Constitutional Framework that Supports Women's Participation and Representation in Legislation in the Gambia

Fatima Favour-Tamar Tanimu, PhD[1], Ishaya Umaru Tanimu, PhD[2]

[1]Faculty of Education University of The Gambia

[2]Faculty of Arts & Sciences Department of Humanities University of The Gambia

ABSTRACT: This study uses a survey design to facilitate the aim of understanding the Constitutional Framework that Supports Women's Participation and Representation in Legislation in The Gambia. The study adopts a mixed approach to discuss the issues of women's participation and representation in parliament. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data. Findings from the study suggest that a majority of participants share a sense of doubt or pessimism regarding the prospect of achieving gender parity in parliamentary representation. The findings underscore the need for continued efforts to address the Constitutional Framework that Supports Women's Participation and Representation in Legislation in The Gambia. Affirmative Action such as party quotas seems far away. The study herewith, recommends thus: Political parties should provide enabling fair play environment for women to participate in the democratisation process in The Gambia, thus, the concept of politics among women should be corrected through proper awareness campaigns to educate women on the need to understand that the negative concept of politics must be corrected and negative stereotype of women dampens their morale and thereby affects their zeal to participate in politics.

KEYWORDS: Women, Parliamentary, Politics, Gambia, Legislation

INTRODUCTION

In 1998, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan made the insightful statement that "Gender equality is more than a goal in itself." It is necessary to meet the challenges of fostering sustainable development, lowering poverty, and establishing sound government. Cultures, traditions, and conventions can act as obstacles to women's political engagement in Africa (Africa Barometer, 2021). For the most part, Gambia politics has been perceived as a man's domain. Historically, there have been more men than women in positions of political representation. In general, women in the Gambia play supporting roles to men, while men dominate politics.

This, however, does not suggest that there are no policies and laws to support women. Since the Gambia's independence in 1965, several laws on women empowerment and gender equality have been passed, but they are not impactful on the level of female participation in politics (Nabaneh, 2022). However, women are the biggest supporters of men in their respective political parties (Nabaneh, 2014). According to UNFPA (2023), women are great at driving change if provided with the right opportunities for empowerment. After independence, women's engagement in politics at the presidential/state level has largely been to be a seconder to a man i.e., a vice president. This has happened at least twice. Historically, among the different ethnic groups, wollof women are found to be more active in Gambian politics compared to the other ethnics (Fourshey, 2019).

The lack of female participation in politics is much more apparent at the level of parliament where only 3 of the 58 parliamentarians are females (UNFPA, 2023). If the voices of women must be felt, it should be at the highest decision-making body i.e., the parliament. Without having more female representatives, issues affecting women will continue to be partly handled and we will not be able to achieve our development goals (UNDP, 2022). Women are always in a better position to represent and deal with women's issues (UNFPA, 2023). Women deserve more leadership roles (Sawo, 2021). As development relates to gender, without a specific consideration of women's role in politics especially their representation in the parliament, the future of mainstreaming gender in all sectors and levels of development would be blurred. To make a greater impact, women cannot continue to be mobilizers and supporters of male politicians while occupying the back seat; women must be at the forefront. Studies have shown that women groups known as '*yaye kompins*' are very influential and do help male politicians to win, but the groups themselves do not hold power within the government (Nabaneh, 2014; Janneh, 2021). Thus, the contribution of women in politics is often overlooked (Sillah, 2023).

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METHODOLOGY

This study uses a survey design to facilitate the aim of understanding the low political representation of women in The Gambia. This involves the engagement of women and parties of interest in the study through the administration of close-ended interview questionnaires. The population of the study is 200 people. It comprises National Assembly members, political party representatives, gender experts, and representatives of NGOs. The study adopts Slovin's statistical formula for the study. The sample size is 99.59 percent of the population of 200 participants in the study. The choice for the population was purposive and to provide an overall representation of the sample for the study.

The study adopts a mixed-method approach to discuss the issues of women's participation and representation in parliament. Structured questionnaires were used to garnish the research. A p-value of less than 0.05 using the correlation coefficients was employed. This can be argued to be the most suitable design since going deeper into a problem and focusing on one context have the advantage of giving a more detailed answer which enables a deeper understanding of the problem. Gender equality is looked upon as the dependent variable. By using female representation and participation as the independent variable. The participation of women in politics should not be seen solely as the number of women represented, but also their influence and role in politics must be measured. This study will explore both the substantial representation and the descriptive representation meaning both the role of women and the number of women represented in the national Parliament

Statement of the Research Problem

The Gambia is not on track to meeting gender equality or have an appreciable percentage of female representation in the parliament; the Millenium Development Goal's (MDG) assessment report has shown that the Gambia missed the target of having at least 33% of its parliament members being women. The Gambia was able to have only 9.4% of its parliamentarians being females (MDG Status Report, 2015). Therefore, it is crucial to have a strong commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially goal

5 which has to do with achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Besides having some important policies for women empowerment already in place in the Gambia, there is a need for specific endeavors on gender empowerment to achieve the gender equality Goals and improve female representation in the parliament. To ascertain the possible level of women's participation in politics, this study seeks to find the issues surrounding the very low participation of females in politics which also reflects in their representation in the parliament.

Test of Assumptions

Table 1 Validity of the Questionnaire

Statement	Pairwise Correlation	P-Value (sig)
Since the First Republic to date women's representation and participation in parliament has been steadily improving.	0.44	0.000*
There is an unjustifiably disproportionate Women representation and participation in parliament	0.67	0.000*
Political parties are doing adequately enough to enhance and advocate women's representation and participation in parliament.	0.471	0.000*
Women's participation is not as adequately felt as their representation in the parliament	0.399	0.000*
There is a centrality of structural explanations to the problem of women's electoral under- representation	0.615	0.000*
There is a dashing of the idealistic hope that women will soon or even ever achieve parity in representation in the parliament.	0.607	0.000*
Religious influences have strongly hindered women's participation in parliament.	0.508	0.000*

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Cultural stereotypes and ethnocentrism are a great hindrance to women's participation in the Gambia.	0.405	0.000*
The biological role ascribed to women is a contributing hindrance to women's participation in parliament	0.568	0.000*
The lack of radical and affirmative actions by the state is a major contributing factor to women's representation and participation in parliament	0.428	0.000*
Lack of financial resources to be considered meaningful members of political parties	0.658	0.000*
Lack of access to appropriate information serves as a barrier to women's participation in politics	0.577	0.000*
The male-dominated model of politics that tends to undermine the value of women's contributions and their participation is a hindrance to women's political participation	0.554	0.000*
Lack of formal or political education and self-confidence	0.484	0.000*
Lack of political experience is hindering women from participating	0.416	0.000*
Women do not support fellow women participating in politics	0.425	0.000*
Lack of party support and exclusion from decision-making party structures	0.401	0.000*
The dual burden and a disproportionate share of domestic work is a contributing factor	0.437	0.000*
Lack of campaign funds	0.485	0.000*
The perception of politics as "dirty" by women in The Gambia	0.462	0.000*
Lack of media coverage and gender- based stereotypes and bias in the media	0.493	0.000*
Training and leadership programmes for women will enhance Women's Political Participation at the Subnational level project provides for the development and holding of offline and online training events	0.684	0.000*
Mentoring which may include Special mentoring (tutorship) Political (party) mentoring programmes	0.604	0.000*
Inter-factional associations and groups that aim to ensure gender equality help women champion important issues in politics.	0.557	0.000*
The gender policy of political parties provides the basis for developing programmes and policies that enable and help women move up the career ladder and become more publicly visible and recognizable	0.809	0.000*
Quotas are necessary if legally imposed a certain percent mandatory quota on nominating candidates and drawing up political party lists.	0.704	0.000*

Source: Field Survey, 2024

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To test the validity and reliability of our results we employed the validity and reliability tests the results show the instruments were valid and reliable in measuring the Promotion of Gender Equality Through the Participation and Representation of Women in Legislation in The Gambia. Table 1 shows the correlation coefficient for each of the statements of the Level of Women's Participation and Representation in Parliament in The Gambia. All the correlation coefficients are large. The p-values (Sig.) are less than 0.05, thus all the correlation coefficients are significant at the 5% level. Thus, we can say the statements are consistent and valid to measure what it was set for.

Table 2: Reliability of the Questionnaire	
Field	**Cronbach's Alpha**
The constitutional framework that supports women's participation and representation in Legislation in The Gambia.	0.6854

Source: Field Survey, 2024

FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY

The study reveals that 80% of participants agree or strongly agree with the statement that training and leadership programs can improve women's political participation at the subnational level, with a small percentage disagreeing or strongly disagreeing (7.07%) and 19.19% undecided. The majority of the respondents (55.56%) agreed that mentoring, including political party mentorship, can enhance women's political participation at the subnational level. 25.25% strongly agreed with this statement, while only 6.06% disagreed or strongly disagreed. However, 13.13% of the respondents were undecided on this issue. The results suggest that mentoring programs can be a useful tool to promote women's political participation, but more research and analysis may be needed to develop effective mentoring strategies. It appears that a majority of the respondents (79.59%) agreed or strongly agreed that inter-factional associations and groups that aim to ensure gender equality help women champion important issues in politics. Only a small percentage (7.14%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, while 19.39% were undecided. This suggests that such associations and groups may have a positive impact on women's political participation, according to the respondents of the survey.

The majority of respondents (65.66%) believe that political party gender policies aid women in career advancement and public visibility, with 18.18% strongly agreeing and 5.05% disagreeing. However, 11.11% remain undecided, indicating a strong consensus on this matter. The majority of respondents, 63.64% and 16.16%, agree or strongly agree that quotas are necessary for nominating candidates and creating political party lists, while 9.09% are undecided and 11.11% strongly disagree, indicating resistance to quotas in promoting gender equality in politics.

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Survey Questions	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Training and leadership programmes for women will enhance Women's Political Participation at the Subnational level project provides for the development and holding of offline and online training events	3	3.0%	4	4.0%	12	12.1%	50	50.5%	30	30.3%
Mentoring which may include Special mentoring (tutorship) Political (party) mentoring programmes	4	4.0%	2	2.0%	13	13.1%	55	55.6%	25	25.3%
Inter- factional associations and groups that aim to ensure gender equality help women champion important issues in politics.	4	4.1%	3	3.1%	12	12.2%	59	60.2%	20	20.4%

Table 3: Constitutional Framework that Supports Women's Participation and Representation in Legislation in The Gambia

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The gender policy of political parties provides the basis for developing programmes and policies that enable and help women move up the career ladder and become more publicly visible and recognizable	2	2.0%	3	3.0%	11	11.1%	65	65.7%	18	18.2%
Quotas are necessary if legally imposed a certain percent mandatory quota on nominating candidates and drawing up political party lists.	4	4.0%	7	7.1%	9	9.1%	63	63.6%	16	16.2%

Source: Field Survey, 2024

CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that training and leadership programs, mentoring, inter-factional associations, and political parties' gender policies can enhance women's political participation and representation at the subnational level. These measures can provide the necessary skills, knowledge, and support to help women move up the career ladder and become more visible and recognizable in politics. The positive perception of these measures among the participants indicates that there is a willingness to promote women's political participation in The Gambia. However, the findings also reveal some degree of resistance to the use of quotas as a means of promoting gender equality in politics. While a majority of the respondents agree that quotas are necessary, there are still a significant number of respondents who are undecided or disagree with the use of quotas. This suggests that more work needs to be done to educate and persuade stakeholders about the importance of quotas in promoting gender equality in politics. Overall, the findings suggest that there is a constitutional framework in place to support women's political participation and representation in The Gambia. However, more efforts are needed to promote and implement these measures effectively. This includes developing effective mentoring strategies, promoting inter-factional associations and groups, and persuading stakeholders about the importance of quotas.

RECOMMENDATION

The fact is that a negative stereotype of women dampens their morale and thereby affects their zeal to participate in politics. Therefore, there is a need for deliberate and conscious attempts by stakeholders in the industry to encourage and support the participation and representation of women in politics.

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