Increasing and Contribution of Women in Political Domain in Cameroon

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Abstract: Cameroon is one of the countries where women are no motivated to contribute in the political domain. In fact, women according to national statistic institute constitute 52 percent of the population and they play in the society a crucial role which can enhance the development. Unfortunately, they are considered as mother who mains role are to cook and take care of the children. In our society, they function as subordinators of men. Women's empowerment is currently an issue of national concern and both state and international efforts at mainstreaming women in development have so far produced mixed results. The vision of this paper is to contribute to the enhancement of democracy in our country by assisting women to enjoy full political and civil rights. This article seeks to strengthen the participation and performances of all women in Cameroon in the electoral process and governance of our country.

Keywords: Cameroon, politics, women development.

INTRODUCTION

Women in government in the modern era are under-represented in most countries worldwide, in contrast to men. However, women are increasingly being politically elected to be heads of state and government. More than 20 countries currently have a woman holding office as the head of a national government, and the global participation rate of women in national-level parliaments is nearly 20%. A number of countries are exploring measures that may increase women's participation in government at all levels, from the local to the national.

Women and girls make up 52% according to national institute statistic of the total Cameroon population. Yet they occupy less than 8% of the political and decision making system of the country. Women and girls remain the most affected by poverty and other societal ills. The burden of care, remain very heavy on women with most of the unpaid home keeping job largely unrecognized and unvalued. Only 8% (32/360) of Mayors in Cameroon are Female. Only 10.5% (19/180) of Members of Parliament are Female,0% of the Regional Governors are Female.

The alliance for economic and political empowerment of women and girls has as main objective to build stronger partnership with feminist activities committed to meaningful advancement of the rights of women and girls from all fronts.

Our definition of feminism include committed men and women working together to address the inequalities imposed by the societies that impact negatively on women and girls only because of their sex. We recognize the important role that the men who have value and respect for women can play in converting their peers to start addressing the issues.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The political situation in Cameroon has a long and trying history within its 48 years of independence from France and Britain. 1960 started the independent era of Cameroon as French Cameroon gained independence from France. With this new independence Ahmadou Ahidjo, a Muslim from the North Region of Cameroon became the president of the Republic. The British Cameroons, which were under the rule of Britain had not yet gained independence and were under the debate on whether or not to join French Cameroon. In 1961, after a referendum by the United Nation, the southern most section of the British Cameroons, which are the modern day North West and South West provinces, voted to join the French Cameroon and become the Federal Republic of Cameroon. The northern portion of the British Cameroon elected to join Nigeria, thus separating themselves from the Cameroonian nationality, by continuing to live in Nigeria, who was previously under British control.

The government type of Cameroon can be described as a republic and is divided into ten administrative divisions, which are indicative to the regions of Cameroon. Cameroon has a parliamentary style of government in which Paul Biya currently serves as president. There is also a cabinet of officials appointed by the present proposed by the prime minister, which allows for the president to have control of whoever comes into power. As with the parliamentary system, Cameroon's legislative branch has a nationally assembly of 180 seats and all members are elected by direct popular for to serve 5 year terms. In each of the ten regions, a position equivalent to a governor serves as the top tier followed by a breakdown of departments headed by prefects, who are directly over sub-prefects of whom are directly over the chiefs of villages. For the purpose of this reflection, I will focus on the number of women who occupy seat in the political domains such as parliament, council, chiefs of villages president of political parties and in administrative domain.

One area of main importance of politics in Cameroon is the political parties. Cameroon claims to have an advanced democracy, boasting a majority of parties, which they claim make them far superior with the vast amounts of choices. The multiparty system was enacted in December of 1990, which systematically brought the end of the one party system held in place during the presidency of Ahidjo starting in 1966. The main political parties include the Cameroon Democratic Union, UDC, the Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement (CPDM), the Movement Defense of the Republic, (MDR), the National Union for Democracy and Progress (UNDP), the Progressive Movement, the United Peoples of Cameroon, (UPC) and the Social Democratic Front. Out of these parties, select representatives voted into power hold seats within the national assembly.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Women face numerous obstacles in achieving representation in governance Their participation has been limited by the assumption that women's proper sphere is the "private" sphere. Whereas the "public" domain is one of political authority and contestation, the "private" realm is associated with the family and the home. By relegating women to the private sphere, their ability to enter the political area is curtailed. This paper analyze the evolution and the contribution of women in politics in cameroon As we see in the table below, we realize that women are less represent in the administration.

Table 1: Evolution of women in territorial commandment from 2011 to 2012

	2010	2011	2012
Governors	0	0	0
Secretaries of Region	0	0	1
Prefect	0	0	1
Associate prefect	0	2	2
Sub prefects	6	6	7
Associate administrative district	8	10	13

Source: MINATD

Gender inequality within families, inequitable division of labor within households, and cultural attitudes about gender roles further subjugate women and serve to limit their representation in public life. Societies that are highly patriarchal often have local power structures that make it difficult for women to combat. Thus, their interests are often not represented. The second table will show us the increasing or the stability of women in the head of village from 2010 to 2013.

Table2: women who are chiefs of 1st and 2nd degree in the region of Cameroon

Regions	2010		2011		2012		2013	
	1st degree	2nd degree	1st degree	2nd degree	1st degree	2nd degree	1st degree	2nd degree
Adamawa	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Centre	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
Est	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Extreme North	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Littoral	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North West	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sud	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Sud-West	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2

Source: MINATD

Even once elected, women tend to hold lesser valued or similar positions. In the administration, when women are appointed ministers by the Head of state, their posts are described as "soft industries" and include health, education, and welfare. Rarely do women hold executive decision-making authority in more powerful domains or those that are associated with traditional notions of masculinity (such as finance and the military). Typically, the more powerful the institution, the less likely it is that women's interests will be represented. Additionally, in more autocratic nations, women are less likely to have their interests represented. Many women attain political standing due to kinship ties, as they have male family members who are involved in politics. These women tend to be from higher income, higher status families and thus may not be as focused on the issues faced by lower income families. According to MINATD, women hold 13 in the head of political parties and 278 for the men.

Additionally, women face challenges in that their private lives seem to be focused on more than their political careers. For instance, fashion choices are often picked apart by the media, and in this women rarely win, either they show too much skin or too little, they either look too feminine or too masculine. In Cameroon, women will try to enhance thelselve

ANALYSIS

Writing for the World Bank, Landell-Mills and Serageldin [1] define governance as the use of political authority and exercise of control over a 30 society and the management of its resources for social and economic development. It encompasses the nature of the functioning of a state's institutional and structural arrangements, decision making processes, policy formulation and implementation capacity, effectiveness of leadership, and the nature of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled. Different kinds of governance do exist but in many African states the most common are centralized and decentralized governance. The United Nation 2005 Sachs report on the implementation of the United Nation Millennium Development Goals argued that poor governance in African states was one of the key reasons for ongoing problems in meeting the goals of development. The principle of good governance was launched in international aid circles at the end of the cold-war as a guiding principle aimed at the internal restructuring of government machinery of developing and transitional economies. It was an approach adopted by the World Bank and aid agencies as a pre-condition to receive development aid, which was concerned with improving the political leadership of democracy and integrating economic and social goals. In effect, it is endorsed as a core element of development strategy [2].Though adopted primarily as a political policy it was restrictive to the economic sphere.

Doornbos argues that the quality of good governance can be evaluated in terms of its democratic content. Implicitly, good governance and democracy are inseparable, that is, they converge both "conceptually and practically" in the study of practice of the formulation and implementation of public policy [2]. Its landmarks include: accountability, transparency, effectiveness and efficiency; it is also participatory, consensus oriented, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It ensures that corruption is minimized (like in the case of election malpractices). For good governance to be efficient, democracy must be operational. Expanding democracy-whose indicators include multi-partysm, freedom of speech and the press - improves individual opportunity for prosperity and improved well-being, thus contributing to the growth of the society. And in ensuring effectiveness and efficiency, processes and institutions produce results that meet the needs of society while making the best use of resources at their disposal.

The concept of efficiency in the context of good governance also covers the sustainable use of natural resources and the protection of the environment. The concept of good governance is of importance in this study because it brings out the idea of democracy which gives freedom and empowerment to the people. Here, there is an attempt to establish a link between building good governance (democratic governance) and development. The reasons for exploring the concept of good governance are rooted in my interest to draw a focus on the symbiosis between politics and development for a fuller understanding of the problems of development.

Karlstrom [3] addresses the concept of democracy as 'a local political cosmology which emphasizes the values of justice, civility and open communication between rulers and subjects', where, according to Schumpeter, political decisions are realized for 'common good' by making the people decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out their will [4]. Schumpeter further states that this common good implies providing answers to questions in order that every measure taken can unequivocally be classified as 'good' or 'bad'. It is the rule of the people, depicting liberty, and freedom. Lijphart [5] gives the following as definitions of democracy: (1) Representative democracy is defined as the government by the representatives of the people; (2) Abraham Lincoln's famous stipulation of democracy as government for the people and by the people, that is, a government that works in accordance with the peoples' preferences. There are different kinds of democracy, majoritarian and consensus models [6]. However, the majoritarian model will be ruled out in this study because it stipulates that the majority should govern while the minorities oppose. The consensus model of democracy requires that a consensus should be

arrived at through discursive means [7]. Lewis seems to work in the same line of thought as Schumpeter. In his view, the consensus model depicts the real essence of democracy where all who are affected by a decision should have a chance to participate in making that decision directly or indirectly through chosen representatives. Lijphart [5] outlines 8 criteria for defining and measuring democracy proposed by Robert A. Dahl [5]. They include:

- A right to vote,
- The right to be elected,
- The right for political leaders to compete for support and votes,
- Free and fair elections,
- Freedom of association and expression (civil liberties),
- Alternative sources of information,
- Institutions for making public policies depend on votes and other expression of preference.

Democratic freedoms permit political parties to mobilize and draw support on the basis of their preferred espousal interests and identities. This does not rule out the fact that in a democratic society the management of affairs requires certain special aptitudes and techniques that needs to be entrusted to those who possess them. Yet, this does not have to affect the principle of common good by allowing the people decide issues, because these people who are there (representatives) are simply there to carry out the will of the people. areas. Free and fair elections take the stage in a democratic system where there is socio-political inclusion.

Within this framework of female under-representation, it is better to continue to organize initiatives to increase women participation in the political and electoral processes in Cameroon. This sensitization can pass through workshops to encourage women to take up leadership roles within their respective political parties, so as to increase their chances of being invested as party candidates in the municipal and legislative elections. To encourage women to vie for offices in the up coming elections. To equally produced a handbook to educate women on concepts and procedures related to elections in Cameroon, so as to enable them to have some basic skills in their attempt to vie for political offices.

The United Nations has identified six avenues by which female participation in politics and government may be strengthened. These avenues are: equalization of educational opportunities, quotas for female participation in governing bodies, legislative reform to increase focus on issues concerning women and children and financing gender-responsive budgets to equally take into account the needs of men and women.

a) Education

Women with formal education (at any level) are likelier to delay marriage and subsequent childbirth, be better informed about infant and child nutrition, and ensure childhood immunization. Children of mothers with formal education are better nourished and have higher survival rates. Equalization of educational opportunities for boys and girls may take the form of several initiatives:

- abolishment of educational fees which would require parents to consider financial issues when deciding which of their children to educate. Poor children in rural areas are particularly affected by inequality resulting from educational fees.
- encouragement of parents and communities to institute gender-equal educational agendas. Perceived opportunity cost of educating girls may be addressed through a conditional cash transfer program which financially reward families who educate their daughters (thus removing the financial barrier that results from girls substituting school attendance for work in the family labor force).
- creation of "girl-friendly" schools to minimize bias and create a safe school environment for girls and young women. Currently, a barrier to female school attendance is the risk of sexual violence en route to school. A "safe school environment" is one in which the school is located to minimize such violence, in addition to providing girls with educational opportunities (as opposed to using female students to perform janitorial work or other menial labor).

Education is a vital tool for any person in society to better themselves in their career path. Regarding the current status of women, culture aspects are breaking down and are deviating from the social norm in western cultures. "The biggest hurdles to overcome for women are still on the local level where both men and women are often recruited from the communities and have limited political skills". The level of education in these local governments or, for that matter, the people in those positions of power are said to not be at a level of sufficient standards.

b) Quotas

Quotas are mechanisms by which governments seek to increase the number of women represented in the governing body. "Gender quotas for the election of legislators have been used since the late 1970s by a few political parties (via the party charter) in a small number of advanced industrial democracies; such examples would be like Germany and Norway". Quota systems have been examined through a large number of country statistics regarding women in office.

Andrew Reynolds says there is "an increasing practice in legislatures for the state, or the parties themselves, to utilize formal or informal quota mechanisms to promote women as candidates and MPs". Quotas have been established in many countries however, there is still a limited ratio of women representation that takes place within these quotas. "Although over 60% of countries have reached at least 10% women in their national legislature, fewer have crossed the 20% and 30% barriers. By February 2006, only about 10% of sovereign nations had more than 30% women in parliament". Though the global rise of women in office helps contribute to equality laws pertaining to women, many cultural and social concepts regarding women are slowly adjusting to the shift of women representation. This makes it hard for women to be acknowledged in politics as much as countries say they should be.

c) Legislation

There have been numerous occasions where equal legislation has, in itself and through the effects that women have, benefited the overall progression of women equality on a global scale. Though women have entered legislation, the overall representation within higher ranks of government is not being established. "Looking at ministerial positions broken down by portfolio allocation, one sees a worldwide tendency to place women in the softer sociocultural ministerial positions rather than in the harder and politically more prestigious positions of economic planning, national security, and foreign affairs, which are often seen as stepping-stones to national leader ship".

d) Financing

Sex-responsive budgets address the needs and interests of different individuals and social groups, maintaining awareness of sexual equality issues within the formation of policies and budgets. Such budgets are not necessarily a 50–50 male-female split, but accurately reflect the needs of each sex (such as increased allocation for women's reproductive health. Benefits of gender-responsive budgets include:

- Improved budget efficiency by ensuring that funds are allocated where they are needed most
- Strengthened government position by advocating for needs of all, including the poor and the underrepresented
- Increased information flow surrounding needs of those who are usually discriminated against

A sex-responsive budget may also work to address issues of unpaid care work and caring labor gaps.

Women's informal collectives are crucial to improving the standard of living for women worldwide. Collectives can address such issues as nutrition, education, shelter, food distribution, and generally improved standard of living. Empowering such collectives can increase their reach to the women most in need of support and empowerment. Though women's movements have a very successful outcome with the emphasis on gaining equality towards women, other movements are taking different approaches to the issue. Women in certain countries, instead of approaching the demands as representation of women as "a particular interest group", have approached the issue on the basis of the "universality of sex differences and the relation to the nation". Htun and Weldon also bring up the point of democracy and its effects on the level of equality it brings. In their article, they explain that a democratic country is more likely to listen to "autonomous organizing" within the government. Women's movements would benefit from this the most or has had great influence and impact because of democracy, though it can become a very complex system. When it comes to local government issues, political standings for women are not necessarily looked upon as a major issue. "Even civil society organizations left women's issues off the agenda. At this level, traditional leaders also have a vested interest that generally opposes women's interests". Theorists believe that having a setback in government policies would be seen as catastrophic to the overall progress of women in government. Amanda Gouws says that "The instability of democratic or nominally democratic regimes makes women's political gains very vulnerable because these gains can be easily rolled back when regimes change. The failure to make the private sphere part of political contestation diminishes the power of formal democratic rights and limits solutions to gender inequality".

DISCUSSIONS

According to figures published by the minister of territorial administration and decentralisation, only five million Cameroonians registered to vote in 2007 out of a total estimated population of 18 million. And 62 percent of those, three million Cameroonians, actually voted.

The reclaiming of Cameroon's electorate, obviously tired of political games, is now the battle cry of many political groups and several civil society organisations in the country. Women alone account for 52 percent of the Cameroonian population, so they carry a potentially determining demographic weight that should be mobilised for a massive registration and greater political participation electoral process.

Guy Parfait Songué, a political scientist and lecturer at the University of Douala, the economic capital, said that the low participation of Cameroonians – including women – in the political process has its roots in the violence of the decolonisation process. "There was a veritable crisis of citizenship in Cameroon. We must not forget that the heart of this country was decimated before independence and during the 10 following years. The nationalists who fought for

the country's independence were decimated by napalm by French settlers. This has weakened national sentiment," he said.

For the academic, weak political involvement – from both men and women – in Cameroon is also due to psychological and anthropological causes.

"Asking people to be involved in politics is tantamount to spurring them into leadership. But we cannot promote the spirit of leadership of an individual while refusing to value their potential. It starts in the family where children's leadership (whether boys and girls) is prohibited. They are taught fear and doubt instead. You cannot foster the leadership potential of a child after denigrating them their whole life. Parents should start by changing their relationships with children," Songué explained.

We can agree that there is a real problem. Women have weak political culture. And texts that establish gender equality, such as the constitution, are not very well known or understood.

This is despite the fact that political parties advocate for more gender parity. One of these is the Rassemblement démocratique du peuple camerounais (RDPC), the party currently in power. The party rarely follows the rules set by its hierarchy in regards to integrating women and youth in its candidate list during legislative and municipal elections. This can explain the attitude that hampers women's political participation.

However, the representation of women in political life in Cameroon has improved slightly due to the feminist advocacy and government efforts.

According to the INS, between 1992 and 2002, the number of women in the national assembly dropped from 23 to 10 out of 180 members of parliament. However, between 2002 and 2012, the number of female members of parliament increased from 10 to 25. At the local level, between 2007 and 2012 out of 360 mayors only 24 were women. Furthermore, Cameroon has six female ministers of state out of 30. There are also four female director generals in state-owned entities.

But progress is still insufficient, since the creation of the National Assembly women represented only 8.41 of those in parliament, as opposed to 11.16 of elected officials in municipal councils. Women should get involved in associations and groups, and not only to pay dues, eat, drink and assist each other in difficult times.

"I'll use every gathering to spread the message: women's vote is key to choosing representatives and especially in electing other women," Ngala Esther Ntale

vowed. Ntale is an MP and member of the Social Democratic Front, the main opposition party.

The International Day of the Woman celebrated worldwide every March 8th has had its shortcomings and its advantages especially in developing countries. Ignorance of what is required has played a major role in the unruly manner with which most women go about the day. In Cameroon many homes have been broken, many women and a few men have lost their lives in a bid to pull the blanket in case of an uproar. Some people think that overtime a good number of women have come to understand the true meaning of the day's celebration while some people put government at fault for failing to carry out proper education of these women going by the Geneva resolution requirement on the rights of women. In order to let the people speak Eden sought the views of the people pertaining to this day's celebration.

Women's Day celebrations provoke more social strives than solve women's problems. Women still have the same very old headaches. They still have gender bias in many things, poor representation at the level of parliament, Senate and government. They still have to depend on the men for survivals even though they go clamouring for more power. The Women's Day leaves them with more headaches.

According to the Advocates for Human Rights voting rights and participation of women in the political process are areas of significant concern in Cameroon. Women represent 51% of the population of Cameroon, but the percentage of women in government as a whole is much lower. Cameroon reported that the percentage of women members in government stands at 13.5%. This is far below equal representation or the 30 percent quota suggested by the Committee. 3 Significant under representation of women persists in positions of local representation, diplomacy, administration, and magistracy. The substantial lack of representation by women in the public life of a country is a form of discrimination against women.

De facto equality between men and women means equality in all spheres of life, including the political sphere. .This submission addresses Cameroon's compliance with its obligations in the context of women's voting and political rights. The government of Cameroon has made progress toward increasing the number of women who participate in decision making roles within the government. However, additional efforts are required by the Convention. This submission sets forth the challenges that remain and provides recommendation s for reforms to be considered.

Cameroon ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against

Women on August 23, 1994. In particular, obligations relating to the right to vote and political rights are found in Articles 7 and 8. Cameroon also acceded to the Optional Protocol on January 7, 2005, which allows individuals and groups to report to the Committee violations of Convention rights by Cameroon.

Under Article 7, Cameroon has agreed to take all appropriate measures to eliminate, in Cameroon's political and public life, discrimination against women. Particularly, Cameroon agreed to work toward equal voting rights in all elections by formulating and implementing applicable government policies, to assist in increasing the number of women holding public office and performing public functions at all levels of government, and to participate in non-governmental organizations and associations (NGOs).

Under Article 8, Cameroon has agreed to take all appropriate measures for ensuring women equal terms as men without any discrimination, in opportunities to represent the Cameroonian government in an international capacity and to participate in work for international organizations.

Article 4 further obligates Cameroon to adopt temporary special measures to accelerate de facto equality between men and women. In General Recommendation No. 25, State Parties were instructed to take temporary special measures to ensure full compliance with the provisions of Articles 7 and 8.

Traditional barriers continue to impair women's ability to participate in politics. A recent report highlighted the Mbororo community where women are prevented from making decisions inside their own families because of their economic dependence and exclusion from community decision making, even on issues that affect women. Without the economic resources to pursue a political career, many women are prevented from independently pursuing one. Furthermore, discriminatory laws reinforce this barrier.

The current state of politics in Cameroon also presents a barrier. The underrepresentation of women and low enrollment of women in political parties can undermine confidence in women by politicians and weaken solidarity among women.

CONCLUSION

At the end of our study based on the increasing and the participation of the women in politics we recommend to the government to:

- Undertake measures to overcome barriers, such as illiteracy or impediments to freedom of movement, that prevent women from exercising their political rights effectively.
- Adopt measures to facilitate women's right to vote, including public outreach to both men and women, transportation to polling centers, and ensuring that voting registration requirements are reasonable and do not have a discriminatory impact on women.
- Identify and eliminate obstacles to voting for women, including photograph and national identity card requirements and restrictions on freedom to movement. Ensure that interference with a person's right to vote is prohibited by law and such laws are enforced
- Adopt special measures, such as photographs, symbols, and fingerprint voting, to facilitate voting by illiterate voters and provide them with adequate information.
- Provide support, training and advice to elected female representatives on issues, such as: navigating the institution to which they are elected; their core responsibilities; relationships with constituents; their duties and responsibilities; budgeting; and executive oversight; and procedural matters and operations.
- Develop and carry out institutional reforms to ensure the culture and working environment of political institutions is sensitive to the needs of female representatives, for example, the availability and proximity of female restrooms, provision of on site or nearby childcare services, eradication of evening sessions that may interfere with familial duties, as well as other structural reforms such as proportionate gender representation on committees
- Provide adequate funding to organizations and programs that support and promote women's political participation.
- Undertake public awareness campaigns to educate and promote women's political participation as voters, candidates, and appointees.

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