

Activities of Political Parties and Their Influence on Women's Political Participaton in Bamusso and Ekondo TITI SUB-DIVISIONS of NDIAN Division in The South West Region of Cameroon

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ABSTRACT : Different activities by political parties can either ameliorate or discourage women's interests in political participation and representation. This paper examines the various activities political parties are engaged with in the Bamusso and Ekondo Titi Sub-Divisions in Ndian Divisions of the South West Region of Cameroon. With the ratification of numerous international legal tools and machineries by the government of Cameroon in adherence to the global call on all states to committedly improve women's political participation, the women of Ndian are still tokenized when it comes to the political life of their Division. Men are still in absolute dominance of the politics in Ndian. More men indicate their interest in politics while a few intentional women show their interest in politics. For gender distribution on political participation and representation, the number keeps tilting in favour of the men. This paper examines the different forms of activities political parties carry out which influences women's political participation and representation in Bamusso and Ekondo Titi Sub-Divisions in Ndian Divisions of the South West Region of Cameroon. The descriptive survey and stratified sampling were used for the study and primary data was collected through the administration of questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire was designed as an ordinal scale to weight the responses put up by respondents. For analyses, the X^2 was adopted. Findings showed that there is not sufficient evidence to support the claim that the activities of political parties in Bamusso and Ekondo Titi Sub-Divisions do not influence women's political participation in Bamusso and Ekondo Titi Sub-Divisions. The study made certain recommendations for positive change.

KEY WORDS: *Political Activities; Political Participation and Political Parties*

I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of gender bias has not disappeared from national, regional, international institutions and community's agenda for over four decades. Envisaging the adverse consequences of gender bias attached to women, especially in preventing them from maximising their full potentials whether in the economic, social or political sphere of development (UN Women, 2021), the signing of global and regional charters including policy papers by Cameroon has been recognised as some of the measures taken in order to ensure the promotion of women in making contributions to the political life of their communities and state at large (Doffonsou et al. 2014:12).

On a global scale, the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) report (2017) revealed that between 1995 and 2015, the global average of women in national parliament has increased from 11.3% to 22.1%. An indication that some countries are taking measures to ameliorate women's political presence. Hence, experiencing increase in the presence of women in formal politics (IPU, 2019). However, global parity has not been achieved because Nordic countries with gender equal societies, still fall short of equality. Women occupy only 41.7% of the seats in their legislatures on average. In the United Kingdom gender parity is at 30%, the Republic of Ireland has 22.2% and the United States have just 19.1% of women's representation according to IPU (2017). Elucidating that men are over represented to a greater extent in leadership roles than women (UN Women, 2017).

Globally, women population constitutes 46.56% as opined by the World Bank's report (World Bank, 2017a). Out of the 46.56%, 23.3% of these women constitute members of parliament (IPU, 2017) and 18.4% are members of cabinet as purported by World Bank (2017b). These are indications that women's involvement in the political affairs of their states is very minimal as compared to their male counterparts. In Africa, Rwanda holds an exceptionally impeccable position when it comes to issues regarding women's political participation and representation. Rwanda has displayed her impeccability in handling gender inclusivity and promoting women's political representation by recording 55% of women's representation and political participation.

Countries like Senegal, Mozambique, and South Africa seem to be making progressive efforts in achieving greater participation and representation of women in politics.

But Cameroon has not been able to sustain substantial increase in the representation of women in her political leadership. With the ratification of several global and regional legal frameworks and machineries aimed at improving women's participation and representation in politics, Cameroon still finds her female population very low when it comes to political participation and representation. The UN Women's Report (2014) unveils that out of the 38 countries studied, 18 of those countries shows that women make up less than 10% of parliamentarians. And Cameroon is in no way immune from this problem of gender inequality in political representation as expressed by Abua & Fonchong (2004).

Kah & Tembi (2018:2) opined that Cameroon has still not met up with the parity line even with the ratification of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW according to Raday (2016:512) is the machinery that governs women's legal status at the international level and sets the basis for the realisation of gender equality through ensuring women's equal access to political and public life. The 1979 United Nation Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) based on the opinion of Cole (2016:1) addressed issues pertaining to the rights of women in respect to education, inheritance, credit opportunities on equal bases with men in all ramifications of life. It also reaffirmed the equality of human rights for women and men in societies and in the family.

In the same vein, it made it obligatory for States to ensure they take actions against the social causes of women's inequality and called for the elimination of laws, stereotypical practices and prejudices that impaired the all-round well-being of women as stipulated by UNDP (2005) cited in Kinge & Adepoju (2014:144). Aside making provisions for legislations in favour of women, CEDAW also recommended special measures just to ensure women enjoy equal opportunities in both political and public life. By ratifying CEDAW, many states including Cameroon committed themselves to undertake series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms and to make room for opportunities to promote women's participation in the political life of their countries. To Awumbila (2001) these kinds of programs and frameworks that have been designed by the international community are being enacted by states in order to enhance women's self-esteem and to ease them into actively participating in the development of their local communities.

Cameroon just like most West and Central African states has at least ratified the main international and regional legal instruments for promoting and protecting women's rights in the political sphere (Doffonsou et al. 2014:12). These developments could partly be as a result of pressure from the international level like the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2012 to Cameroon as reported by Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) – Cameroon (2019:5). The Economic, Social and Cultural Rights called on the Cameroon government to adopt a comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation listing all prohibited grounds for discrimination. The response from the Cameroon government came in five years later, through her report in 2017 expressing in details the various legal instruments put up to crush the different forms of discrimination. The Beijing Platform of Action in 1995 called on governments all over the world to take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making.

Women's political participation and representation has experienced challenges from 2013 to 2024. Despite constitutional guarantee of gender equality and efforts to promote women's empowerment, women continue to face numerous challenges in accessing and participating in political processes. Ranking 144th out of 186 countries in the Inter-Parliamentary Union's global ranking is an indicator that Cameroonian women are experiencing discrimination in the milieu of politics. Concerning Ndian Division, women are still to get the 30% parity as displayed on the table below;

Table: 3.1: The number of female councilors found in the nine (9) sub-divisional councils of Ndian Division between 2007 and 2013

Division (Ndian)	Sub-Divisional councils	Number of councilors	Number of female councilors	Percentage of female councilors
1.	Bamusso	25	5	20%
2.	Dikome Balue	25	3	12%
3.	Ekondo Titi	25	4	16%
4.	Idabato	25	5	20%
5.	Isangele	25	8	32%
6.	Kumbo Abedimo	25	6	26%
7.	Kumbo Itindi	25	11	44%
8.	Mundemba	25	6	24%
9.	Toko	25	5	20%
	Total	225	53	23.5%

Source: Adopted from Municipal Development Counseling Group- MUDEC Group (2013), Buea-Cameroon.

The above table by implication unveiled that when it comes to the political life of the people of Ndiang, the statistics presented by MUDEC was overwhelmingly dominated by men who in tend spoke and made decisions for women even on matters that concerned women exclusively (IPU, 2017). Presently, by observation, the number of councilors has increased in some of the municipalities in Ndiang Division. Although more and more countries are marking the centenary with the extension of full political rights to women, the number of countries that have had women leaders have increased, though the list is still relatively short (Pew Research Center, 2015). Consequently, women's participation in the politics of Bamusso and Ekondo Titi sub-divisions is still low.

Statement of the Problem

The political atmosphere or environment of Cameroon is overwhelmingly dominated by men. Although women account for 51% of Cameroon's population, their occupancy in the political and decision making system of the country is just 13%. Only 6.7% of Mayors in Cameroon are females, 13% of the Members of Parliament (MPs) are females and none of the regional governors is female. Even with the introduction and implementation of a 25-30% quota for women on the electoral lists to increase women's political participation and representation by major political parties in Cameroon like the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) and the Social Democratic Front (SDF), women's involvement in politics is still low. The senate for 2023 registered only twenty eight (28) seats occupied by women i.e. 28%. The introduction of the regional house as an executive organ in the granting of special status after the major national dialogue of 2020 did not make any difference in women's participation and representation in the south west region.

Out of the 33 councils and two city councils in the South west region, a total of 877 councilors are positioned to represent their local communities. From the 877 councilors, 139 are females making 15.8%. In the case of Ndiang Division, out of 225 councilors, only 53 were females making 23.5% of female political representation. Of the 25 councilors from Bamusso Sub-Divisional Council, 5 are female active in the political life of the area. And for Ekondo Titi Sub-Divisional Council 6 female councilors are in active politics with one presently at the helm of power.

Despite Cameroon's efforts towards international commitments to promote gender equality through ensuring women's equal access to political and public life, gender gaps keep widening up when it has to do with politics in Bamusso and Ekondo Titi Sub-Divisions. The presence of few women in the politics of these two Sub-Divisions indicates gender imbalance in the political participation of women. The issue here is whether the activities of political parties in the area affect women's political participation in these two Sub-Divisions. Eventually, only through thorough investigation from a comparative study of Bamusso and Ekondo Titi Sub-Divisions that the study can unravel whether the forms of activities carried out by Political Parties have influence on women's political participation.

Objective of the Study

Examine the forms of activities carried out by Political Parties in promoting the political participation of women in Bamusso and Ekondo Titi Sub-Divisions of Ndiang Division in the South West Region of Cameroon;

Research Hypothesis

$H_0: \mu = 45.559$; i.e., the activities of Political Parties significantly promote the political participation of women in Bamusso and Ekondo Titi Sub-Divisions of Ndiang Division in the South West Region of Cameroon;

$H_2: \mu \neq 45.559$; i.e., the activities of Political Parties do not significantly promote the political participation of women in Bamusso and Ekondo Titi Sub-Divisions of Ndiang Division in the South West Region of Cameroon;

Hypothesis Test: The activities of political parties and women's political participation in Bamusso and Ekondo Titi Sub-Divisions.

STEP 1: State the hypothesis and identify the Claim

$H_0: \mu = 45.559$, and $H_1: \mu \neq 45.559$ (claim)

STEP 2: Find the critical value

Since $\alpha = 0.005$ and $df = (r - 1)(c - 1) = (13 - 1)(3 - 1) = 24$. Thus, the critical value is 45.559

STEP 3: Compute the test value

$X^2 = 6,291.954$ (see appendix II for the computation)

Step 4: Make the Decision

Do not reject the H_0 , since the test value falls in the non-critical region $X^2 = \underline{6,291.954}$
> 45.559

STEP 5: Summarise the result

There is not sufficient evidence to support the claim that the activities of political parties in Bamusso and Ekondo Titi Sub-Divisions do not influence women's political participation in Bamusso and Ekondo Titi Sub-Divisions. This is supported by Ekman & Amnå (2012: 290) where they posited that the gateway to political participation is through party politics. In this case, identifying as a member of a political party is of eminence. Party membership creates opportunities for members to be projected and put at the frontline of political leadership. This therefore tells that political parties play a pivotal role in influencing the rate and level of women's political by reinforcing gender bias towards certain party activities; According to reports by International IDEA (2021: 2) it is through political parties, people are able to make choices of those to represent them and intervene on their behalf by advocating for good policies and good government programs. People get involved in public life through political parties. As such, political parties in modern democracy remain key institutions for inclusive participation and accountable representation; As stated by Commonwealth (2018: 10) and Kadribašić, et al. (2020: 34) political parties are the missing links or gatekeepers of women's access to political office and can best increase women's representation within structures of the party; To Catón (2007) when it comes to representative democracy, political parties tend to stand as entities that cannot be overlooked and make provision for people to move into the corridors of power; As stipulated by Caul (1999: 80-83) identified four party-level factors she believed best explain how parties can affect the level of women's political representation. These four levels include party institutionalisation/ organisational structure, ideology, women party activists and gender-related candidate rules; these findings which were further strengthened by Caul one and half decade later, were accepted by Fakir & Lodge (2016: 14) though they related more to western countries, with more institutionalised parties, nevertheless, the findings are still relevant to Commonwealth countries in Africa, where multi-partyism is practiced under very different conditions compared to those in advanced Western democracies; When it comes to proportional representation (PR) system as stated by Commonwealth (2016: 17) the electoral system works for the advantage of women. This is because under the PR system, ballots are cast for a party rather than for a particular candidate, as parties only draw up lists of candidates to represent electoral districts. The number of seats assigned to each party is based on their vote count. With this system, female candidates have limited fear of prejudice from voters selecting male candidates over female ones. As such, the system through political parties will promote women in politics to represent their political parties without any fear of not being chosen over male politicians; the opinions put forward by ODIHR (2014: 19) expressed that another means through which political parties promote women's political participation is through the use of quotas. Mandatory quota which is embedded in the constitution and legalised for political parties to implement as part of their party's policies, make political parties to commit themselves towards the inclusion of women either within party lists and/or party structures; to Karamehić (2021: 14) for political parties to genuinely achieve gender equality, the parties have to show a great commitment to gender equality pledge for Political Parties; to get this achievement, ODIHR (2014: 19) stated that parties have to go to the extent of identifying and compiling good practices that will create a level playing field within the party for both genders thereby increasing women's political participation and representation. Having women actively participating in politics through political parties is the first step to combat gender-based discrimination in political parties as the pool of willing women to run for public offices will expand thereby having women not only representing themselves but also serving as role models to encourage more women to engage actively in politics thereby changing the perception of society and political stakeholders regarding women.

Literature Review

It cannot be argued that several factors account for gender gaps and bias between men and women in politics. Aside considerations of the factors responsible for low women's political participation and representation in Cameroon particularly in the Bamusso and Ekondo Titi Sub-Divisions in Ndian Division of the South West Region, there is necessity for the study on the activities political parties carry out in an attempt to combat gender bias thereby increasing women's political participation. Some of the things political parties have done and are still doing include though not exhaustive the following;

First, the introduction of Quotas and Affirmative Action Policies by the government of Cameroon is seen as one of the measures put in place to reduce gender gaps and increase women's presence and participation in politics. The Study by Drude Dahlerup emphasised on the effectiveness of gender quotas in increasing women's political participation and representation. In countries where quotas are implemented, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of women participating and occupying political positions. Quotas can be mandatory (legally enforced) or voluntary (adopted by parties).

Krook (2009) showed that gender quotas are one of the most effective mechanisms for enhancing women's political participation. Quotas made ensure that women are given a minimum number of seats, which can help overcome gender biases in candidate selection. Dahlerup and Freidenvall (2023) carried out a recent work which highlighted the sustained impact of gender quotas across various political systems. They argued that quotas not only increase women's representation but also help in changing the broader political culture to be more inclusive. Krook and Zetterberg (2022) in their study found that countries implementing gender quotas had seen significant rise in women's political participation, which often led to broader policy changes that favor gender equality in the political milieu.

Another activity is at the level of the party's structure. Party Leadership and Internal Policies is another measure to combat gender bias against women's political participation. Lovenduski study in 2005 highlighted the importance of party leadership in promoting gender equality. Parties with leaders who prioritize gender equality are more likely to implement internal policies that support women's participation, such as mentoring programs and training workshops. More so, Caul (2001) found that political parties with women in key leadership roles are more likely to support policies that promote gender equality within the party and in the broader political arena.

Bjarnegård and Zetterberg (2020) explored how male-dominated party leaderships can unintentionally perpetuate gender biases. However, when party leaders actively work to include women as a policy, the internal culture and practices shift towards greater inclusivity. Celis and Erzeel (2021) emphasised on the role of party leadership in driving gender equality initiatives. Parties with leadership committed to gender parity often implement more effective policies, such as gender-balanced candidate lists and leadership training for women.

Furthermore, recruitment and support for candidates is another activity political parties engaged in. Political parties are bound to carry out recruitment and Support for candidates. In this light, Norris and Lovenduski in their seminal work of 1995 revealed that recruitment practices are crucial in increasing women's political participation. Their findings showed that Parties that actively recruit female candidates and provide support through training and allocation of resources for female folks saw higher rates of female candidacy and election success. In 2005, Bjarnegård and Kenny carried out a study where they posited that party support networks and informal channels are often male-dominated, creating barriers for women. Parties that recognised and addressed these informal barriers improved gender balance in political participation.

Verge and Claveria in a research carried out in 2021, expressed the effectiveness of mentorship programs within parties. Women who receive mentorship and support from experienced politicians are more likely to succeed in their political careers. Thomas and Bittner studied recruitment mechanisms operated by political parties. In 2023, their study underscored the importance of active recruitment and support mechanisms. To them, Parties that prioritize recruiting women and providing them with necessary resources and training saw a higher success rate in elections Thomas and Bittner (2003).

Also, within the Cultural and Institutional Contexts, Hughes (2011) emphasised that the success of gender equality measured within parties is influenced by the broader cultural and institutional context. In societies where strong patriarchal norms are upheld, parties might need to adopt more robust measures to counteract deep-seated biases. Tripp and Kang (2008) found that countries with proportional representation systems had higher rates of women's participation compared to majoritarian systems. Political parties in these systems often have more incentives to include women to appeal for broader electorates.

Studies by Stockemer (2020) showed that electoral systems play a crucial role in either increasing or decreasing women's presence in politics. When political parties implement the proportional representation system, the rate of women's political participation statistics have proven that the rate of women's political participation higher compared to majoritarian systems. This is because with proportional representation, parties have incentives to present diverse candidate lists which will increase women's chances and presence in politics. Kenworthy and Malami (2022) argued that cultural attitudes towards gender roles significantly impact the effectiveness of gender equality measures within political parties. There is a high possibility for cultural attitudes and beliefs to be transcended or infused to the party but in more egalitarian societies, such measures are more readily accepted and implemented.

More so, political parties also engage in the creating of Women's Wings and Networks. These are important in promoting women's political participation. Kittilson's research suggested that women's wings within political parties played a significant role in advocating for gender equality policies which in turn supported female candidates. This wing for women with the party structure served as crucial networks for women to build

political careers Kittilson (2006). Added to Kittilson's work was the study of Childs and Krook (2021). Their study highlighted the effectiveness of cross-party women's networks in promoting gender equality. Such networks pushed for reforms and supported female candidates across party lines. Piscopo and Franceschet (2022) research demonstrated that women's wings within political parties are instrumental in advocating supporting gender-specific policies alongside female candidates. These wings provide a platform for women to influence party agendas.

In addition, party engagement in intersectionality and representation according to Hughes and Paxton (2021) in their study will prompt more women to participate in politics. They highlighted the importance of considering intersectionality in political representation. Women from minority backgrounds often face compounded biases, and political parties need to adopt intersectional approaches to address these issues effectively. Based on Mügge and Van der Pas' work in 2023, suggested that intersectional strategies within parties can lead to more inclusive and representative political systems, benefiting not only women but also other marginalized groups.

Political parties play a pivotal role in combating gender bias and increasing women's political participation. The implementation of gender quotas, strong leadership commitment to gender equality, proactive candidate recruitment, and support, as well as the establishment of women's wings and networks, has proven effective. Recent studies emphasised the need for intersectional approaches and the importance of cultural and institutional contexts in shaping the success of these measures. Continuous efforts and innovations in party policies and practices are essential for achieving gender parity in political participation globally.

Regarding the effectiveness of the measures put in place by Cameroonian legislators in the promotion of gender parity in the political participation of women, it should be noted that to enhance the full and effective political participation of women required the legislative arm of the government to ensure the promotion of human rights and expressing an inclusive and strategic policy for women to be part and parcel of growth and sustainable development (OECD, 2018a). It is an undeniable truth that there are developmental benefits attached to the inclusion of women in politics as opined by Fokum & Fonjong (2018:755). Violet Yigha Fokum & Lotsmart N Fonjong in their study of "Increasing women's representation in the Cameroon parliament: do numbers really matter?" they unveiled the situation of women's representation as the study examines the relationship between increasing the number of female legislators in Cameroon and its impact on gender-related policy from a critical analysis of the participation of individual parliamentarians in influencing parliamentary proceedings and decisions within existing parliamentary structures.

The study uses the concept of descriptive and substantive representation within the framework of the critical mass theory to investigate the extent to which an increase in the presence of women in the Cameroonian parliament will affect the quality of women's issues presented to parliament. Interviews were done and the findings revealed that an increase in the number of women does not significantly enhance substantive representation or women's issues. It noted that while the profiles of female parliamentarians influence their participation in decision making structures within parliament, party discipline and the parliamentary system has more influences on the issues and policies debated and voted in parliament than numbers. In the Considering the developmental impact women's inclusion in politics have on the state, the government of Cameroon through the legislative arm has instituted certain strategies in order to combat women's low political participation. By so doing, alleviate women's participation in the political life of Cameroon thereby enhance gender parity in politics.

The Cameroon constitution upholds the principle of gender equality. But there are several obstacles (legal, social, religious and cultural) to attaining gender equality especially in the domain of politics and decision making. According to the explanations made by Ndichia (2010:9), the coexistence of the dual system of law (French and English) with customary law, has made it difficult for equality to be valued since both systems appear to be highly patriarchal. Based on Section 1(2) of the revised Cameroon Constitution of 18 January 1996, Cameroon was defined as a democratic decentralized unitary State (Fokum & Fonjong, 2018).

Being a decentralized democratic state, Cameroon has a semi-presidential form of government. This form of government has been designed in a way that the exercising of state power is shared between the President of the Republic and the Parliament as proclaimed in Section 4. The legislative is bicameral; that is to say, the institution responsible for the deliberation of state matters and making of laws is the Parliament. The Parliament is made up of the National Assembly and the Senate also referred to as the Lower and Upper House respectively. But before the effective functioning of the upper house of Parliament (Senate), the government of Cameroon operated a unicameral parliament from 1966 right up to 1990, when the Political Parties Act -Law No. 90/056 of 19 December 1990 was promulgated (UN, 1999).

Ngwane (2007:2) explained that after the promulgation of the Political Parties Act introducing multi-party politics in Cameroon, other political parties emerged. Like the Social Democratic Front (SDF) which was launched on the 19th of December, 1990 (Konings, 2004:2). By March 1st 1992, many parties such as the Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement (CPDM), National Union for Democracy and Progress (UNDP), Movement of the Defense of the Republic (MDR) and Union of Cameroon Populations (UPC) took part in the Parliamentary elections as reported by Ngwane (2007). The elections ended up with these political parties occupying 88, 68, 18 and 06 seats respectively in the Parliament during the 1992 Parliamentary elections. However, parties like the Social Democratic Front (SDF) and Cameroon Democratic Union (UDC), boycotted the polls as a sign of expressing their dissatisfaction about the manner in which elections were conducted.

The promulgation of Law No. 90/056 of 19 December 1990 for the creation of multi-party politics can be considered as a strategy by the Cameroon government to broaden the spectrum of participants in the political life of the state. Par-adventure includes women as political participants. Aside this measure of creating opportunities for other political parties to be involved in the political decisions of the state, other measures have been put in place by the legislative to ensure that women's participation in politics is increased. It is interesting to note that political participation also covers political representation and occupation of positions that can influence the policies of the state.

As earlier mentioned, the legislative arm in Cameroon which is the Parliament is bicameral. That is to buttress that the Parliament is made up of the National Assembly and the Senate which is also referred to as the Lower and Upper House respectively. Both houses are made up of 180 and 100 members respectively with a mandate of five (05) years renewable. Cameroon has functioned as a unicameral system until 2013 when the Upper house of the Parliament became functional.

The legislature between 2007- 2012 which was unicameral, had twenty four women in the Parliament of which twenty one came from the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) which is the ruling party. Two came from Democratic Union of Cameroon (UDC) and one from the Social Democratic Front (SDF). The political parties represented in the Parliament at that period were: Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) with one hundred and fifty three (153) seats, Social Democratic Front (SDF) with sixteen (16) seats, Democratic Union of Cameroon (UDC) with four (04) seats, National Union for Democracy and Progress (UNDP) with six (06) seats and the Progressive Movement (MP) secured one (01) seat.

Prior to the colonial period, women were integrated into decision-making and leadership processes in Cameroon (Nwadege & Nwadege, 2014). In Nigeria, as well as in several other African countries like Cameroon, records hold that very few women have held political offices, either elected or appointed (Badmus, 2006:55; Abdela, 2000:17). Every country in Africa and even in the Americas has had at least one woman in decision making positions as Minister (Clark, 1991; Le Sexe Droit au Cameroun, 2014:15). But then, women's representation in decision making is still not high as compared to the males.

Women are still underrepresented at decision-making levels such as the parliament, judiciary, in senior leadership positions in the civil service, and at the ministerial level as systematic barriers persist that impede women's equal participation in political life. It is therefore imperative to continue increasing women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership (Africa Regional Review, 2019:20). With all these, Cameroon has at least ratified the main international, regional and national legal instruments for promoting and protecting women's rights (Doffonsou et al. 2014:12).

Theoretical Review

Two peculiar theories were implemented in this study. They included the behaviouralism theory and the role congruency theory.

One important theory used in this study is the Behaviouralism theory. This theory explained and predicted the political behaviour of people. It examined the strength of behaviour, actions and attitude of individuals when it comes to making political decisions. This theory holds that institutions like the Legislative, Executive and Judiciary are less powerful than the individuals as such; institutions cannot function without individuals implementing the ideologies these institutions stand for. That is to say that meaning and importance on effectiveness of these institutions are recognised due to the role humans play to the functionality of these institutions. When it comes to politics, there exist a strong relationship between the political actions/ activities or behaviours of citizens and the political processes whether at the level of participation or representation in a democracy. Rose (2007) opines that political participation entails activities like voting, lobbying and candidature. These are political behaviours and reactions political actors emit towards certain political

happenings. Studying the relationship between gender bias and women's political participation will be perfectly understood through the lens of the behavioural approach or theory.

The third important theory used in the study was The Role Congruency Theory. It propagated that much of the difficulty that women face in terms of claiming their status as authoritative experts lies within the stereotyped traits and societal roles for both men and women. The Role Congruency Theory dictated that stereotypical traits assigned to women and men are born out of their separate historical societal roles (Eagly and Karau 2002). The roles distributed between the different genders over time plays a great role in the formation of strong constructions on what women are to do and where society seems appropriate for both genders to find themselves. Assigned roles to men and women tend to define their social identity and create a status for them. Men are given the identity to be authoritative and women the other way. This reflects on the exercise of their social, economic and political rights which becomes normalised and creates stability in the society. As such, whenever an attempt is made to challenge this norm, instability might creep in.

Data Set and Methodology

The descriptive survey with hypothesis tested and the probability sampling technique precisely the cluster sampling was adopted for the study. The study population involves the population of Bamusso and Ekondo Titi Sub-Divisions which is approximately 19,230 and 56,503 respectively as opined by city population (2024). Conclusively, the study population is approximately 75,733 from villages randomly selected and clustered. From each of the selected villages the Sub-Divisional headquarters were visited as well for the collection of data relevant for the study. Data was obtained from the field through the administration of questionnaires and interviews. The hypothesis was tested using the chi-square after the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used to test the reliability of the questionnaire which was excellent.

Findings and Discussion

There exist various activities political parties carry out geared towards promoting the political participation of women in Bamusso and Ekondo Titi Sub-Divisions of Ndian Division. The second hypothesis tested in this study provided very strong evidence ($6,291.954 > 45.559$) to affirm the claim that the activities of political parties would significantly influence women's political participation in Bamusso and Ekondo Titi Sub-Divisions.

Ekman & Amnå (2012: 290) supported this claim by positing that political parties are the gateway to political participation. This is possibly done by identifying with a political party as a member. Through political parties, opportunities to be projected and put at the frontline of political leadership are granted to individuals with party membership. This therefore tells that political parties play a pivotal role in influencing women's political participation.

Certain activities initiated by political parties like the selection of party representatives to stand for elections and advocate for good policies and good government programs, get women involved in public life as reported by International IDEA (2021: 2). Commonwealth (2018: 10) and Kadribašić, et al. (2020: 34) elucidated that through political parties, women's access to political office and increased women's representation within structures of the party will be achieved. To Catón (2007) when it comes to representative democracy, political parties stand as entities that cannot be overlooked in their role to move individual through the corridors of power.

When it comes to proportional representation (PR) system as stated by Commonwealth (2016: 17) the electoral system works for the advantage of women. This is because under the PR system, ballots are cast for a party rather than for a particular candidate, as parties only draw up lists of candidates to represent electoral districts. The number of seats or positions assigned to each party is based on their vote count. With this system, female candidates have limited fear of prejudice from voters selecting male candidates over female ones. As such, the system through political parties will promote women in politics to represent their political parties without any fear of not being chosen over male politicians.

The use of quotas as opined by ODIHR (2014: 19) another means through which political parties promote women's political participation. Mandatory quota embedded in the constitution and legalised for political parties to implement as part of their party's policies, has made political parties to commit themselves towards the inclusion of women either within party lists and/or party structures. Karamehić (2021: 14) stated that for political parties to genuinely achieve gender equality, great commitments need to be shown by the party to ensure they are reminded of their gender equality pledge.

Added to that, ODIHR (2014: 19) stated that parties have to go to the extent of identifying and compiling good practices that will create a level playing field within the party for both genders thereby increasing women's political participation and representation. Having women actively participating in politics through political parties is the first step to combat gender-based discrimination in political parties. This will expand the pool of women running for public offices where the situation will not just have women representing themselves but also serving as role models to encourage more women to participate in politics.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

Regarding the activities of political parties and women's political participation in Bamusso and Ekondo Titi Sub-Divisions, it was revealed that the call for party rally and meetings; preparing party members to be accustomed to political activities within the party; the political parties working together with ELECAM to ensure electoral register are updated all the time; presenting candidates to stand in for elections; carrying out door to door campaigns concerning political parties and candidates; organizing fund raising functions to either solicit funds for a candidate or for a party and carry out campaigns for partisans and distribute campaign literature during elections.

The hypothesis test provided very strong evidence to support the claim and supported by the fact that political parties are gateways to women's political participation; through political parties, voters can make choices of party members to represent them be it men or women; fraud and political violence serve as injuries to women's confidence and ability to participate in politics; political parties project candidates for the public for voters to confirm; the projection of more women as candidates will cause women's political participation to increase; the introduction and implementation of gender-related rules in the choice of candidates by political parties can influence women's political participation; politics is a whole investment which requires financial resources and networks; women lack the financial capacity and capability to embark on political activities; and activities that express traditional gender roles of care and nurturing are attractively dominated by women

Previous studies have shown that political parties play an incredible role in influencing women's political participation by reinforcing gender bias towards certain party activities. When it comes to representative democracy, political parties make provision for people to move into the corridors of power. They select and project those to represent them. For women's access to political office and women's representation to increase within structures of the party, then party institutionalisation/ organisational structure, party ideology, women party activists and gender-related candidate rules have to be reconsidered.

Party's choice of proportional representation (PR) of the electoral system, works for the advantage of women. This is because under the PR system, ballots are cast for a party rather than for a particular candidate. Later on, parties will draw up the various lists of candidates to represent electoral districts. The number of seats assigned to each party is based on their vote count. With this system, female candidates have limited fear of prejudice from voters selecting male candidates over female ones. As such, the system will promote women in politics to represent their political parties without any fear of not being chosen over male politicians.

Aside activities like selection and projection of women candidates, mandatory quota for political parties to implement as part of their party's policies, has made parties to commit themselves towards the inclusion of women either within the party lists or the party structures. Added to that, can be the taking of a pledge to the political parties' demonstrating great commitment to gender equality. With a pledge to gender equality, identifying and compiling good practices that will present a level playing field within the party for both genders to politically engage in the parties thereby increasing women's political participation and representation.

Although political parties play an incredible role in creating accessibility for people into political participation and representation, they can as well act in ways that will yield contrary effects. Party's lack of projects that can generate income to run party activities has made financial demands from members humongous. This can discourage women who struggle with their financial resources. Also, the different assessments made by party gatekeepers and voters on the abilities, qualifications and experiences of members, tend to be different for men and women. These differences are recognised during candidate identification, nomination and selection processes, and elections. These assessments underscores the inherent biases of the political parties which tend to favour male over female party members, as well as political parties' conviction that voters prefer men as candidates than women candidates.

Recommendations

Concerning the activities of political parties in promoting the political participation of women in Bamusso and Ekondo Titi Sub-Divisions of Ndian Division, the following recommendations have been made;

- Not just political parties should be involved in the projection of candidates for elections. The system should be flexible enough to create opportunities for individuals to run as independent candidates. As a result, reduces the degree of strength with which party activities attribute responsibilities handed to women that are linked to women's domestic roles. Also, it will limit the down grading of women in the shade of benevolent sexism which hideously antagonizes women by praising them yet conclude that they are incompetent there by keeping women as deputies to men occupying political offices.
- The restructuring of the system of representation by the political system from the listing system to a Proportional representation (PR) system, will lead to people voting for a party and not the gender of attributes of the candidate projected by the party. As such, trait-based bias where the personality of women as warm, sensitive, calm sympathetic, patient but dumb makes them incompetent to handle tough policies and decisions required of them to be much relevant in politics.
- Identifying and copying good practices from other countries will ameliorate the situation of women in Bamusso and Ekondo Titi Sub-Divisions of Ndiian Division. Good practices like the zipping system implemented in Rwanda will increase women's political participation and representation, combat gender-based discrimination in political parties as more women will not only represent themselves but also serving as role models to encourage more women to engage actively in politics.
- The putting of band on the use denigrating words on women by the men should be encouraged. This will counter the use misogynistic languages and reducing the rate of prevalence of language bias.

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