

Dominated Myths Are Almost Broken: Evaluating Assembly Members' Lived Experiences in Ghanaian Local Politics

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DOI//<http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gjds.v19i1.2>

Abstract

Ghanaian cultural norms, verbal and non-verbal expressions, gender stereotypes, and male dominance are real propaganda that discourages women from engaging in local politics. This paper draws from the dominant ideology, development approach and gender power relations to reveal efforts to motivate aspiring women politicians to engage local government administration. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were used in collating the data. The study findings showed that male and female assembly members resisted derogatory pronouncements. The actions were to encourage more women to contest district assembly elections and win. The male assembly members suggested ways to encourage women in their electoral areas to participate in local politics influenced the near deconstruction of the myths. These myths included male dominance surrounding discriminatory predispositions against aspiring women politicians in Ghana.

Keywords: Gender, Development, Deconstruction, Dominant Ideology, Ghana

Introduction

After several years of restoring multi-party democracy in Ghana, the country still records a low number of women representatives in decision-making positions at the national and local levels (DzradosI, Elikem, & Agyekum, 2018). For example, after the 2016 Parliamentary Elections, only 36 females were elected, representing 13.1% in parliament out of the 275 elected members.

In the history of the 1998 district assembly elections, 547 women contested, and 196 won (Abantu for Development, 2020). On September 1, 2015, during the district assembly elections, female contestants were 1,155, and 282 (4.65%) were elected (Paaga, 2016). With 909 contenders and 216 winners, the 2019 district assembly elections recorded the second-lowest number of women contestants against the 1998

elections (Abantu for Development, 2020). However, there is a relative increase in the numbers.

Many societies' socio-cultural beliefs and practices often disadvantage women (Umar, 2011). The gendered socio-cultural beliefs, norms, and stereotypes are the myths or traditions that reflect Ghanaian expressions and adages reinforcing women's disadvantaged positions. Also, these myths are traditions within the Ghanaian culture, patriarchal systems, and structures that construct gender relations, paving the way for men to decide on women's behalf, which eventually tumbles them to experience discrimination in the public space (DzradosI, Elikem & Agyekum, 2018). More specifically, several factors attributed to the low representation of women in the district assemblies include the cultural orientation amidst traditional proverbs, adages, gender stereotypes reinforcing negative perceptions about female politicians (Abass & Çoban-Döşkaya, 2017).

Prior literature found evidence of negative stereotypes, labelling female politicians as sex objects as they are accused of favouring other politicians by engaging in sexual acts (see Boateng, 2017). Thus, the harsh environment in which political contests are staged also features a gendered perception of married female politicians (Darkwa, 2016). The consequences make it difficult, if not impossible, for women to compete with men for political positions. Meanwhile, the politicians' responsibilities demanded that they commit to the people irrespective of their gender, class, and status. Politics is about people, decision-making, and wellbeing (Ariza-Montes et al., 2019).

The local government system in Ghana reflects patriarchal structures as older and younger men rule and manage the system. Through the socially constructed statuses between men and women in Ghanaian society, men are considered household heads and have opportunities in public spaces, political activities, and political positions. The individual male political actors have privileged positions in power over females; they influence institutional rules, norms, conventions, which are interpreted to affect gender power relations (Abass & Çoban-Döşkaya, 2017). Thus, gender stereotypes, socio-cultural practices, and traditional beliefs tend to demote women to the lower levels of all aspects of Ghanaian society.

Gender advocates under the guides of gender and development (GAD) approach draw attention to unequal power relations and proposes women's empowerment as key to addressing inequality in decision-making positions (World Bank, 2010; Jack, 2015). Empowerment does not mean setting women against men but making both

realise their changing roles and status to develop consensus for harmonious living in society (Prasad, 2012). The empowerment bit always motivated female contenders to encourage themselves to participate in politics. Sometimes, governments insist on policies, programs, and laws to empower women to curtail the reinforcement of the dominant ideology and unequal power relations in politics. For instance, in 2002, Ghana's government directed that half of the 30% appointee positions in the district assemblies be reserved for women. The directives were to ensure gender equality in local politics, although they have not been fulfilled.

However, some government actions are questioned; unsurprisingly, the affirmative action bill had been before Ghana's Parliament for more than two decades as of 2021, pending its enactment into law. That demonstrates the lack of MPs' political will and interest to allow more women to occupy government decision-making positions. Their actions further highlight that the mythical dominant ideology exists in the body politics in Ghana. Thus, affirming the notion that the advocacy for equal representation of gender in Ghanaian politics has not been successful and directly undermined efforts to achieve the MDG 3 (gender equity and women's empowerment) (Coalition of the Women's Manifesto for Ghana [CWMG], 2004).

The cultural orientation in Ghana tags women to function in the private spheres while men operate in the public space, a situation that enforces gender inequality in politics (Amoah et al., 2019). It is assumed that any woman aspiring to engage in politics challenges male dominance's status quo, thereby attracting attacks, abuse, insults, negative adages, and stereotypes. The effect of these attacks, beliefs, and sayings consistently illustrates the expectation that a woman should submit to the private spheres of life, which is being contested; hence, the call for gender equality in local politics and public decision-making positions in Ghana. There have been resistance movements and groups, including gender advocates, political parties, civil society organisations (i.e., social activities) in Ghana, resisting the dominant ideology and advocating for fair representation in decision-making positions. The study aims to discuss female and males (assembly members) resistance against discriminatory predispositions, traditional beliefs, derogatory comments, gender stereotypes, and male dominance to inspire other women to aspire to political positions in the local government system. The paper's contribution to gender equality and women's empowerment is threefold. First, the study confirms female politicians strive to break the glass ceiling, even though they are being pulled down by cultural orientation. Hence, the need to drum home their efforts and contributions in political societies to sensitise many women to participate in local politics. Second, the findings

communicate how male politicians relate to colleague female politicians' challenges and their efforts to support them. Third, the study ultimately draws attention to social change, women's empowerment, laws, policies, gender advocacy, and the gradual deconstruction of cultural hindrances. Studies such as this encourages the affirmative action bill's passage into law to support the deconstruction of male dominance in Ghanaian politics. The implications are to acknowledge efforts to empower women politically and create awareness of the unequal power relations in Ghana's local government system.

Theoretical Framework

Dominant ideologies

The dominant ideology suggests that there are still hostile societies with beliefs that control others and, through its integration in subordinate classes' consciousness, tends to inhibit the development of radical political dissent (Hill, 2014).

The dominant ideology reveals many prevailing myths, reflecting the unequal gender power relations observed in Ghanaian politics. Thus, men continue to dominate mainstream political organisations of all kinds, both inside and outside the State (O'Neil & Domingo, 2016; Rai, 2005; Staudt, 1985). The dominant ideology sets forth women as domestic helpmates and economic appendages to their husbands, which mythically surrounds patriarchal structures. The doctrine reflects the Ghanaian culture, which influences derogatory expressions and adages against women, and maintains male dominance in the public spaces. Accordingly, a woman should play a "working mother," generally low paid and apolitical (Tong, 2018). The belief in male power denies women the right to engage in politics, keeps their work at home to articulate consumer demands, and depend on men for livelihood. Nukunya (2003) affirmed that a husband in Ghana is entitled to a wife's commercial and domestic services. Hence, the adages and proverbs that enhance the dominant beliefs indoctrinate females from venturing into male-dominated public space and politics. For instance, some of the well-known cultural sayings include, "sj obaa to tuo a, etwere barima bo", literally meaning, when a woman buys a gun, it is placed on the chest of a man or when a woman faces any issue, a man bears the circumstances. Again, "obaa bo nwa, ommo akyekyere", meaning females crack snails and not tortoises; or a husband receives praises when glory is his wife. Also, "obaa ton ntorowa, onton atoduro" to wit, a woman sells garden eggs and not gun powder. "Akoko bedee na onim nea ne mma bedi". Literally meaning, a hen knows what its chicks will feed on. These sayings reinforce women's place in the private spheres of life, which are also myths hindering women's chances to engage in politics. For example, unmarried female aspirants are forced to respond to queries about their marital status and their aspiration to engage in local politics despite their singlehood.

The culture of each ethnic group in Ghana features patriarchal systems that uphold male's notional superiority and advantages (Amoakohene, 2004; Prah, 2011). Each ethnic group shapes an individual through heritage transmission to gain life experiences (Boateng, 2017).

Accordingly, in anticipating becoming part of the public space's decision-making positions, any interested female aspirants need to survive the societal rebound. Thus, she should beware that she would be subjected to all forms of abuse, including insults, derogatory expressions and quotes, adages to discourage her from rescinding her decision about politics. Those perceptions frustrate female aspirants and discourage other ambitious females from pursuing political careers, resulting in low representation in Ghana's district assemblies.

Political and public positions remain mostly in male hands because of the bond men and women have, and it is being based on power, which depicts domination over females in life (Eatwell & Wright, 1999; Titi, 2000). Feminists believe that a woman's subordinated status in society is not the natural and biological difference between her and men. Instead, it results from socially constructed roles, making men superior (Tong, 2018). Gender and development (GAD) approach rises to challenge, change, and deconstruct women's disadvantaged position to empower them to enhance gender equality in decision-making positions in society.

Gender and Development Approach to Gender Equality

Gender and Development (GAD) theory was propounded in the 1980s to advocate for gender equality. Since the twentieth century, the GAD theory or approach has supported women's voices to resist the perceptions that discourage them from engaging in politics. As a result of the social construction of gender, the structured patriarchal system makes women feel dependent, and society is yet to recognise their role in the development process (Boateng, 2009). The gendered relations and attitudes involving male dominance, masculinity, chauvinism, male protagonists, culture, and societal rules are associated with patriarchal systems and gender construction (George, 2019; Goetz, 1995; March et al., 1999). Hence, the GAD course is thoughtful of women's consciousness, central to empowering them to rely on their agency (voices), influencing their reactions to stereotypical issues about female community roles and responsibilities, including politics. The GAD recognises the gendered relationships at the societal levels and encompasses concerns about the social construction of gender, the assignment of specific functions, responsibilities, expectations of women and men (March et al., 1999; Kaliniuk & Schozodaeva, 2012).

As the GAD approach looks at all aspects of society, it aims at ensuring gender equity, equality, gender mainstreaming, and women empowerment in the community; it enables women to engage in public decision-making processes. Therefore, the approach becomes more helpful in informing policy and planning (March et al., 1999).

Concept of Empowerment

Empowerment is part of the GAD advocacy, and the term empowerment is the process of gaining access and developing people's capacities (or "intending to") to participate actively in shaping one's life, as well as one's community in economic, social, and political terms (AusAID, 2011). Empowerment means giving power, a socially constructed status based on the assumption that a person or group may have access to valued resources (Hancock et al., 2011), including decision-making positions in political systems. Hence, any new adjustments, understanding, and trust between men and women are empowerment circumstances (Prasad, 2012). Particularly, empowering women is about the redistribution of work roles, applying women's values and attitudes to the changing world, including equality in policy change at the national and international levels. This also reveals that women's empowerment will enhance the deconstruction of the age-long patriarchal beliefs in society.

Through the empowerment construct, an individual's strength and competencies, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviours can be harnessed for effective social policy and social change (Gumede, 2018). The social change motivates female aspirants in Ghana to resist the socio-cultural norms and expressions that hinder them from participating in local politics. Women's resistance and responses are aided by their agency (voice), which is one of the fundamental pillars of empowerment; it relies on women's ability to make strategic life choices when their capacity has been previously denied (Tursunova, 2014). Empowerment processes enhance advocacy as the increasing awareness of women's subordinating positions in the Third World following the world economic recession in the 1970s and the second wave of the feminist movement had brought the processes to the fore (Kaliniuk & Shozodaeva, 2012). Thus, an awareness of the empowerment concept makes those assemblywomen and other female aspirants collaborate to resist any attempt that disempowers them in their political careers. Thus, derogatory remarks and messages that discourage women from public space have been identified. Expectedly, gender advocates, social change, empowerment processes and gender theories have influenced the recognition of women's participation in politics.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative approach to research, which is vital to understanding the social world. While the study design describes the strategy adopted to accomplish the research goal, the research approach focuses on the phenomenological approach (life-world). According to Honer and Hitzler (2015), “life-world” refers to the subject’s horizon of perception, orientation, and action. The life-world phenomenon is based on concrete subjective consciousness; as the self-evident, unquestioned foundation of all everyday lived experience and activity, and dreams, visions, and theories. It does not exist without the subject, nor does the subject exist without it. The study selected a phenomenological approach (Life-World Theory) to explore this study’s objectives, and the questions were based on the researcher’s philosophical orientations. The researcher’s interest was in creating knowledge on subjective beliefs by understanding female aspirants’ lived experiences in the districts.

The study employed purposive sampling techniques to select thirty respondents to reach information-rich cases. Thus, the study selected twenty female and ten male respondents due to their knowledge about the phenomenon.

Research sites

This study collected information from four regions in Ghana: Greater Accra Region (GAR), Central Region (CR), Eastern Region (ER), and Ahafo Region (AR). The regions' selection was based on their multicultural nature. Almost all the respondents came from ethnic groups, which feature patriarchal systems that disadvantage women in Ghanaian society. The aspirants’ cultural orientation differs, yet they all experience gender stereotypes. Besides, the percentage of women representation in the district assemblies in those regions varied. For example, after the 2015 district assembly elections in the Central Region, the Cape Coast Metropolitan Assembly never recorded an elected assemblywoman.

Data collection

The research team’s encounter with the respondents established a rapport, which created a receptive setting to conduct the interviews and group discussions. Purposively selecting the participants was more appropriate for qualitative studies involving interviews and focused group discussion.

The face-to-face interview took place with assemblywomen and female assembly aspirants, while the focused group discussions involved ten male assembly members and male assembly aspirants. The ten assemblymen were gathered into two groups of five members in each group. The arrangement for single-sex groups aimed to

maintain an equal social status among group members to minimise biases. In-depth interviews and group discussions could disclose the Ghanaian socio-cultural gendered norms, stereotypical expressions that challenge women's engagement in politics. Also, the small number of respondents enabled the researcher to understand the issues in detail.

After the in-depth interviews, each participant was labelled with a #C1, #C2, #C3, #C4 code to represent the cases in the various four regions. Instead of respondents' real names, the coded numbers were used to reduce the possibility of revealing their identities. Also, the codes were used to refer to the participants' quotations. Each group was identified with a region's abbreviation; examples are ER (Eastern Region) and CR (Central Region). The researcher assured the participants that the data would be secured, and password protected as only the researcher would have access. The participants were also confirmed that they could halt their participation in the study if they felt threatened and uncomfortable about the interview or the group discussions.

Trustworthiness and rigour

In this qualitative research, the researcher used triangulation as a strategy to ensure that the data was reliable and rigour (Mays & Pope, 2000). Thus, the data from interviewees and group discussants were employed to substantiate the phenomenon under discussion. The researcher used bracketing as a research approach to shelve her experiences, biases, and any theoretical knowledge relating to this study (Creswell, 2013). The researcher also applied the bracketing approach to data analysis and the write-ups to ensure its integrity and dependability.

Data Analysis

The researcher read through the transcripts of the field data many times and familiarised herself with the issues. The participants' indexed data were summarised into understandable meaning, and the data was labelled in themes and mapped patterns of ideas. The analysis yielded the following thematic areas, and the presentation was a 'tell it all' lived experiences of members of the district assemblies. Thus, there was a thematic relationship relating to the study objectives.

Results and Discussion

The findings formed part of the themes that emerged from the field data. The responses from the participants revealed gender stereotypes and traditional beliefs that were against prospective female politicians and political aspirants. The themes were categorised into 1) Perspectives on female participation in politics; and 2) Resistance to gender stereotypes, chauvinism, and domineering propensities.

Perspectives on female participation in politics

The perspectives were about women's interests against Ghanaian perceptions about women politicians. The viewpoints were in two sections: a). women's attraction to engage in politics, and b). Ghanaian perceptions about women politicians. Thus, the study revealed assemblywomen and female political aspirants' interest in participating in politics and the Ghanaian societal perception about women politicians and their expectations to be submissive in the private spheres of life, thereby maintaining male dominance in public spaces.

a. Women's interest to engage in politics

In this study, the female respondents (assemblywomen and female political aspirants) were interested in political positions to address women's welfare needs. In their electoral areas, the female politicians involved themselves in local politics, contested the district assembly elections, and some won. They thought of putting in efforts to provide many social amenities in the community and perceived that a woman could do the same and even better whatever a man could do. The counter expression showed the participants' preparedness to resist any hurdles in their political careers, including those myths mentioned earlier. When asked how they managed their socially constructed gender roles regarding providing care for their children, many of them planned their reproductive and marital responsibilities. #C38 said,

“I left my children in the care of my mother before I campaigned at rallies, and when I returned, I took over the duties. Besides, I am not married. I believe that if I had a husband, the situation would have pulled my political career back” (Female participant #C38, CR, 10.5.2020).

Participant #C40 was married and indicated that her reproductive roles, including household chores and marital responsibilities, remained scheduled ever since she engaged in local politics.

Thus, when she won the district assembly elections, #40 continued performing her gender responsibilities and marital duties. For instance, she prepared household food within time and attended any scheduled assembly meetings. Because of her gender reproductive roles, #40 planned her movements with schedules, which did not get much of her time. Besides, #C40 knew why she wanted to be in politics. She admitted that a political position would allow her to help other women. On the other hand, #C38's status as a single mother helped her perform the community responsibilities to develop her electoral area.

#C35, also married, had discussed her decision to engage in local politics with the husband and children, which they understood and supported her to win the district assembly elections. She admitted that issues were not managed well in the household at the earlier stages of her political career. She said, 'I had a thorough discussion with my family on the schedules that would be executed well as I could not fully take part in home management' (Female participant #C35, AR, 12.9.2020). #C35 indicated that when she faced challenges regarding her electoral area's development, her husband being a secretary to a political party, sometimes aided her. Family members' intuitive support towards female politicians and aspirants is affirmed when families motivate relative female aspirants and request that they participate in politics (Whiteley & Seyd, 2002). Thus, although there was a collective family share of any loss or achievement or honours, including political laurels (Whiteley & Seyd, 2002), there should be a consensus among marriage partners.

While some women found it challenging to combine marital roles, reproductive responsibilities, and political activities, others saw that their spouses' presence gained financial support. They believed that such husbands understood the essence of female political engagement and empowerment. Some women, however, indicated that pressure from community members was somewhat challenging. The respondents were aware of their responsibilities as female politicians. #C35 said, 'I know what I want to do for women' (female participant #C35, AR, 12.9.2020). She could cope with community challenges, and her family helped her engage in politics.

For responses on how the traditional Ghanaian could be encouraged to support women in local politics, #C7 proposed that the State give the electorate mass education and sensitisation about women's roles and contribution to nation-building. She indicated that awareness could equally be made through organising young women to develop an interest in politics. The suggestions were that more women need to be encouraged as the experienced ones bow out from politics. The move

would allow elderly women politicians to mentor young females before they retire from active politics.

A participant observed that since the inception of the local government system in Ghana, men had been the only aspirants in her electoral area. She entered local politics to engage in community development projects to assist women; hence, community elders and opinion leaders encouraged her to contest district assembly elections. Those elders had already approached other women; their motivation for female representation in the district assembly assured #C7 to contest the elections against all the odds.

As a result of the advocacy for gender equality, some were campaigning for women's political empowerment and representation in decision-making positions. Still, the traditional Ghanaians were against women's involvement in politics. Thus, in a participant's maiden political campaign to begin her first term journey in the district assembly, almost all the people in her electoral area threw their weight behind her. A male contender made the competition very keen in the subsequent election, but #C7 still won.

#C17 emphasised that women should get involved as men's decisions do not benefit them nor satisfy their needs. She drew attention to basic human needs and other valued resources such as water, sanitation kits, market, toilet facilities, health facilities and shelter access. Accordingly, a traditional Ghanaian male does not walk in mileage to get water for his family; instead, women and girls search for water to clean and maintain their homes. #C17 said, "When there is a need for water, a man does not give much attention to it; women are much concerned about getting water for their household maintenance needs" (Female participant #C17, ER, 12.8.2020). Once a child is born a girl, the household chores automatically become her role; thus, Ghanaian society's socialisation processes nurture females to patronise social responsibilities, like cultural values and belief systems.

Hence, advocating for gender equality in decision-making tends to deconstruct the socialisation processes to make women appear in public spaces. The implications are that such women could extend their reproductive responsibilities from the private sphere into public areas.

As a nurtured Ghanaian woman, #C17 became a public figure, and her duties were enhanced as she cared for the needs and interests of other women. Her selfless care won the electorate confidence, setting the first female record to have won the district assembly election in that electoral area. She did her best to help nursing mothers who used to carry their babies at their backs while going to the farm. Thus, she started a

crèche to accommodate their babies and took care of them during the working days till they returned from their farms, public service departments, teaching, and fire tendering. She said,

“I see myself as a government ambassador for the electorate, particularly women. When someone comes to me for help, and I don't assist, it means voting for me was a total waste of time and no essence. After caring for the voters, the participants engaged in farming activities to generate income to cater for their children and others who appealed for support” (Female participant #C17, ER, 12.9.2020).

The inferences are that women best understand their needs and must be part of the decision-making processes (Ballington et al., 2012; Paxton & Hughes, 2016).

Politics is about decision-making and gaining local political experience; # C17 could talk to young girls about teenage pregnancy and reproductive health issues in the electoral area. She indicated that if it had not been for the sake of female needs, other female aspirants would not have visioned to teach themselves how to live together (Female participant #C17, ER, 12.9.2020). #C17 was aware that without her involvement in the district assembly, she might not have had the chance to care for the electorate and speak to the youth regarding their health rights. On what prompted her to engage in local politics, #C17 said,

“What motivated me was that I am encouraged to visit places anytime I involve myself in local politics. I associate myself with people, which has helped me know a lot. I could not have gone up the political ladder had it not been for the privileges gained as a member of the assembly” (Female participant #C17, ER, 12.8.2020).

The male-dominated district assembly has been cracked with female representativeness. Thus, with the females' political activism, many women occupied seats in the district assemblies after the subsequent assembly elections in 2015 and 2019. Helping women in society is tantamount to supporting them to have a voice in decision-making positions in both households and public spaces, thereby deconstructing male dominance in society. Although female contestants have increased during district assembly elections, the elected ones have not shot up, resulting in relatively few female representations in the assemblies.

b. Ghanaian perceptions about women politicians.

A participant said, “I do not know any woman who has shown interest in contesting for an assembly member position, but I am still not contesting” (Female participant #C7 at AR, 12.9.2020). Besides, some respondents indicated that a few of them were in the assembly, and still, their male counterparts relegated them to the background. Even when the women spoke on the floor at assembly meetings, men ordered them to ‘shut up and sit down’ (Female participant #C7, AR, 12.9.2020).

People's perception of independent women, widows, divorcees, and single female politicians had caused a lot of disillusionment for women to engage in politics. The Ghanaian cultural orientation expected wives to seek husbands' consent before engaging in politics. Hence, the absence of a husband in a female politician's life presented mixed reactions, as the husband's presence to campaign against the wife could also deny her the chance in politics. When a husband's denial is overlooked, and a wife takes a unilateral decision to engage in politics, he could accuse her of insubordination, causing a stir, and in many times, resulting in divorce (Abakah, 2018; Boateng, 2017). Thus, when a female political aspirant does not accept male dominance, it induces pressure and tension in their families and communities.

On the other hand, women politicians preferring to be married while in politics anticipated financial and household support from their spouses. For instance, #C17 indicated that the absence of a man in her life during her political career made the journey difficult. She had children leaving with many reproductive roles with limited financial resources and making managing the family very difficult. She said, “I don't have a husband, and it is only God” (Female participant #C17, ER, 12.9.2020). Such imprecation from #C17 depicts how Ghanaian culture makes women believe that the presence of men in their lives could guarantee success in everything, including politics.

Notwithstanding, #C38 choice of remaining a single parent implied that she had control over perceptions against unmarried women politicians. Still, her option of staying unmarried did not convince some constituents; hence, they became apathetic towards the development projects. Although #C38's tenacity was motivational, the stance against marriage affected her second term bid as she lost the seat in the local government administration in subsequent district assembly elections. After losing re-elections, she was still convinced that she could participate in local politics and contribute to regional development without being married.

She gained confidence against all the odds; the insistence from community members for her to marry did not deter her from competing in other local elections at the Unit Committee levels. The inference is to discard the hitherto perceptions that she could not engage in politics unless married. Ostensibly, the grudge between #C38 and the electorate was her conviction to change the status quo to curtail female submissiveness and deconstruct some marriage elements.

Nevertheless, there were reasons for some voters and other women to suggest that #C38 should have gotten married. To the community members, a male partner would guide and protect #C38 against abusers. The assumptions were that females were not strong compared to their male counterparts, and the electorate expected that a husband for #C38 would protect her.

The mere show of husbands did not, however, guarantee total community support. This study shows that in some cases, husbands who agreed with their wives' decision to be in politics faced ridicule from community members who questioned their male's superiority. Those community members mocked those understanding husbands and sometimes coaxed them to rescind their decisions to assist their wives. The study revealed that although there was persistent pressure on husbands to withdraw the support for their aspiring wives, other male constituents endorsed female candidature and supported them to win district assembly elections. Such male supporters had observed and appreciated the commitment from those hardworking assembly women aspiring women politicians who had performed well in their communities. Thus, those women politicians had faithfully kept their traditional gender roles and marital responsibilities, and their supporters saw no reason such committed female politicians should not be supported. Such determined constituents believed that those who discredited the women and coaxed their husbands against them wanted only to mire themselves in ancient patriarchal tradition (Boateng, 2017; Scott, 2010; Vlas & Gherghina, 2012). #C40's husband, for instance, had consented to her interest and decision to be in local politics and supported her in winning district assembly elections. The support from both husbands and male community members against patriarchal structures in Ghanaian society is evidence of near deconstruction of the dominant ideology. Despite the pressure on women to rescind their decision not to engage in politics, resistance against gender stereotypes continues to deconstruct the unequal gender power relations in politics.

Resistance and Responses to Gender Stereotypes, Chauvinism, and Domineering Propensities

There had been sensitisation to encourage female participation in public space and decision-making positions at the local levels. Hence, any detraction that aimed to discourage women from local politics was counter approached by assembly members and other constituents. The study showed women and men's resistance and responses to any discouraging factors against females' participation in politics, which presented a fulfilling realisation of women's interest in local government. The resistance was against the myths that comprise gender stereotypes, male dominance, chauvinism, and derogatory cultural practices. Thus, the theme on 2) Resistance and Responses, which have been analysed into three sections: a). Resistance to gender stereotypes, b). Resistance to chauvinism, and c). Resistance to domineering propensities, which motivate prospective female politicians and aspiring women to engage in politics.

Resistance To Gender Stereotypes

#C7 believed that 'whatever a man could do, a woman could do the same and even much better (a common saying). Accordingly, the above expressions prompted #C7 to contest the district assembly elections, which she won. As revealed earlier, the participant had indicated male domination at the district assembly; hence, women should be bold enough to demonstrate their capacity to contest for positions in the decision-making processes. She said,

"I mostly observe that on the Assembly floor when women display concerns to meet their necessities, the men sometimes suppress their argument by counter arguing that they should mention important needs" (Female participant #C7, AR, 12.9.2020).

#C7 affirmed that when women inquired about anything on the floor of the assembly, they were subjected to insults, abuses, and ridiculing, which made them doubt themselves. Such abusive behaviours were not unrecognised as other male members criticised abusers and defended female victims. Meanwhile, the local government system in Ghana makes financial provisions in the budget for the district assemblies that are disbursed to the needy, the poor, and people with disabilities. #C7 revealed that the assemblywomen ignored those abusive male colleagues and concentrated on their community roles. Their silence was a counterargument against their violent attitudes.

The female members had all advocated for social justice to resist discrimination in local governance involvement. When the research team encountered #C7, she appealed to other women to be courageous to engage in local politics. Her call drums home the

battle against discrimination and inequality, which discourage many women from aspiring for a political position at the grassroots levels.

Other respondents confirmed that men had no idea about women's concerns; hence, they could not participate in decision-making. For instance, #C38 revealed that she had the vision to engage in local government administration. Her decision to compete for political position was to rely on public institutions and ask for other women to support each other to address their needs and interests. #C38 mobilised women's support on her campaign rallies and convinced them about their ability to care for themselves and the electorate. Her action was to sensitise them to compete with men, changing and challenging the status quo of male dominance. #C38 also appealed to female voters to support women political aspirants to represent them during assembly proceedings to seek their needs, the needs of the poor and the vulnerable. #C38 said, 'I will have to get there (into the assembly) to verify the men's claim that nothing was in store at the local government administration' (Female participant #C38, CR, 10.5.2020). She aimed to diffuse the female electorate's mind and perception against the woman's place being the kitchen. Aspiring female politicians' resistance tends to erase the societal preference for male politicians, a subtle resistance against an age-old cultural practice.

Resistance To Domineering Propensities

Irrespective of her social, economic, and educational background, a female was nurtured to perform her marital and reproductive responsibilities (Hamah, 2015). Hence, any aspiring female politician placed herself in an uncompromising position accused of altering male dominance's status quo. The respondents' political campaign approaches were to resist male power in local politics, deconstruct the dominant ideology, and fend for women against relying on men for survival. Hitherto, many female electorate in #C35's electoral areas voted for males; hence, convincing them to vote for her and assuring them of their needs was an assurance for other women not to depend on men for survival but to develop an interest in local politics.

This study's information on dominant ideas and myths surrounding women's low participation in local politics has been documented for future references. In this current study, some of the female respondents, mainly the assemblywomen, hinted that husbands' presence in their political environment offered mixed experiences. This study's findings revealed a challenge in the Ghanaian assumption once the culture predicted women to be married, reproduce children, and manage their marital homes. While some husbands attempted to suppress wives' political ambitions, other community male members supported their bids to become assembly members.

Also, #C35 believed that the behaviour of men in her electoral area was overpowering. Still, women competed with them during elections, indicating that the women were not weak to be bullied. She hinted that if women did not gather courage, they wouldn't win the district assembly elections.

Further, #C38 observed that although winning an election was challenging, ever since she became an assembly member, any woman who planned well before contesting saw nothing complicated. In many circumstances, for fear of being insulted and abused, husbands and other male relatives advised their female family aspirants against participating in local politics. Nowadays the women resist such directives from their family members.

#C35 said, "If I had followed one of my male children's comments, I would not have contested the district assembly elections, but the other children were very supportive" (Female participant #C35, AR, 12.9.2020). She testified that the son later supported upon realising her initiatives for community development. #C35's children's motivation covertly resisted any dissuasion from other men, which inspired her to perform well in the electoral area. She had been interacting with women and suggested that educating and motivating them could be the only way for them to develop an interest in local politics. Again, anytime #C35's gave talks to women at church meetings, school events and meetings to educate nursing mothers at post-natal clinics, she encouraged all women to engage in politics. She said, 'When I get that opportunity, I encourage them to work hard, knowing that they are also capable of doing what men do' (Female participant #C35, AR, 10.5.2020). #C35, acting independent, believed that women had begun engaging in public spaces and local politics. Hence, gender equality in the decision-making processes was inevitable to deconstruct the status quo of male dominance in politics.

Resistance To Chauvinism

#C35 once dared a male contender who doubted women's ability. He had questioned her whether she had ever heard people calling for help from women as communities always relied on men for assistance when there was a problem. In a counter-reaction to the male contender's rebuke, #C35 retorted, 'excuse me; these kinds of languages and popular sayings have brought about all these inequality problems' (Female participant #C35, AR, 12.9.2020). #C35 never doubted the male predecessors' capabilities, mainly because there were problems in the community that needed a male's support. As stated earlier in this paper, Ghana's nurturing processes encourage women to ask for male's help; hence, the derogatory queries if women wanted to act independently.

The male group discussants were inconsistent with whether women should participate in local politics. While some were in favour, others were opposed to the motion and stood on the grounds, insisting that they would not allow their female relatives and wives to engage in any form of politics. These male respondents were in active politics but emphasised that those political activities were dirty and forbade other women from engaging in local politics. Although the groups' discussion brought a scenario of uncertainties towards achieving gender equality in Ghana, those male respondents with positive advocacy would impact women's engagement in local politics. The supportive male groups embraced gender equality and motivated women to participate in politics. Their support and positive stance bared the significance of having a changed society as there have been changes in the perceptions, norms, rules, laws, and policies through women's social empowerment. Thus, women can access valued resources such as political decision-making positions in local government administration, respect, and the recognition of their status in society (Pettit, 2012). Hitherto, Ghanaian women had been perceived as privately nurtured individuals and expected to be humbled, empathetic, fair, and not compromised by politics. Knowingly or unknowingly, those characteristics had been hampering women's political empowerment status (Gender Centre for Empowering Development, 2019).

An earlier study (see Boateng, 2006) indicated that the influence of traditional marital responsibilities and gender roles had been considered a hindrance to females' political participation. For example, the implications for wives to observe Ghanaian marital duties reflect society's expectation of women to be submissive to men to maintain peace in the household. An Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) study had confirmed that it was challenging in Ghana for a woman to take a unilateral decision to engage in politics. Thus, compared with a married man who could act more independently, a married woman needed to make her husband, children, and other family members aware of her decision to engage in politics (Boateng, 2017). In the same study (see Boateng, 2017), it was revealed that women now regarded those reproductive roles as part of their daily duties as they have always managed them. Not surprisingly, women have developed a subtle resistance strategy to manage their socially constructed reproductive roles to combine them with their community responsibility, including politics.

Until recently, a Ghanaian male or female would not have recognised a woman's achievements if she was not married with children. Thus, even highly educated single and childless women found it challenging to win the electorate's support in their political careers. Nevertheless, within the current patriarchal society, women could

participate in politics and demand a fair reward for their work in the community (Treasure & Gibb, 2010), mainly when they could convince the male electorate to reelect them into political offices. It has consciously awakened other male politicians to support their female counterparts for political positions, further deconstructing gender power relations. Society has realised the essence of gender equality in decision-making processes, and women and men are convinced to support female politicians. Political contenders had no option but to campaign alongside each other. Male aspirants who favour female politicians support their campaign against other male contenders. Naturally, a vociferous female aspirant constantly challenges male contenders who guard against losing to the females. Ironically, some male aspirants campaigned for female aspirants against some male contenders yet competed massively against female contenders who challenged them in the same electoral areas.

Conclusion

The themes from the findings revealed the support for female political aspirants to win district assembly elections. The research team was convinced that women and men aspirants had to assist other females in engaging in local politics and winning elections. Resisting gender stereotypes has been significant as women gained access to political spaces at the local level have been on the drawing board of female aspirants. The male support was evidence that the dominant myth favouring men and against women's leadership and responsibilities in the public space is getting deconstructed. The revelation is that society's support base, including men and family members, assists and encourages women to engage in politics, and have begun to deconstruct the mythical propaganda against female politicians. The implications are that gradually, the patriarchal structures and the dominant ideology are being shelved to pave the way for women's engagement in public space. Until Ghanaians change their stereotypical perception of female politicians, more women will find it challenging to participate in local politics. Anyhow, the counterattack against male dominance and gender inequality in decision-making positions has been a global advocacy, and the belief is to end them successfully.

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