

**GENDER INCLUSIVENESS IN DECISION MAKING AND NATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN
 WEST AFRICAN SUB-REGION.**

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Abstract

Gender equality embraces fundamental human rights and enhances the meaningful peace for a sustainable world. The Sustainable Development Goal 5 target 5, ensures women inclusiveness at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life. The study, therefore, examined the influence of women participation at the National Assembly and the effects on the national economic productivity. Secondary data from the World Bank was used for analysis. Data used included the percentage of women in the national assembly as at 2021 in the 15 West African states (with complete data) and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita. One way ANOVA was used to analyze the data. The result shows that higher representation of women at the national assembly yields higher GDP per capita. However, this relationship is not statistically significant even when women representation was at 30 percent and above, the level that was the affirmative action taken at Beijing Declaration and platform for Action in 1995. There is need therefore, to properly assess the level of women representation in decision making that could yield significant impact in the economic recovery, especially in the West African Sub-region.

Keywords: Gender, Decision making, Economic development, Inclusiveness, Sub-region

Introduction

Good decision making at different levels of human endeavor could help in achieving set targets. Tailoring these decisions to achieve the set targets requires skills and experience. This could become more tasking when the decisions are at the national level due to varying degrees of interest groups and stakeholders. The natural care-taking skills of the female gender could be an advantage if appropriate gender representations are considered in the decision-making process especially at the national level. This might be why the Sustainable Development Goal 5 embraces the need to be intentional in our structuring of the political and economic life in such

a way that gender disparity is minimized in various leadership positions. Perhaps, this could help give equal opportunities and protect the rights and privileges of the different genders.

The actualization of gender inclusiveness has been viewed from different perspectives which include, quota system among others. In furtherance to this inclusion, the 1995 Beijing Declaration and the provision of the Convention and Elimination of Discriminatory practices Against Women (CEDAW) consented to an affirmative action which implored 30% positions in government to be ceded to women (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995). Gender inclusion seeks an equitable representation of the different genders in decision making. Current studies have shown that such inclusiveness has capacity to enhance dividends of democracy especially in ameliorating corrupt practices (Hessami & da Fonseca, 2020; Ngouhouo & Njoya, 2020). Gender inclusiveness also enables critical institutional development such as health, education (even reduction of gender gap in educational attainment) (Beaman *et al.*, 2012; Clayton & Zetterberg, 2018; Svaleryd, 2009). However, when women representation is enhanced, attitudes that could generate conflict behaviour is minimized and seemingly reducing defense spending (Koch & Fulton, 2011). The reduction in defense financing could save more funds for other critical infrastructure for national development. The study therefore, considered the following objectives:

1. examine the influence of women representations on the GDP per Capita of West African sub-region
2. re-assess the appropriateness of the 30% affirmative action for women representations in the decision-making process in the West African sub-region

Literature Review

GDP per Capita

GDP per capita reflects a lot of socio-economic variables of a country such as, the country's prosperity, life expectancy, infrastructural development among others (Varun, 2014). There is a positive relationship between GDP per Capita and Corruption Perception Index (CPI). Among European countries a unit in CPI increases GDP per Capita by 2.4% (Podobnik *et al.*, 2008). This implies that when corrupt practices decrease, GDP per capita increases. Therefore, GDP per Capita can be used to measure national economic development.

Women Representation and the GDP per Capita

Gender equality seeks a balance of opportunities in life between men and women, even at the national levels; and women could be disadvantaged in this balance due to societal stereotypes, cultural perspectives and labour market segregations (Vasiljevic *et al.*, 2017). The United Nations 193 member states have 28 women currently serving as heads of their government with 26% serving as parliamentarians (World Population Review, 2023). In Sub-Saharan Africa, about a quarter (26.3%) of the parliamentary seats were held by women, in West Africa, Senegal had forty-percent in the parliament (Kamer, 2023).

Studies on gender diversity in the workplace have applauded the right mix as contributing to organizational performance, good return on invested capital, and better resilience of the organizations during economic crisis (Carter & Wagner, 2011; Carter *et al.*, 2003; Erhardt *et al.*, 2003). Previous studies have shown that female executives are more engaging than their male counterparts and as board directors, women are more likely to attend board meetings and participate in oversight functions of the organizations (Fitch, & Agrawal, 2015; Adams, &

Ferreira, 2009). Though female directors are more benevolent but less power oriented than males, yet they are more likely to demand more auditing of the organizations (Adams, & Funk, 2012; Srinidhi *et al.*, 2011). The combinations of good oversight functions and regular auditing of firms could help in curbing corrupt practices, as the study involving more than 125 countries had revealed (Kumar, & Sudipta, 2018). Perhaps, curbing corrupt practices could increase the national income and enhance GDP per Capita.

Appropriateness of the Affirmative Action for Women

Globally, not many nations have the critical mass of women representation needed to trigger off the gender diversity needed for national development (Adriaanse, 2016). A study by Dieleman *et al.* (2014) on women representation in the board of directors showed a wide discrepancy among regions with 40.5% in Norway, 20.7% in United Kingdom, 16.9% in the United States of America, 11.6% in Indonesia and 1.9% in the Republic of Korea. According to Nasser (2018), in the Arab world, only two countries had ever met the absolute (50%) gender equality, United Arab Emirate (66.7% in 2014) and Kuwait (51.8% in 2015). Pushing for the right mix of gender diversity is important for national development as a study by Qian (2016) showed that firms that have more than a quarter of their board members as females were the best performing firms in the area of energy, consumer discretionary and financial industries. Previous studies have shown that women consider policies that are inclusive and consensus driven, and have a positive drive towards issues that could alleviate poverty and enhance community wellbeing (Camissa *et al.*, 2018).

This predisposition of women conceivably, are qualities needed for peace building and national development. Perhaps, the nation Rwanda, understood the benefits of gender diversity, despite emerging from war, enacted laws that improved their women representations to achieve national development. According to Key Statistics on Rwanda (2021), despite losing close to a million lives in war with stagnating economy (average growth of 2.2% between 1985 to 1993), 64% inflation rate and 78% poverty rate (between 1985 and 1990), Rwanda has the best global female representation at national level (63%). The country had been recognized globally as second most competitive in Africa (World Travel Guide, 2018), second easiest place to do business in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank report, 2019), third country in cyber security in Africa (Global Cyber Security Index, 2018), 7th global most efficient government (World Economic Forum, 2015) and 9th best place to be a woman globally (Gallup Global report, 2019). These rankings of Rwanda could be interpreted as having positive impact on its citizens and a reflection of national development. However, stimulating an environment that commands 63% women representations (more than twice above the earlier 30% affirmative action) is a poser to reconsider the actual percentage of women representation needed for meaningful national development.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist theory emerged as a struggle to end women's oppression and enthrone women's rights. It began in the 18th century with the works of Mary Wollstonecraft in her publication "*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*". The study was anchored on the feminist theory, especially the liberal and Marxist feminism that seeks a level playing ground for women to excel in socio-political and economic dimensions. In sub-Saharan Africa where patriarchy is still

prominent, socio-political and economic policies, norms and customs that disadvantaged women are institutionalized to keep women away from participation in politics and governance. Some of these include high cost of nomination forms for political offices, nocturnal meetings, violence at meetings and rallies among others. Perhaps, this explains the low representation of women in the West African sub-region at the parliament level, where decision making and laws are made. Low representation might imply that legislations on women and children might not be properly captured and this could further compromise their socio-economic empowerment and national productivity.

Methodology

The study utilized secondary quantitative data on Sub-Saharan Africa published by World bank in 2022. West African data was extracted from the Sub-Saharan data. The percentage distribution of women in national assembly as at 2021 was used. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of the 15 members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was also used. The analysis utilized descriptive (frequency table) and inferential statistics of correlation and one-way ANOVA to analyze the data.

Table.1 Percentage distribution of percentage of women in national assembly in West African countries and the corresponding GDP per capita

Country	Percentage (%) of women in the National Assembly (2021)	GDP per capita
Benin	08	1417
Burkina Faso	06	894
Cabo Verde	39	3570
Cote d’Ivoire	14	2684
Gambia	09	832
Ghana	15	2198
Guinea	17	1141
Guinea-Bissau	14	818
Liberia	11	669
Mali	27	970
Niger	26	635
Nigeria	04	2271

Senegal	43	1648
Sierra Leone	12	476
Togo	19	1020
Total	264	
Average	17.6%	

Source: World bank (2022). Data for Sub-Saharan Africa, OECD members.
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=ZG>
<https://data.worldbank.org/?locations=ZG-OE>

Results

Table 2 Percentage distribution of women in the national assembly in West Africa

Women in the national assembly	Frequency	Percent
Less than 12%	5	33.33
12 - 29%	8	53.33
30% and above	2	13.33

Table 2 shows that across nations in West African region, close to half (53.3%) of the 15 countries captured were represented by 12 to 15% of women in the national assembly. Only close to a tenth (13.3%) of the countries had at least 30% of women representation in the national assembly.

Table.3 Correlation analysis between percentage of women's representation at the national assembly and the GDP per capita in West Africa.

		% Women in National Assembly
GDP per Capita	Pearson Correlation	0.321
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.244
	N	15

There is a low positive correlation between percentage of women in the national assembly and GDP per capita in the West African sub-region and this result is not statistically significant ($r = 0.321$, $p > 0.05$). The positive correlation implies that increasing the percentage of women representation also increases the GDP per capita in West Africa.

Table.4 The Descriptive statistics of the influence of the percentage of women representation at the national assembly on the GDP per capita in West Africa countries

% women Rep	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Les than 12%	5	1216.6	652.64	291.87	406.24	2026.96
12-29%	8	1242.8	780.27	275.87	590.43	1895.07
30% and above	2	2609.0	1359.0	961.00	-9601.66	14819.66
Total	15	1416.2	890.34	229.89	923.14	1909.26

Table 4 shows that increasing the percentage of women in the national assembly increases the mean value of the GDP per Capita. The result show that less than 12% of women representation has the least GDP per Capita (M=1216.6, SD = 652.64), 12 to 29% women representation (M = 1242.8, SD = 780.27), and 30% and above women representation (M = 2609, SD = 1359.06).

Table 5. GDP per Capita, Test of Homogeneity of Variances

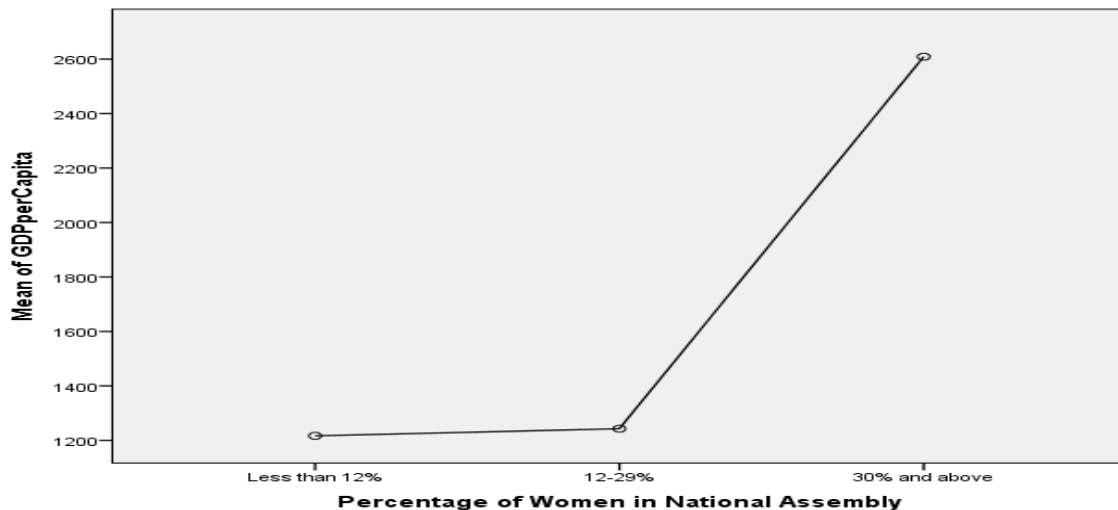
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
0.999	2	12	0.397

The Levene Statistic is not significant ($p > 0.05$); therefore, equal variance was assumed.

Table 6. One-Way ANOVA of the influence of percentage of women representation at the national assembly on the GDP per capita in West Africa countries

GDP per Capita	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3285424	2	1642712	2.523	0.122
Within Groups	7812561	12	651046.7		
Total	11097984	14			

Table 6 shows the ANOVA analysis, and the GDP per Capita scores of the different percentages of women’s representations do not differ significantly ($F_{2, 12} 2.523, p > 0.05$).



Mean plots

Fig.1. *Mean plot of the influence of percentage of women in the national assembly on the GDP per Capita in the West African sub-region*

The mean plot in fig.1 shows that at 30% and above representation of women in the national Assembly, there is a sharp increase in the mean GDP per Capita.

Discussion of Findings

The study examined how the percentage of women in the national assembly influenced the national productivity (GDP per Capita). Two objectives were examined on how the level of women representation influence the GDP per Capita and whether 30% affirmative action is the right gender diversity needed to drive meaningful national economic development. West African countries have low representations of women at the national assembly, with 13.3% of the countries having women representations above the affirmative 30%.

In West Africa, the average number of women in the parliament is 17.6%, this falls short of the world average of 26% (World Population Review, 2023) and sub-Saharan average of 26.3% (Kamer, 2023) of seats held by women parliamentarian.

However, increasing the percentage of women representation in the national assembly also improved the mean of the GDP per Capita, although the differences in the mean were not statistically significant. Perhaps, the increase in the women representation have not reached a critical mass that could generate significant difference in the GDP per Capita. The mean GDP per Capita was more than doubled when women representation was increased from 12-29% to 30% and above, and this could be an indication that much higher than 30% affirmative action could be needed to trigger off the desired national economic development. The Rwandan case of regional and global economic success with 63% of women representation could be a case study (Key Statistics on Rwanda, 2021).

Alternatively, the findings imply that, different percentages of women representations influence varying values of GDP per Capita, and there might be need to push for higher percentage affirmative action to get the critical mass for a meaningful national economic development.

Conclusion

The study examined how the right mix of gender diversity at national assembly could influence the national economic development of West African states. Secondary data of 15 West African countries with complete data were analysed using descriptive (frequency table) and inferential statistics (Correlation and ANOVA). Women representation at the national assembly in West Africa was low. However, increasing the percentage of women representations yield higher GDP per Capita. There is also, a low positive correlation between the percentage of women representation at national assembly and the GDP per Capita. Women by their disposition understand how to manage challenges relatively peaceful, to produce results. The low representations in the national assembly in West African sub-region could threaten our

democratic values, especially, with the recent incursions of military rule in some West African states.

Recommendations

1. There is need to have a strong advocacy group to push for higher women representations at the national assembly. This could be in form of drive towards legislation, or quota system for women.
2. The 30% affirmative action could be outdated, much higher women representations is needed for meaningful national economic development
3. There might be need to profile countries or regions before determining the level of percentage affirmative action that is appropriate for them, rather than one rule fits them all method.

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