

**WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN GHANA**  
**The Case of the Nadowli District of the Upper West Region**

CHARLES GYIMAH<sup>23</sup>

Department of Land Economy, Planning and Rural Development  
University for Development Studies  
Wa, Ghana  
Email:cgimah@yahoo.com

and

EDWIN S. THOMPSON<sup>24</sup>

UDS Library, Nyankpala Campus  
University for Development Studies  
Nyankpala, Ghana  
Email:

**ABSTRACT**

The issue of women's participation in all spheres of life has become a major developmental concern world-wide. Many debates on the above issue have highlighted women's marginalization in all aspects of social, economic and political life. The paper discusses the extent of women's participation in the governance process at the local level in the Nadowli District of Ghana. The fieldwork was conducted on factors impacting on the level of women's participation, impact of female representatives in the District Assembly and mechanisms for ensuring their active participation. A two-tier multi-stage sampling procedure involving simple random and purposive techniques was used to select area councils, communities, assemblypersons and community members as respondents. Key informant interviews with some heads of relevant decentralized agencies in the District were also carried out. The fieldwork revealed that, despite a marginal increase in female representation in the assembly, their numbers were still very low for the period 1988 to 2006. However, in spite of their low numerical strength; the study indicated that female representatives in the assembly

<sup>23</sup> Charles Gyimah is a Lecturer in the Planning and Rural Development, University for Development Studies. He specializes in project planning, monitoring and evaluation and, development policy and planning. His research interest is in participatory approaches to development planning, development policy analysis, analysis of poverty situation and reduction, governance of development (with emphasis on governance at the local level and decentralization processes in Ghana), integrated rural development, and tourism development planning and promotion.

<sup>24</sup> Edwin Thompson is an Assistant Librarian with interests in indexing, institutional repositories and management systems as well as development communications

have exhibited a positive impact on the development of their communities. The study also identified factors that relegate women to subordinate roles. Hence, measures have been suggested to enhance active involvement of women in the governance processes at the local level.

**KEY WORDS:** Women's Participation, Governance, Socio-cultural factors, Marginalized people, District Assembly

## **INTRODUCTION**

The subject of women's participation in development has gained attention globally since the Beijing Conference on women in the 1990's. This conference and preceding ones like 'the First World Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975, "the Second World Conference on Women in Denmark in 1980 and "the World Summit for Social Development in Denmark in 1995, among others, brought to the fore, the issue of gender equality and rights. The World Bank (2005) indicates that gender inequality disadvantages women throughout their lives and stifles the development prospects of their societies. Again, it states that illiterate and poorly educated mothers are less able to care for their children, and low education levels and responsibilities for household work prevent women from finding productive employment and limit their participation in public decision-making. Though, in 1989 less than 4% of the ministerial positions worldwide were occupied by women, Sellami-Meslem (1991) commented that the situation at sub-ministerial decision-making levels in government was, of course, better. In Africa, the situation on women's participation is worse and has remained bleak more than a decade after the First United Nations Conference on Women in 1975 and the Fourth World Conference of Women in 1995.

All the international women's conferences stressed the importance of women assuming positions of power and influence not only because of their views and talents but also as a matter of their human right. In 1994, the World Bank indicated that women's contribution to the social and economic development of any society is immense. In spite of these contributions, the Bank stressed that a wide range of laws and regulatory practices still limit women's, to a greater extent than men, chance of obtaining much-needed credit, productive inputs, education, training, information and medical care to perform their economic roles. The Bank further asserted that the distortions in resource allocations that result from this discrimination carry high development costs – too high to remain invisible in current and future development strategies.

In spite of the significant roles women play in the development processes, they are still marginalized, especially in relation to public and political decision making. According to Nzomo (1994), women's equal participation in political life is pivotal to social development. In the 2005 report on World Development Indicators, the World Bank stressed that around the world women were under-represented in parliaments and other high level decision-making bodies. The Bank also indicated that, though,

women's presence in public life has been rising, as at 2004, women still occupied only 16 % of the seats in national parliaments, and their representation at the ministerial and executive levels of government was even lower.

In Ghana, women constitute about 50.5% of the total population (Ghana Statistical Service, 2005). In spite of their large proportion, women are not well represented when it comes to the issue of governance. The National Council on Women and Development (NCWD) (1998) observed in a survey conducted in Ghana that women were marginalized and remained the minority in politics. In the current (2004-08) Parliament, only 25 (10.9%) out of a total of 230 parliamentarians are women - which is far below, the United Nations minimal standard of 33% (Genderlens, 2005) or even national commitments; Affirmative Action Guidelines (1998) and Local Government Law..

A synoptic view of the decentralization system in Ghana also depicts a low level of women's participation in the decision-making process at that level. Ekumah (1999) observed that at the district level, women comprise less than 8% of the membership of the 1988 district level election (i.e., 486 women out of the 6448 total membership). Only 152 (31%) out of the 486 women representatives were elected by the electorate and 334 were appointed by the government of the day; PNDC. In the case of Nadowli District, only 348 women contested in the local government elections though there were 4428 seats available. Ofei-Aboagye. (2000) also noted that in 1999 there were only three (3) women (3.6%) among the 110 District Coordinating Directors (DCDs). She indicated that the low representation of women at such a high administrative level at the local level was disturbing. Ten (10) out of fifty eight (58) Assembly members of the Nadowli District Assembly in 2006 were women (Nadowli District Assembly, 2006). A similar situation also prevailed at the sub-district structures. Out of 512 elected unit committee members in the entire district at the 2006 district assembly election, only 50 (9.8%) were women. Ghana's situation is therefore a true reflection of the low level of women's participation in the decision-making process on the global scene.

The conceptual and material basis of women's historic exclusion from the formal arena of political participation and decision making at the local levels is what this study seeks to deal with. Poverty, low status and a lack of participation and integration into the mainstream have contributed in the marginalization of women. One of the main reasons for the minimal participation of women in politics in general and grass root participation in particular has been the assumption that women are subordinate to men as a consequence of social and institutional discrimination (Bekele, 2000).

The picture above raised some key questions which motivated an investigation into the situation in the Nadowli District of the Upper West Region of Ghana. The specific questions were: (1) To what extent do women participate in the decentralized

governance processes? (2) What are the factors that impinge on the participation of women in the local governance processes? (3) What impact do women representatives in the decentralized processes at the local level have on their communities? (4) What mechanism(s) should be put in place to promote active participation of a significant proportion of women in governance processes at the local level?

## **THE NADOWLI AREA**

### **Demographic Characteristics**

According to the 2000 Population Census, the population of the Nadowli District was 82,716 with a growth rate of 1.5% per annum. The District's sex ratio (males to 100 females) was 90.8. Majority of households, 75.8% were headed by males, and 24.2% by females (Ghana Statistical Service, 2005). The economy of Nadowli is dominated by agriculture, which accounts for 85% of the labor force and is characterized by crop farming and livestock production. Commerce and the industrial sector are the least developed, accounting for 14% and 1% of the labor force, respectively.

### **Political Systems**

There exist both the traditional and modern political systems in the Nadowli District. With respect to the traditional political system, there are five (5) paramountcies in the District- namely Nadowli, Kaleo, Daffiama, Issa and Bussie. There are also priests who are the custodians of the land as well as the spiritual leaders. The chiefs (*Naamene*), priest (*Tensorb*) and elders are the custodians of the customs and traditions of the communities and serve as entry points and liaisons between the communities and outsiders. The traditional political system of the District does not have a place for women in its hierarchy. However, in contemporary time there has been the concept of "*Magazia*" (the leader of the women in a community) who mobilizes women and represents them during community development interactions. The *maga-zia* are not part of the traditional hierarchy and do not sit in council with chiefs and elders in matters regarding traditions.

Owing to government's policy of decentralization, which aims at ensuring effective community participation in the administration of the state, there has been an emergence of modern political authority that works in close collaboration with the traditional system. Nadowli District Assembly therefore represents the modern political system at the district level and has (10) Area Councils. These are: Bussie, Charikpong, Daffiama, Issa, Jang, Takpo, Kaleo, Sankana, Nandowli and Sombo. There are fifty eight (58) assembly members out of which ten (10) are women in the current Nadowli District Assembly. There are seven (7) decentralized departments at the District, and at the close of 2006, only one of the heads of department was a woman.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Scope and Data collection**

The study focused on the district assemblies and their substructures. It covered a period of 12 years comprising three (3) terms of assembly sessions. These periods are 1994 -1998, 1998–2002 and 2002–2006 assembly sessions. Basically, the research covered issues bordering on the extent of women's participation in local decentralized governance processes, obstacles to their participation and the role they played in the process during the period under review.

The study made use of both primary and secondary data. In terms of secondary data, relevant information and data were extracted from various documentary sources in the country and websites. These sources included: Ghana Land Government Information Digest, Electoral Commission's Report on District Level Election, Nadowli District Medium-term Development Plan and UN website – Women Watch Draw. Specifically, three (3) Area Councils of the study district were selected for the collection of primary data, which also served as the main source of data. The Area Councils were Nadowli, Kaleo and Dafiamma. Nadowli Area Council was selected for its role as the political capital of the study district. The other two (2) – Kaleo and Dafiamma, were selected from each of the two constituencies of the district – i.e. Nadowli West and East respectively. Based on the fact that the communities in the study district have near homogenous features in terms of ethnicity, religion and basic needs of the people (Nadowli District Medium-term Development Plan – 2005 update) it was expected that there would be little variations in terms of responses to research questions. Hence, one (1) community was randomly selected from each of the three Area Councils for primary data collection.

Questionnaires, key informant and focus group discussions were employed to gather data from respondents in the selected communities. Structured questions relating to the extent of women's participation (in terms of numbers and performance in district assembly, area councils and decentralized departments) and impact of women representatives in the local decentralized governance process on their communities were used. Focused group discussions were organized for randomly selected individuals among some women's groups in the three (3) selected communities – Nadowli, Kaleo and Dafiamma. Issues related to in-depth information on the impact of women representatives and factors affecting women's participation in the local decentralized governance process in the study district were discussed. Interviews were also held with opinion leaders and key district assembly officials such as the District Community Development Officer, District Planning Officer, Gender Desk Officer, Presiding Member, some Chiefs and leaders of various women's groups to generate views on the issues at stake and to validate the data already gathered from other sources.

## **Sampling**

Both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were employed. With respect to the probability technique, the multi-stage sampling technique was used. The first stage involved the use of cluster sampling to zone area councils based on the two political constituencies (Nadowli West and Nadowli East) and the seat of the study district into three clusters. In addition to the Nadowli Area Council, which houses the District Assembly, two other area councils (Kaleo and Dafiana) were randomly selected from the political constituencies – one area council from each of the two constituencies. Simple random procedure were then employed to sample these three communities (Nadowli, Kaleo and Dafiana) from the three sampled area councils – one community from each of the area councils, for data collection. A total of 100 people having voting rights (i.e. above the age of 18 - including 12 assembly members) were randomly selected from the three sampled communities as respondents. The sample size (100) was therefore shared among the three communities based on their respective population proportion to the total population of the sampled area councils as follows: Nadowli: 43; Kaleo: 28; and Dafiana: 29.

The District Community Development Officer, District Planning Officer, Gender Desk Officer, Presiding Member, and some Chiefs, leaders of various women's groups, some Assembly and Unit committees' members in the sampled communities were purposely selected and interviewed either as key informants or used as focus group. Analyzed data from the study and results are outlined in the ensuing section.

## **STUDY RESULTS**

This section focuses on some aspects of the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics relevant to women's participation in local governance, the extent of women's participation in the District and sub-district decision-making bodies, and female representation in the decentralized departments. It also touches and puts emphasis on the impact of female representatives in the District and sub-district decision-making bodies on their communities, and factors impinging on women's participation in the local decentralized governance process.

### **Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents**

#### ***Age Distribution***

Age plays an important role in decision-making. One's age in Ghana and for that matter Nadowli District determines whether the person is matured to participate in decision making. This is because a person can vote and be voted for to participate in the decentralized governance process at the local level as guaranteed by the 1992 constitution of Ghana when he or she is at least 18 years. From Table 1 below, more women (59%) were randomly selected and interviewed than men (41%). The high percentage of female respondents was encouraging since the research wanted to get

in-depth information about women's level of participation, and what hinders their participation in the local governance process.

**Table 1: Age Distribution of Respondents**

Age Group	Male	Female	Total	Percentage (%)
18-30	12	8	20	20
31-40	8	20	28	28
41-50	10	14	24	24
51-60	5	12	17	17
60+	6	5	11	11
Total	41	59	100	100

*Source: Field Survey, May 2006.*

### ***Educational Status of Respondents***

The data collected on the educational status indicated low level of education for both sexes, but a lower level for the females. Only 11 out of 59 women interviewed had secondary and tertiary education. From Table 2 below, it could further be observed that more women, 15 out of 59 interviewed than their male counterparts (4 out of 44 interviewed) had no basic education.

**Table 2: Educational Status of Respondents**

Education level	Male		Female		Total	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
No education	4	9.76	15	25.42	19	19
Basic	15	36.58	33	55.94	48	48
Secondary	18	43.90	6	10.16	24	24
Tertiary	4	9.76	5	8.48	9	9
Total	41	100	59	100	100	100

*Source: Field Survey, May 2006.*

### ***Occupational status of Respondents***

Most of the women interviewed acknowledged that they were either unemployed (25.42%) or engaged in farming, trading and vocational practice (50.84%) that fetch them low income. This situation according to them served as an impediment in their endeavor to marshal the needed resources to participate in the local level governance process. This is because financial and other resources are needed to register, campaign and participate as an aspiring assembly member/area councilor/unit committee member (Table 3). It was also identified that the women were considered as unemployed because they did not own their own enterprises or did not generate incomes

that go directly to them. However, they supported their husbands in farming activities - sowing, weeding, harvesting and marketing of the produce.

**Table 3: Occupational Status of Respondents**

Occupation	Male		Female		Total	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Farming	14	34.14	15	25.42	29	29
Trading	4	9.76	7	11.86	11	11
Vocational (Artisans)	8	19.57	8	13.56	16	16
Public sector	7	17.07	12	20.34	19	19
Student / apprentice	4	9.76	1	1.70	5	5
Pensioners	4	9.76	1	1.70	5	5
Unemployment	-	-	15	25.42	15	15
Total	41	100	59	100	100	100

*Source: Field Survey, May 2006.*

### **Women's Participation in Local Level Governance Process**

#### ***Female Representation at the District Assembly***

To identify the extent of female participation in the district assembly (DA) governance process, the study examined the trend of female representation at the Nadowli District Assembly (NDA) for three successive assembly sessions - 1994 -1998, 1998-2002 and 2002 -2006. Data collected revealed that there was low female representation as assembly persons at the district level during the three sessions despite the increasing campaign and sensitization on the need to include and increase women in the local level governance process (*See table 4 below*).

**Table 4: Sex Composition of Assembly Members by Assembly Sessions.**

Assembly sessions	Male		Female		Total
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency
1994-1998	49	92.4	4	7.6	53
1998-2002	46	86.8	7	13.2	53
2002-2006	48	82.8	10	17.2	58
Total	143	85.0	21	15.0	164

*Source: Nadowli District Assembly 2006 or Field Survey 2006*



From Table 4 above, it could be deduced that there was low female representation in the NDA during the period under study. Out of a total of 164 members of the assembly, only 21 (15%) were women. Table 4 also indicates that during the 1994-1998 session of the assembly, out of the total of 53 assembly members only four (4) were females constituting 7.5% as compared to the men with a numerical standing of 49 representing 92.4%. Furthermore during the 1998-2002 session, out of a total of 53 members of the assembly, only seven (7) representing 13.2% were female. The 1998-2002 session figures indicated a drop of 5.6% of male representatives whilst female representation experienced a rise of 5.6%. The 2002-2006 session also experienced an increase in female representation in the assembly than before. The figures in table 4 therefore show that between 1998 -2002 and 2002 -2006 assembly sessions, the female representation at the assembly increased from 13.2% to 17.2%.

Though Table 4 reveals a general percentage increase in female representation from 1994 - 2006, the females elected to the assembly were woefully and still remain low as compared to their male counterparts. This observation comes to confirm Ekumah (1999) assertion that women's representation in government, nationally and more especially locally is poor and low and has not changed significantly.

The field data also revealed that, out of the 10 female assembly members of the 2002 - 2006 assembly session, four (4) have had tertiary education with one of them holding a masters degree, five (5) having reached post secondary level (teachers) and one (1) was a senior medical assistant. This clearly indicates that women who have attained higher levels of education were more likely to participate in the local level governance process if supported by civic society groups and other benevolent organizations.

### ***Women and Assembly Activities***

The extent of women's participation in the governance process within the assembly was assessed, using a Likert scale/summated rating to seek views from twelve respondents - all being assembly members (6 males and 6 females). The results of their responses using the scale are shown in Table 5 below.

**Table 5: Extent of Women's Participation at the Assembly Level.**

Indicators	Weight	Scale of Participation by Response					Weighted Score
		Very High (5)	High (4)	Moderate (3)	Low (2)	Poor (1)	
Meetings Attendance		9	3	-	-	-	4.75
Raising vital issues at meetings		1	4	5	2	-	3.33
Contribution to discussion at meetings		1	6	3	2	-	3.50

**Source: Field Survey, May 2006.**

**Note:** Weighted average score equals the sum of weighted scores of all the indicators divided by the number of indicators.

Table 5 above shows that women's participation in terms of their performance at the assembly level with a weighted average score of 3.86 (i.e. the average of 4.75+3.33+3.50) could generally be described as moderate. It reveals that in terms of meetings attendance, 9 out of 12 respondents rated them very high (meaning they actively attended meetings) with only 3 respondents rating them high, resulting in a total weighted score of 4.75. In terms of raising vital issues at the assembly meetings, the women had a weighted score of 3.33 on the scale. With respect to their contributions, they earned a weighted score of 3.50. The study revealed also that out of the three indicators of assessment, the frequency of participation in the assembly meetings (meetings attendance) rated first with a weighted score of 4.75, followed by contributions to discussion - 3.50, and then raising vital issues at meetings with a weighted score of 3.33. The study also uncovered that almost all the assembly women interviewed were teachers by profession. It was also discovered that the women found themselves under some kind of intimidation (shouted at by male assembly members or at times ignored by the presiding members if they wanted to contribute to discussions on the floor of the assembly meetings) by their male counterparts who were the majority. However, due to their level of education they were able to cope with the situation and contributed moderately to discussions and raised vital issues respectively.

### ***Women and Assembly Sub-Committees***

The study found that the current ten (10) female assembly members were also members of the various sub-committees of the Assembly. According to the Planning Officer of the NDA, two (2) of them were chairpersons of two (2) sub-committees of the Assembly. These were Environmental; and Women and Children's Affairs Sub-committees. The others (8) were members of the Development Planning; Finance and Administration; Works; and Justice and Security Sub-committees.

### ***Women's Representation at the Area Council Level (1998- 2006)***

Data gathered from the three (3) area councils in terms of female representation indicated that all the councilors (100%) were males during 1998-2002 and 2002-2006 sessions of the Nadowli Area Council (see Table 6). It was also identified and shown in Table 6 that in Daffiema Area Council, out of the 40 councilors only 4 were females during the 1998-2002 and 2002-2006 sessions. In the same periods, Kaleo Area council also had 33 councilors of which only four (4) were females and the rest males.

**Table 6: Sex Composition of Representatives of the sampled Area Councils**

Area Councils	Session	Male		Female		Total
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	
Nadowli	1998-2002	20	100	-	-	20
	2002-2006	15	100	-	-	15
Daffiema	1998-2002	18	90	2	10	20
	2002-2006	18	90	2	10	20
Kaleo	1998-2002	16	88.89	2	11.11	18
	2002-2006	13	86.66	2	13.33	15

*Source: Field Survey May, 2006.*

Generally, the study indicated that out of a total number of 108 councilors for the three(3) sampled Area Councils during the 1998-2002 and 2002-2006 sessions, only 8 (7.41%) were women. It can therefore be inferred that women’s participation in terms of representation at the sub-district level of the three sampled Area Councils in particular and the District in general has been very low.

***Unit Committee Level Analysis***

One of the issues that run through key informants and household respondents especially on the Unit Committees (UCs) during field survey was lack of incentives/ motivation for UC members as motivation to contest for UC elections. An assembly member stated that there will be a time when nobody will come out to contest for the UCs as there were no attractive incentives for past UC members. Observations indicated the non-existence and dysfunction of the UCs in the participating communities. Hence, no meaningful data were collected on the UCs. However, the data collected from the Upper West Regional Electoral Commission office in Wa on the Nadowli District concerning the UC’s elections on July 2002 are re/presented in Table 7 below. Table 7 therefore shows women contestants and those who won elections in the last (2002-2006) UC level election in the District. The study unveiled that out of 91 UCs that were supposed to exist in the district, only 65 had people filing nominations to contest for the last UC elections. The study also uncovered that out of the 65 UCs, which had contestants, only 9 had women to contest for UC membership.

**Table 7: Number of Contestants by Women Participation in the Unit Committees’ Election, July 2002.**

Contestants	Males		Females		Total
	Frequency	%	frequency	%	
No. of Contestants	414	86.97	62	13.02	476
No. of Elected	78	86.67	12	13.33	90
No. of Contestants who stood alone without contestants	313	87.18	46	12.81	359

*Source: Field Survey, May 2006*

The study revealed a general apathy among the citizenry towards the UC elections held in 2002 at the study district. Despite the general apathy, women's participation was also very low. Thus, out of a total of 476 contestants only 62 (13.02%) were women. Table 7 indicates that among those who were elected (90) only 12 (13.33%) were females. The evidence presented above indicates that there is generally gross gender inequality in the local political landscape.

### ***Female Representation in the Decentralized Departments***

The study revealed that there were more men working in the decentralized departments in the district than women, and the few women found at the departments were in the secretarial and clerical classes. This situation confirmed what Ofei-Aboagye (2000) noted that most women in decentralized departments found themselves in secretarial and clerical positions and therefore were not able to influence policies and programmes in the interest of women. From Table 8 below, it was identified that out of 61 staff at the District Education Department, 10 (16.39%) were women. Six (6) out of the ten (10) female staff were in the administrative position whilst four (4) were in the secretarial and clerical classes. Again, out of the 20 staff at the District Office of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, 3 (15%) were women; and all the three (3) women were found in the secretarial class. The story was not different at the Office of the District Assembly. There were 55 staff, of which only 10 (18%) were women. All the ten (10) women were also found in the secretarial and clerical classes (only one of them was at the Middle Class zone).

Generally, Table 8 shows that only few women were found in positions (administrative level) that might influence decision-making within the decentralized administrative system of the Nadowli District Assembly.

**Table 8: Women's Position in Some Decentralized Departments**

Name of institution	Total staff	Number of women	%	Positions		
				Administrative (senior) (Junior)	Technical (middle)	Secretarial clerical
District Education Directorate	61	10	16.39	6	1	3
Ministry of Food and Agriculture	20	3	15	-	-	3
Office of the Nadowli District Assembly	55	10	18.1	-	1	9

*Source: Field Survey, May 2006.*

## Impact of Female Representatives in the District Assembly on their Communities

With the aid of a Likert scale and indicators defined by the key informants (see Table 9) data were collected from respondents to assess the impact of activities of female representatives in the local governance process, particularly on their communities. The results of the analyzed field data indicated in Table 10 shows that the female representatives have impacted positively on their communities as a whole.

**Table 9: Defining Indicators for Assessing the Impact of Female Representatives on their Communities**

Indicator	Definition
Leadership Skill	Capability to provide direction to yield positive results
Communication	Interaction (frequent meetings) with their communities to take/share their ideas on development issues
Management of Project	Effective supervision, co-ordination, control and resource mobilization for development of their communities
Dissemination of Local and National Policies	Publicity and interpretation of national and land issues of concern to their district and communities
Transparency	Regular reporting, honesty and trustworthy in implementation of programmes and project to their people
Onward Transmission of Community view	Communicate the communities' problems, perceptions and needs to the appropriate development agencies

**Table 10: Impact of Female Representatives on their Communities.**

[Likert scale: Very high (5), High (4), Moderate (3), Low (2) and Poor (1)]

Indicators	Scale of impact					weigh ted Score	Rank s
	Very High 5	High 4	Moder- ate 3	Lo w 2	Poor 1		
Leadership skill	43	29	23	2	3	4.07	1st
Communication	26	28	25	20	1	3.58	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Management of project	23	49	15	11	2	3.80	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Dissemination of gov't Policies	25	28	22	15	10	3.43	4 <sup>th</sup>
Transparency	20	30	30	17	8	3.32	5 <sup>th</sup>
On ward transmis- sion of community view	15	20	30	20	15	3.00	6 <sup>th</sup>

Source: Field Survey May, 2006

**Note:** Weighted average score equals the sum of weighted scores of all the indicators divided by the number of indicators.

Table 10 above revealed that generally, the impact of female representatives in the local governance process is moderate with a weighted average score of 3.53 on the Likert scale. This demonstrates a moderate sense of satisfaction by the respondents. This clearly shows that the community members at the grassroots were delighted by the contributions of women representatives in the development of their communities. Perhaps the drive to increase the number of females at the assembly can be attributed to the performance of these few women in the system. In terms of using leadership skills to assess the impact of female representatives, Table 10 indicated that out of the 100 respondents, 43% rated the leadership skills of the women as very high; 29% rated them high; 23% put them at moderate; 2% rated them low and 3% scored them poor with an overall weighted score of 4.07 on a scale of 5 (very high) to 1 (poor). When it comes to management of projects as part of their activities toward their communities either at the DA, AC or UC, the respondents' weighted score was 3.80. Similarly in terms of communication - frequency of organizing meetings with their people, they had a weighted score of 3.58. The weighted scores of the other indicators used by the respondents to assess the impact of female representatives on their communities are indicated in Table 10. It could therefore be deduced from Table 10 that the female representatives were highly admired for the leadership skills they had exhibited in their communities

Interviews with male Assembly members, Area Councilors and some community members in the participating communities showed that the female representatives possess the necessary leadership and relationship skills for mobilizing their community members effectively for development activities and soliciting various financial assistance from NGOs and the DA, especially regarding women's socio-economic empowerment and self-reliant. The study further revealed that these female representatives were transparent and good managers of development projects. These views were shared by a UC member of Daffiama who asserted that, women in unit committees, the AC and other women groups in the sampled communities had joined hands to operate a fuel station to generate revenue to assist women within the Daffiama AC by giving them soft loans to start or expand their economic activities. Similarly, a key informant (a woman) from Kaleo mentioned during the FGD that "*women could now purchase their own shea nuts and retail them through a credit facility of \$ 200,000.00 they received from World Vision International through the good leadership of their assembly woman of Kaleo East Electoral Area*". The situation buttresses the observation made by the World Bank (1995) in Brazil that women leaders organized themselves for local involvement in project identification and implementation.

Again, the Gender Desk Officer and the then Presiding Member of Nadowli DA, the chairperson of Women and Children's Sub-Committee of the DA were instrumental in pushing through women issues at the assembly level. This point was also supported by a female assembly member who added that with the joint effort of all

women in political positions in the district; a lot of functional education had taken place in the district to create awareness particularly among the women of their rights to contest election and also express their views on development issues and local governance. During one of the FGDs held with women groups in Kaleo, two women leaders mentioned that female representatives at the assembly provided information on government policies such as health insurance and registration, and participation in district level elections. According to the Clerk of AC at Daffiama, women in the District were predominantly found in the informal sector, and this situation, prompted the female representatives to educate the market women on why they should pay their taxes to enable the assembly provide development projects in the District. They also sensitized the women on the importance of education. The Clerk also noted that the awareness created by the female representatives had made most women to acquire knowledge and build their capacities in leadership roles both in economic and in providing supportive roles to their husbands. Most of the opinion leaders interviewed also asserted that many of the assembly women contributed effectively during community meetings and discussions at their various electoral areas. One of the opinion leaders, the Regent of Nadowli, remarked that if more women were voted into power, they could equally perform just as the majority of the males in the Assembly, ACs and UCs.

The implication of the foregone analysis is that the female representatives in the local governance process had played a vital role in contributing tremendously towards local development. These contributions also confirmed the assertion made by Ampon-sah and Bofo-Arthur (2003) that these women were an incalculable human resource at the national and local level.

### **Factors Impinging on Women's Participation in Local Governance Processes.**

Despite the enormous benefits society derived from the participation of women in the decision-making process especially at the local level, several factors impinged on their level of participation. Analysis of field data unveiled the following as the factors that impinged on women's participation in the local governance process at the studied communities:

#### ***Level of Education***

The FGDs held with the various groups in the study area (women's group leaders, Assembly persons, Gender Desk Officer of the NDA and chiefs) indicated that low level of education was one of the major factors impinging on women's participation in governance process at the local level. According to the Nadowli Assembly member "*English language which is the mode of communication at the Assembly level serves as a barrier to women who had low level or no education to participate in the Assembly election and also its deliberation.*" The results of the interview also revealed that only a few female respondents have higher education even to the level of post-graduate education. This comes to confirm the assertion made by the Northern

Easter School (2006) that due to low level of education or complete lack of it, women cannot read and understand a lot of things that enlighten them, and to have enough knowledge about the local level governance hence their inability to participate in the decentralization process.

### ***Inadequate Finance***

It was identified that majority of the female respondents were engaged in the informal activities such as petty trading, vocational (artisans), and farming. The study also revealed that the women engaged in these activities in the participating communities did not earn much as compared to their male counterparts who own farms and get higher incomes. This issue of inadequate financial resources has prevented women in the communities from taking active part in households as well as community and public decision-making processes. The outcomes of FGDs and key informants interview sessions, identified that money serves as a constraint to women's effort in participating in the local governance process. Thus, before one is voted for as a unit committee member/area councilor/assembly member that person has to embark on a vigorous electioneering campaign which involves cost of transportation, logistics and buying of drinks (pito) to influence voters. The issue of spending huge sums of money to influence voters has therefore contributed to the low level of women participation in the local political process because the women do not earn or have enough resources to compete with their male counterparts. This finding supports Nzomo (1994) and Ofei-Aboagye's (2000) assertion that finance has been one of the sources of constraint that prevent women from participating in the governance process especially at the local level.

### ***Socio-Cultural***

An interview with an Assemblyman of Nadowli Central Electoral Area brought to the fore an elaborate explanation as to why most women do not participate in the decentralization process. According to him *"women are considered not to be part of the community and are owned by their husbands."* He further emphasized that this belief of the people affects the society and the socio-cultural orientation females go through from their childhood to adulthood, and in his view has consequently affected their involvement in the public decision-making process. Adding to the statement of the Nadowli Assemblyman, a former Assemblywoman from Daffiama made a critical comment that *"it is considered as a sign of disrespect on the part of women to express their opinions in the midst of men as men consider women's ideas as inferior."* This assertion was also confirmed by most of the respondents that most women were not willing to contest for public positions and those who even avail themselves were often not voted for by the electorate due to their cultural indoctrination. Due to this socio-cultural belief, females were not often educated with the view that women are the property of their husbands. This assertion confirms the observation made by Nzomo (1994) when she cited Dorsey et. al. (1989) that the socialization process affects women coming out since they were not brought out in the public



domain as their male counterparts and this kept them away from participating in public life.

### ***Lack of Confidence***

The study revealed that the socio-cultural background of women in the participating communities has got a negative impact on them as they lack the courage and confidence to participate in public decision making processes. According to a member of the Development Planning Committee of the NDA, most women lack confidence and the courage to raise their views or contribute at public fora. He further stressed that the women normally discussed their views later when they were on their way back home from public fora and even those with higher education who should have been in a better position to express themselves at such fora, at times faced the same problem.

### ***Intimidation***

Data collected indicated that women who were involved in the decentralization process were often intimidated by their male counterparts. One female Assembly member from Kaleo East Electoral Area puts it this way, "*during the Assembly sessions which were male dominant, the males often shouted at their female counterparts to keep quite and sit down in their bid to contribute to discussions on the floor of the house.*" This view of the Kaleo East Assemblywoman had long been confirmed by Ofei- Aboagye (2000). She noted that often women in the assemblies were shouted at during deliberations and often ignored by presiding members who were predominantly males.

### ***Household Chores and Farming Activities***

The study revealed that women in the studied communities faced a double burden of work that impinged on their efforts to come to the public domain. According to most respondents, women's household chores and farm attendance took much of their time. These, coupled with trading at the market to assist their husbands to keep their houses, left them with very little time to participate in public activities. This view of the studied communities came to support the assertion by the Northern Easter School (2006), that the workload of women in northern Ghana was such that they were the first people to wake up and the last to go to bed – that in some parts of Upper East Region women even farmed for their husbands in addition to the normal chores which left them very tired and had very little time to spare for other activities such as local level governance .

### ***Issues of Secrecy / Confidentiality***

Another interesting issue raised by many of the male and female respondents as well as a number of key informants was the issue of secrecy/confidentiality. They stressed

that women were most often not involved in decision making, simply because they could not keep secrets. For instance, the Community Development Officer of the District commented that most of the communities did not involve women when it came to decision making relating to vital issues which needed to be treated confidentially. Because the communities were of the view that women could not keep secrets. He reiterated that they were mostly involved in decision making process related to mobilization of levies or funds and implementation of projects when labor was needed.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

Though women in the studied communities were willing to avail themselves for participation in local governance, they faced various challenges which inhibited their efforts. In view of this, there is the need to provide strategies that would curtail the emerging challenges that account for their low level of participation. From the findings the following have been recommended to promote active and high women participation in the governance process at the local level:

- ◆ The study results established that there is a linkage between education and participation of women in local governance process. Hence, there is the need to intensify and sustain education of females in all forms and levels in the District. This can be done by the promotion and sustenance of massive girl-child education in the district or in the communities through collaboration with the District Assembly, NGOs and other charitable organizations or individuals. This collaboration should lead to the establishment of an educational fund which will provide the needed assistance to the entire girl-child to stay in the class room at all levels of education.
- ◆ Non-Formal Education Unit of the District should also be well equipped to cater for women in the Non-Formal Education system. The Non-Formal unit should be strengthened, and awareness created to encourage the women (including elderly illiterate women) who have had no education so that they will be able to read, write and understand what is around them in terms of governance and development to ensure that more women participate in the decision making process at the household, community, district and national levels.
- ◆ Intensive sensitization of both males and females to begin to re-think and redirect their negative perception to see women as equal partners in the development process of their communities and the nation at large. This can be done through the formation of male advocacy groups comprising chiefs, opinion leaders such as assembly members, and other knowledgeable men to educate their male counterparts in the District about the need to involve women in all levels of local governance.

- ◆ Ineffective and dysfunctional basic units (i.e. AC and UC) of the decentralization process will make the other recommendations unachievable. It is therefore imperative to strengthen the sub-district structures by providing them with needed infrastructure and other resources to enable them discharge their duties effectively. This strategy would put them in a better position to push through the mechanisms of development agencies to enhance active women's participation in the governance process at all levels.
- ◆ DAs in consultation with NGOs and other financial institutions in the district should economically empower the women by soliciting for funds to assist and broaden the scope of existing micro-finance schemes for women. This will enhance the ability of the women to mobilize needed resources to effectively contest with their male counterparts during general or district level elections.
- ◆ Capacities of women in local level governance process and other leadership roles in the District should intensively be built by the DA, NGOs and other women advocacy groups. This strategy will build their confidence level, and upgrade their knowledge in leadership and management skills in their homes, departments and in the public arena. Those women trained would in turn train their fellow women in their communities.
- ◆ Women role models should be identified by the DA and the communities to serve as icons and mentors to their fellow women. These influential women should be selected from the various communities within the District and should be of good character so as to serve as models to impact positively on their peers. This role model strategy will also encourage women to appreciate that they can also take part in decision-making process at all levels of governance.

It is the view of the researchers that the recommended strategies would promote active and sustain women participation in the governance process at the local level. However, the desire for equal participation for males and females in the governance process would not come easily or be gotten on a silver platter since change is a continuum process and a team work between both genders in the society. Hence, it is imperative to note that real and meaningful democracy will not be attained until women and men have equal political decision-making power in which every one's interest is equally and fairly represented Genderlens (2005).

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