The implication is that women would be more likely to champion women empowerment programmes than men. The findings of this study are in tandem with earlier studies by Bayeh (2016) and Orisadare (2019) that low level of women representation being at the centre of marginalization of women and limited attention being paid to women related issues in most African societies.

H_0:   Women representation has no significant effect on policy outputs in social welfare and women empowerment in Ghana and Liberia.

Table 4: Effect of Women Representation on Social Welfare and Women Empowerment

Variable		Coefficient	Std. Error	t- Statistics	Prob.
(Constant)		12.070	.498	24.250	.000
Women Representation		.069	.033	2.106	.036
R-Square	.707				
Adjusted R-Square	.705				
F-statistics	4.435				
Prob. (F-statistics)	.036				

Dependent Variable: Social welfare and women empowerment

Hypothesis test result reveals a simple regression result on women representation effect on policy outputs in social welfare and women empowerment in Ghana and Liberia. Looking at the result, it shows that women representation (coefficient= .069, t= 2.106, prob. =0.036) has a significant positive effect on Social welfare and women empowerment, the t-statistics revealed that the individual parameter estimates are significant. This implies that an improvement on the Women representation will bring about an improvement on Social welfare and women empowerment in Ghana and Liberia, all things being equal. The Adjusted R- Square of 0.707 reveals the explanatory power of Women representation on the on Social welfare and women empowerment, the result shows that 70.7% variation on Social welfare and women empowerment is explained by women representation. The F-statistic reveals the combined significant influence of all the independent variables on the dependent variable. Hence, from the result, it shows that the parameter of the general model is significant at 0.000 which is less than 0.05 level of significant. This means that the parameters estimates in a whole are statistically significant in explaining social welfare and women empowerment.

Conclusion

The level of women representation in Ghana and Liberia are very low, and this has direct implications for policy outputs in the social welfare and women empowerment sectors. Policy makers determine what happens in a society and when a particular segment of the population is not adequately represented it affect the protection of their interests in the public domain. In order to ensure that policy outputs can be regarded at fair, equally protecting the interests of both men and women, there is need for greater women representation, to ensure that greater premium is paid to women related issues. Patriarchal societies across Africa such as Ghana and Liberia would need to make changes to the male dominated political system so as to allow women to have a say about the issues that affect their lives as well as the political system of their country (OECD, 2008, Alvarez and Lopez, 2013). Otherwise, there will be no representative ideas, and protection of the interest of all citizens and the overall political process will be one-sided, pushing women out of the pathway (Bayeh 2016). This negates the tenets of democracy which is about inclusiveness, and ensuring that no segment of the society is marginalized. There is need for governments of Ghana and Liberia to adopt effective strategies for increasing women representation such as quota system as was done by Rwanda. This would ensure that higher number of women are elected as representatives into the national legislatures of both countries.

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