

Leadership and Women Representation Riddle in Ghana

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Abstract This paper interrogates the efficacy of women in authority and how it impacts the lives of underprivileged women in society. The hypothesis suggests that women in authority better represent the interest of vulnerable women and children if given opportunity at the decision-making levels in a country's body politic. Feminist groups who champion this supposition argue, that the story of women has long been told by men and hence, there is the need for women to tell their own story. But how have women in leadership demonstrated their capacity to issues that reflect the interest of women? Using primary and secondary data, the authors analyzed the extent to which the interest of women has been represented by the women who have increasingly held very influential political and administrative positions in Ghana. The paper conceptualized the interest of women minimally to include alleged sexual demands as a *quid pro quo* for employment or positions, accusation of witchcraft, maternity leave with pay and inheritance. The findings suggest that, women in leadership have demonstrated a great zeal for women's emancipation. However, there is more room for improvement to convince the ordinary Ghanaian woman that women in authority adequately represent the interest of all women especially the poor and vulnerable in society. The authors recommend a united front among women in academia, CSOs and the media to mount 'pressure' on women occupying influential positions to prioritize resolving politico-socio-economic challenges that confront vulnerable women in the Ghanaian society.

Keywords: *authority, feminism, representation, women in leadership, vulnerable*

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1. Introduction

The academic literature is replete with issues of women representation at all levels of decision-making. The consensus appears that women are competent and, like their male counterparts, are efficient and effective leaders when given the opportunity and the necessary support. Besides, there is the long-standing debate to the effect that, women are the best in representing the interest of fellow women, children and the vulnerable in society [1,2]. It is further argued that,

greater numbers of women are associated with greater levels of feminist legislation as well as legislation traditionally of interest to women ([3], p. 960).

Scholars who support the above assertion argue that women are better positioned to discuss, adapt, push or implement policies that affect them (women) than men. Hence, women should be given the opportunity or fair playing field to get into decision-making positions in the body politic [3-8]. Thomas [3], notes that in countries where women's representation is higher in the legislature, they introduce and pass many priority bills that concern women, families and children than pertains in countries where men dominate the legislature than women. It implies that, women can make a difference when it comes to representing the interest of confrere.

The concept of representation is broad and scholars have their disagreements with how it is used. This notwithstanding, this paper uses the term within the confines of Pitkin [9] typology of representation which addresses the varied views of scholars. It focuses on four related forms of representation. First, a formalistic representation which refers to the institutional arrangement that ensures representation of women. Second, descriptive representation which deals with the extent to which the representatives reflect the represented. Third, substantive representation which is about the extent to which the actions of representatives align with the interest of the represented. Fourth, symbolic representation, which is measured by the response that the represented invoke to demonstrate their satisfaction or otherwise [9]. All these are relevant in analyzing the rationale behind the quest for more women in leadership as well as assessing the extent to which women leaders are responsive to the interest of underprivileged women.

Despite genuine concerns about the disproportionate ratio between women and men in leadership, women representation in the legislature, for instance, has recorded some marginal improvement over the years. The 2019 Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Report showed that Nordic countries are matchless or peerless in terms of women representation globally (42.3 percent). This is followed by the Americas with 30.3 percent. The rest of Europe followed with 26.5 percent. Sub-Sahara Africa,

Ghana inclusive is followed with 23.8 percent. Asia and the Arab states are next with 19.7 percent and 18.7 percent respectively, which are all below the 30% global average. The worse is the Pacific Nations with only 15.5 percent [10].

In the specific context of Ghana, it is argued that the political instability since independence has been inundated with single-party rule and military interventions, together with the single-member district electoral system and the lack of gender quota. These have contributed to the continued low women representation, especially in parliament [4,11]. This notwithstanding, Ghana has recorded an incremental jump in the number of women in both the executive and legislative arms of government in the Fourth Republic. It is therefore not surprising that Ghana placed 145th position with just 13.1 percent women representation in the 2019 IPU Report. Besides, there has been a “larger presence” or ‘adequate representation’ of women in the “executive and the judiciary”, with the two immediate past Chief Justices of the Supreme Court of Ghana being women and many women on the Supreme Court bench ([11], p. 2). Also, important positions such as the chairpersons of the immediate past and present Electoral Commission, the National Commission on Civic Education, Attorney-General and Minister of Justice, the Deputy Special Prosecutor and immediate past Director of the Criminal Investigation Department of the Ghana Police Service, are/were women.

Interestingly, scholarship on women representation abound. Many of such studies have variously explored the extent to which women are represented in the legislature, judiciary and executive arms of government. Some have argued that women can best represent the interest of women [1,5], while others have opined that the number of women in politics should reflect their numerical strength in Ghana [12,13]. Others have looked at why fewer women get to authoritative decision-making positions [6,14,15,16], among others. However, there is less scholarship on the extent to which women in authority influenced or furthered the interest of women.

In this enigma, this paper seeks to explore the extent to which elected women clothed with the powers to represent the interest of the people especially women, have lived up to expectation. To do this, we use two of Pitkin’s [9] typology of representation; substantive and symbolic. The former refers to the extent to which the actions of women in authority align with the interest of women (the represented), while the latter is assessed based on the response that the represented invoke to demonstrate their satisfaction or otherwise [9]. In this perspective, the study posed the following research questions:

1. To what extent do the actions of women in positions of power reflect the interest of women?
2. How do women assess the actions and decisions of women in a decision-making position concerning things that affect women?
3. To what extent do women in leadership positions represent the interest of the ordinary woman?

The paper is structured as follows: The introductory section is followed by a discussion on the methods used in conducting the study. We then briefly discussed the theoretical issues on representation relative to women.

This is followed by an analysis of qualitative data from 34 study participants; 24 elite interviews and 10 Focus Group Discussions. This was to assess the extent to which women in leadership represent (substantive and symbolic) the interest of women in Ghana. The final section draws some useful conclusions.

2. Method and Materials

This study employed the qualitative method to collect data. The target population was all women purposively sampled from eight constituencies (viz, Affia-Kwesimintsim and Essikado/Ketan in the Western region, Tamale Central and Kpandai in the Northern region, Tema East and Bortiano-Ngleshie-Amanfrom in the Greater Accra region and Kintampo North and Techiman South in the Bono East region). These selected constituencies reflect the urban-rural dichotomy - Northern, Middle and Coastal belts of Ghana.

Face-to-face interviews and Focus Group Discussions were used to gather data from the field. The main instrument was an interview guide. A qualitative approach was adopted because it is:

a systematic subjective approach used to describe life experiences and situations to give them meaning ([17], p. 19).

The researchers resorted to the use of the qualitative approach to explore the perspectives, experiences and feelings of women and their understanding of how women in decision-making positions represent their interests. Consequently, we conducted in-depth interviews with 24 elite women with requisite expertise in the subject under study. Additionally, we engaged 10 women in two Focus Group Discussions with 5 in each group. The total number of participants in the study was 34. This number was deemed sufficient to engage women on their views regarding how their interests are represented by women in authority [18,19]. In other words, the number 34 was used because it provided enough information that reached saturation [20].

In the Affia-Kwesimintsim and Tamale Central, the Focus Group Discussions were used to gather data while elites’ interviews were the mode of data gathering in the remaining four constituencies. The respondents for both the Focus Group Discussions and for the face-to-face interviews were purposively drawn from a sample frame comprising gender activists, women in the media, civil society organizations, political scientists, civil and public servants and graduate students. The questions for both the survey and elite interviews covered a wide range of issues including whether they believed women in decision-making positions represent the interest of women and if so, to what extent? We used pseudo names of our study participants in the analysis of findings to ensure the anonymity of our interviewees.

2.1. Context, Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The study was executed within the context of relativist ontology and subjective epistemology. Consequently, multiple realities informed the context, content, inclusion and exclusion criterion of the study. Hence, we relied on

four major cases or developments. The cases that made the headlines, and also triggered or ignited media panel discussion across the country. The assessment by the participants was based on whether women in positions of authority act in ways that reflect the interest of the 'female constituency'.

The first case was the killing of a 90-year-old woman on the mere accusation of witchcraft. The second, the missing Takoradi girls who were subsequently confirmed dead; third, demands of sexual favours from males for job seekers, promotions or grades in school; and fourth, the unending debate on maternity leave with pay. The last two were chosen to assess how women in authority respond to issues involving up and coming women in the middle or working class (largely educated women) and the first two cases were chosen to explore the response of women in authority to issues involving, arguably, the poor (uneducated low class). While the killing of the 90-year-old woman in the full glare of the public took place in the Northern part of the country, the missing/murdered Takoradi girls occurred in the Coastal part of Ghana. The challenge of sexual demands from young women before jobs are offered, promotions or grades in school and the issue of maternity leave for nursing mothers are rife in all parts of the country with the national capital topping the list of reported cases in the media.

The secondary data was analyzed by first accessing relevant published and unpublished official documents from credible sources (open access). Their relevance in proving substantive evidence to the research questions in this study was determined. The authors then gleaned from those materials "new social scientific understanding" ([21], p. 2) by embarked on "an intellectual process" of generating insights from the data and applied it to our research questions ([22], p. 604). The primary data was thematically analyzed based on a transcription of audio recordings and reorganization of field notes. The leveraged secondary data thus complemented the primary data in expanding and validating alternative perspectives on gender and leadership; efficacy of women in authority and how it impacts the lives of underprivileged women in society.

3. Theoretical Underpinning: Why do We Need Women in Leadership?

Women representation in recognizable positions, including 'society' dates back to ancient Athens. Perikles's law on citizenship in Ancient Athens in 451 B.C., which limited citizenship only to people born to both Athenian mother and father, seemed to have prioritized women as fully represented in Athenian society [23]. This law, as explained in the Aristotelian Constitution of the Athenians thought, was based on the numbers of 'free' people deemed citizens in Athens [24] regardless of sex consideration. This thought, made a significant impact on "how the Athenians symbolized their own identity, by encouraging public acknowledgment of Athenian wives and mothers" ([23], p. 11). As a corollary, women were represented on issues between the Athenian gods and humanity; although women had no voice on issues about death rituals [25].

However, a changed reversal around the mid-fifth century included women in death and funeral rites. But property ownership was not universally acceptable to women in most ancient polis. In fact, women became "very frequently represented, both on Athenian funerary monuments and on the white-ground *lekythoi* (oil flasks) which were deposited in graves" ([23], p. 12). This was perhaps an indication that, women had a pivotal role in aspects of the death rites that were deemed fit to be handled by women especially, covering and/or embalming parts of the dead female body. In effect,

women were acceptable objects of representation on Athenian classical grave monuments associated with burial in a way that they were not acceptable in Athenian archaic grave monuments ([23], p. 18).

This notwithstanding, the domineering role of men in most ancient societies was not in doubt. This has fed into the current patriarchal society which has had men dominating in all spheres, including telling the story of women. They do this, sometimes, as though they represent the lived experience of women [26].

The promotion of women in leadership is a significant concern in development discourse. It is conceptualized in the social science discourse that, active inclusion of women in decision-making at all levels in society is highly imperative for achieving socio-economic development, which will be incomplete without the interest of women fully represented [27,28]. What is not in dispute is the fact that,

relative numbers of socially and culturally different people in a group, are seen as critical in shaping interaction dynamics which makes society better with varied interests represented ([29], p. 965).

Despite the importance of parity in representation, the dominant literature theorized the underrepresentation of women in decision-making around the world. While the interest of women may be better served irrespective of parity in representation in the US and other advanced democracies, the story is different in developing economies. In Africa for instance, besides Uganda, Rwanda and Liberia (where women are visibly represented in national legislatures), many countries on the continent have unrepentantly, men representing women. A perfunctory study of national populations in Africa shows in most cases, the ratio of women to men in national populations tilts favorably towards men [6,8].

According to the World Economic Forum [30] Report, low political empowerment of women has contributed to the yawning gender gap with dire implications for the underrepresentation of women in topnotch positions to better represent the interest of women. Per the Political Empowerment sub-index, the report noted that 108 countries out of the 149 covered in the 2019 and 2018 editions, there has been an overall improvement in the scores. This was driven largely by a significant increase in the number of women in parliaments compared to the previous assessment [30]. The report noted further that, in countries including Latvia, Spain and Thailand, the number of women representatives in parliament had increased substantially. This improvement notwithstanding, only 25% of the 35,127 global parliamentary seats are currently occupied by women and only 21% of the 3,343 ministers are women [30]. Besides, the report stated that,

there are still countries that women are not represented at all. This suggests that while there is a long way to go, efforts at improving political empowerment for women will result in a corresponding increase in the numbers of women in critical positions where the views and interests of women will be represented.

It is argued that for the interest of women to be represented, more women are needed in decision-making positions. Generally, political participation is a concept which does not only encompass the right to exercise one's franchise, but a duty to share power and take part in decision-making at various aspects of national governance [31]. However, this is undermined by electoral systems that are not "gender neutral"; that plurality majority electoral systems are particularly woman-unfriendly; we might also add, 'quota-unfriendly'; and that without an electoral gender quota, women face formidable obstacles as they seek to navigate the 'secret garden of politics' ([32], pp. 41-48). This partly explains the inability of more women to contest elections in "plurality majority electoral systems" ([11], p. 2516). In the United States, gender parity progress has stalled. This has caused the US two positions in the [30] rankings and placed the US in the 53rd position. The interpretation is that women have "less political ambition than men" ([11], p. 2516). In Africa, the stalled pattern of women's representation is blamed on a multiplicity of factors including cultural and religious reasons that have restricted women's primary role in the kitchen and childbearing [1,11,14]. This needs political correctness to empower women to be part of decision-making at the national level. Political participation in itself is about the active inclusion and engagement of people, including both women and men in political actions that affect them [5]. The laws of Ghana do not discriminate on grounds of gender or sex. Hence, everyone superficially has equal political, economic and social rights. However, a closer look at life in Ghana reveals the harsh reality of an endemic state of gender inequality in all facets of life. For instance, the news media has never run out of headlines on issues such as female genital mutilation (FGM), the banishment of suspected witches, sex for job/positions or grade, maternity leave without pay and inhumane widowhood rites (all of which are against women). Women in Ghana continue to suffer from sustained harmful customary practices and gender inequality. These unacceptable practices take place, mostly, in rural areas where poverty is endemic [33].

According to Leavitt [34], the most important clue to a woman's interest is her freedom to participate in economic life, control over the property and the product she produces. This is difficult in the midst of discriminatory practices against women. Hence, there is the need for women who are directly affected to be part of the decision-making group to represent the interest of other women. In the corporate world, for instance, women's leadership has had a positive shore up on productivity. This aligns with a:

model of statistical discrimination where female executives are better equipped at interpreting signals of productivity from female workers ([35], p. 2390).

It is, therefore, possible to have a similar effect with women leaders representing the interest of the ordinary woman or better still, being the voice of the voiceless

women who are root and branch, forms the majority of the population in Ghana. This paper contributes to the burgeoning literature by interrogating the extent to which, privileged few women in leadership influence the interest of women.

4. Findings: How do Women in Leadership Represent the Interests of the Ghanaian Woman?

A renowned feminist, Jane Mansbridge, describes it as a traditional *promissory form of representation*, and the same implied in the context of this study, a dyadic relationship exists between the representative and the represented [36]. The voters and in this context, the women, demand accountability from fellow women in leadership who implicitly or explicitly, took up a topnotch appointment in the name of gender representation, or through gender-related promises resulting in her elections. Besides turning out in their numbers to vote, the Ghanaian electorate - the majority of whom are women, are "demonstrating their capacity to make rational choices" and to demand that their elected or appointed representatives govern "in accordance with their policy preferences" ([37], p. 115).

Women representation in Ghana has seen some consistent improvement for the past decade. Women have occupied critical positions including being the Chief Justice and Justices of the superior courts, Inspector General of Ghana Police Service, Director Generals of the Ghana Prisons Service, Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, Chancellor and Vice-Chancellors of public universities, Commissioners of Electoral Commission, National Commission for Civic Education, Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Chief of Staff, Speaker of Parliament and their like. This notwithstanding, women's representation in leadership is still under 35 percent. However, the 'few' women in decision-making positions can be assessed based on how they have so far represented the interest of women in Ghana. This section is, therefore, dedicated to analyses of primary data on whether women in leadership represent the interest of women in Ghana based on Pitkin's [9] typology of representation - substantive and symbolic.

At the time the much publicized 'missing Takoradi girls' issue and the lynching of a 90-year old woman on accusations of witchcraft were on the hot burner, the Chief Justice, the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Director of the Criminal Investigations Department of the Ghana Police Service, the Chairperson of the National Commission for Civic Education, and the Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection were all women. It was within this context that respondents expressed mixed views on whether women in leadership positions in Ghana represent the interest of women in Ghanaian society. The respondents were women with at least a university degree. The respondents were asked to share their views on how women in decision-making positions represent the interest of women. This was measured on the backdrop of the lynching of a woman on suspicion of witchcraft, sex in exchange for jobs, promotion, or grades in tertiary schools among others.

A Techiman based gender advocate, Aku, believes women become estranged from the needs of other women, once they become appointees or get elected to topmost positions. She admits some progress has been made by some women leaders such as former ministers of Women, Gender and Social Protection, Nana Oye Lithur under the Mahama regime and Madam Otiko Djaba under the Akufo Addo regime. Aku notes that these leaders were very much interested in gender-related issues that affect women including all forms of abuse, witchcraft accusations, and discrimination at workplaces among others. She thinks the successor to Otiko Djaba has not sustained the momentum: *“otherwise, why would Cynthia Morrison show no interest in pushing the Affirmative Action Bill she inherited?”*

Respondents also suggested that elected women legislators failed over the years to lobby enough Bills that serve the interest of women. A journalist in Takoradi, Afia, laments that it is sometimes disturbing to *“hear women in Parliament say that Affirmative Action is not the way to create access for women”*. She thinks that greed on the part of some women leaders could be the reason for the inaction, *“after all, they managed to achieve it on their own, so everyone must struggle. A Senior High School Teacher at Kpandai in the Northern Region, Muna, shared similar views. In her words, “it will interest you to know that women in Parliament are doing nothing to push the Affirmative Action Bill”*. Muna is convinced that some women leaders who are positioned to take actions to indurate benefits to the 'oppressed' women out there are not doing so because they are comfortable being regarded as representing women by merely exhibiting the features of women. For Muna, this does not conform to the assertions that they are women among men so they do things that are in the interest of women. Another Senior High School Teacher in Accra, Naa, held the view that some women leaders are interested in being referred to as people who seek the welfare of the ordinary woman. However, their actions do not suggest that. Naa noted that: *“truthfully, apart from the acclaimed feminists, I don't see any of these women claiming to represent the interest of women or do anything that affects the ordinary woman. I am yet to see them push for bills against discriminatory practices such as sex for jobs or extended maternity leave with pay for women”*.

A state broadcaster and producer of gender issues, Agatha, was emphatic about the inadequacy of women's interest represented or purported to be represented by women in leadership. She noted that some of those women leaders who head organizations have no interest in issues that affect women like maternity leave for working mothers. She cited one of her former bosses under whose leadership a nursing mother would dare not add one day to her maternity leave. She recounts the experience of her colleagues under female leaders: *“when your time is up, you resume without any excuses. Nursing mothers work the same schedule as any other worker without any flexibility. Even though some have been mothers before or experienced same conditions, they are only interested in the job”*.

Other respondents attributed the attitude of women leaders to the notion that women are weak and cannot enforce compliance to enhance productivity at work. Naomi, a gender activist based in the Western region, held that it would be unfair to interpret the strictness of women

leaders to their unwillingness to represent the interest of women. In her view, Ghanaian women leaders do represent the interest of the ordinary woman. She claims that for some unnamed reasons, women are belittled in society. But once a woman can go against the odds to attain great heights, it is appropriate for them to push the agenda of stopping the 'harsh' conditions women find themselves. She concluded: *once she's at the top I believe it is her mandate to help the women in Ghana in whatever way she can but that cannot be done when the ordinary woman is full of excuses so they ought to be strict”*.

The study found that women are generally happy having their colleague women in leadership despite other concerns as discussed above. Azuma, a banker in the Bono East region, opined that women in leadership are a very welcome development. But how they represent the ordinary woman depends on how they conduct themselves or discharge their duties. A woman in political leadership, she observed, must champion the course of underprivileged women by advocating and supporting policies that promote the well-being of such women. Also, women in administrative leadership should carry out their duties diligently to proof the point that women are capable when given the opportunity. Azuma, also held that the ordinary woman must have a say in the appointment of women into positions where decisions that affect women are made. This, she noted could lead to the choice of women who know the actual problems of poor women who have lived with several challenges. For Ela, a civil servant in Takoradi, some women in decision-making positions have closed their doors against other women. Others have misconducted themselves - earning all the negatives tags such as the iron lady and some corruptible activities - while others are silent when they are supposed to make their voices heard on matters concerning women”.

There were also indications from the participants that, the domineering role of men over the years, has made it very difficult for women in leadership to weave through policy trajectories. She opined that women in leadership technically speaking, have not adequately represented the interest of the ordinary Ghanaian woman. It is uncommon for women leaders to champion a united front of women or rallying support of like-minded people to fight certain injustices perpetrated against women in society. Vera, a nurse noted that women leaders and their families are, perhaps, not the ones suffering much of the abuses against women. Hence, their reluctance to take decisive actions to end such vices. In the words of Vera,

this is so because not so long ago the country witnessed a bizarre incident of the lynching of a 90-year-old Madam Akua Denteh, and one would have expected a unified voice against such practices, but that was not the case. Coming on the heels of Madam Akua Denteh was another case of a near lynching of another woman. I believe if the case of Akua Denteh had been given the necessary attention, the other incident would not have occurred. Today, witch camps feature prominently in Ghana, and one wonders why women are the main occupants.

She is convinced that if women elected into the legislature have demonstrated much commitment to the plight of the ordinary Ghanaian women, life would have been a little better for us in the Ghanaian society irrespective of sex or gender.

A graduate student at the University of Cape Coast and domicile in Kintampo, Efuia, argued that the slow pace of women leaders in representing the interest of women is because the marginalized woman has so many issues to be addressed. As such, the few that are being tackled by women leaders are not recognized. According to her, women in politics currently have set the bar higher for the upcoming generations. This means, the seed is sown and the fruits (women's interest) will be better addressed in the future. Efuia believed that it took the effort of women leaders to get public universities to reduce the cut-off points (for female applicants) for some courses especially medicine. Also, the advocacy has generally helped in creating awareness on the need for female child education which has seen an increase in the number of girls in school. Afua, further observed that women in politics have also pushed for the creation of units or agencies where women can go and make complaints against violence perpetrated against them. She cited the Women and Juvenile Unit (WAJU), now called the Domestic Violence and Victims' Support Unit (DOVVSU), as an example. The Unit was established in 1998 with the sole purpose of protecting women and children. This position was buttressed by a Kpandai based educationist, Maame. Like Efuia, Maame was convinced that women leaders have contributed significantly in policies that constitute the interest of underprivileged women. In her words "women in politics played a major role in the setting up of the Ministry of women and children (renamed Gender, Children and Social Protection), which now helps in dealing with issues such as violence against women and children. She is happy that the ministry defends women on issues such as allegations of witchcraft and the arrangement for maternity leave with pay for working mothers. Besides, Maame credited women leaders for some government policies, including advocacy to close down witches' camps across Ghana. She concluded that women leaders have demonstrated enough commitment and showed evidence that they represent the interest of women in the Ghanaian society.

It further emerged that the inability of women in leadership to satisfactorily represent the interest of underprivileged women is due to structural impediments caused by the patriarchal dominated Ghanaian society. Some respondents held the view that women are only doing symbolic representation because they are short-changed. Women have challenges which are embedded within the Ghanaian cultural context and the patriarchal nature of society which have engendered some stereotype against women in Ghana. A social worker in Kpandai, Emelia, noted that women in leadership positions are not specifically assigned to fight for the interest of women; they represent everyone. It is therefore inappropriate to measure the success or otherwise of women based on their actions that are tailored towards addressing the issues of women. She was of the view that if you are seeking to represent the interest of people that are marginalized, you need to understand them first. Emelia argued that most women who are in leadership positions got those positions based on their work and achievements with many coming from well-to-do or rich homes, schooled in the best schools including abroad. They may not, she reckons, necessarily understand issues that affect the ordinary

woman. Besides, Emelia is unsure if it will take women to change the problems facing women. *She observed "if so, then it will take a long way because the proportion of men to women in leadership is widely tilted in favour of men. Take for example the 13 % of women legislators in Ghana, how can they push for women's interest in the male-dominated chamber. Remember how the men resisted when the issue of domestic rape was discussed in parliament some years back?"*.

Other participants held that the entire society rather has to accept that women are marginalized and work at reversing it. They held that various government policies are geared towards addressing this challenge. The views of Ama, a lecturer, are worth noting:

the first point of call is to look at our Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, which has one of the biggest mandates such as looking at the interest of women, children, gender and social protection. Social protection is a whole embodiment of a system put in place, including laws and policies that are meant to protect victims of domestic abuse, violence, etc.

She revealed that the budget that goes to that ministry is very little and can do little, a claim which is public knowledge. That has been the major challenge; budget allocated to the ministry of Women, Gender and Social Protection are the least "so you are already leaving the Ministry incapacitated or made it very difficult to do its work when you give it very little money", Ama lamented. This view is similar to Asibi, a Kintampo based retired police officer who retired at the rank of an Inspector. She opined that the structural impediments make it difficult to push for the actual interest of women to be represented by only women leaders. According to her, some government institutions are mandated to protect women. These agencies, units and departments are headed by women. However, she thinks, you cannot blame them for not representing the interest of women well. Rather, the problem has to do with the cumbersome nature of the process that leads to justice. She used rape as an example,

let's say victims of rape, and they are usually women, look at what they go through. A victim that is abused sexually will first of all be required to have evidence that they have been abused. They have to go to a medical doctor for a report to determine that there was some violation on that part of the body but the medical reports are not for free. Such reports cost between 300-1000 Ghana cedis. Our women representatives have not pushed for the law to be amended for, at least, medical reports of raped women, to be free. It should not be difficult to push for such reports to be included in the services of the operational National Health Insurance Scheme.

This kind of issues that are addressed by women leaders, perhaps, made Rose, an unemployed graduate to remark that most women in leadership positions currently do not represent the interest of the ordinary woman. According to her, women like former first lady Nana Konadu Agyemang Rawlings, through her 31st December Women's Movement fought in the interest of women. It led to the enactment of the Intestate Succession Law, PNDCL 111 (1985). The Law recognizes women's ownership of their deceased husband's property. She equally cited Mrs. Gladys Asmah, a veteran women

advocate and the first occupant of the then Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, Mrs. Gifty Afenyi-Dadzie, former president of the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) as leaders who truly represented the interest of women. But such passion has not been sustained by current women in leadership. But, Nhyira, a Techiman based medical doctor thought otherwise. For her *"in as much as they wish and want to support their fellow women, they are limited in doing so. Sometimes being in a male-dominated area also limits them in extending their support"*. Nhyira held the view that many women are doing so much to represent the interest of ordinary women. But because the media spotlight is not on them, they are not heard. She cited women in academia as an example.

Another challenge that emerged from the data is what was termed as the *generally unfriendly* nature of the Ghana Police Service to issues that constitute women's interest. A former journalist and now gospel crusader, Selikem, who visits marginalized women and supports them in cash, prayers, and clothing among other things remarked:

How friendly is the Ghana Police Service to issues of domestic violence mainly perpetrated against women? Yes, the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit has been set up, but the Unit is so under-resourced such that you do not have police officers who have even a vehicle to transport themselves either to 'women abused scenes' or to gather evidence for prosecution or even transport them to the law court.

Selikem, who has encountered such issues in her work in the National capital expressed worry that even the Social Welfare Officers who are supposed to be in every community to champion the interest of women are equally under-resourced. She is convinced that working under such circumstances can be difficult.

The study further found that the family system frustrates the efforts of women in decision-making positions to even know of certain problems let alone take steps to correct them. Selikem captures this view aptly, citing her experience with such victims as she carries her Hope Mission Evangelistic Ministry to the vulnerable in society. She noted: *"Consider a victim of rape who lives with the perpetrator. That victim's place of solace is the Social Welfare Officers to be counseled in Shelters but Ghana has only two of such shelters nationwide"*. To make matters worse, she added,

for many of such victims, their offenders are closest to them. If a victim is raped by her father and you want to pursue the case, where do you take her to? There is very little that women in leadership can do in this regard because the family system, in some instances, is such that once the elders say, let it be handled by 'us' so shall it be.

Besides, the perpetrators are usually those who take care of the victims so if they report and the victim is arrested, who feeds them?

The focus group discussants had mixed thoughts. Their views fed into the assertion that women leaders can make some changes concerning issues that affect women. However, they have not lived up to expectations. The following quotes from some of the women are worth noting:

I think they do represent the interest of women, just that maybe they don't have the power to stop what's going wrong. I believe with the support of the masses and stakeholders, the few women in leadership can make things better.

To me, I don't think those women in leadership positions represent the interest of the ordinary woman in Ghana because most of the time when they get to those positions, they forget that they are there to help, especially when they become obsessed with power.

In Ghana, women in decision-making positions do not represent the interest of the ordinary Ghanaian woman. Even in instances where they seem to be making an effort, it is usually for the cameras or to ask for their votes.

Many of these women in leadership positions are not proactive towards issues affecting the ordinary Ghanaian woman. Many times they wait until an incident occurs before reacting.

A classic example is COVID-19 and *kayayes* (head porters). The Gender Ministry, which is led by a woman never considered their plight during the lockdown until the girls smuggled themselves out of Accra and were intercepted along the Accra - Kumasi Highway. That was when they were brought back to Accra on the assurance of decent shelter and care, which even left more to be desired.

Others held the view that women in leadership positions in Ghana have demonstrated that they represent the interest of the ordinary woman. The following quotes support this claim:

Yes, and no at the same time. Yes, because you find institutions like the ministry of Women, Gender and Social Protection working hard to promote and protect the interest of women.

No, because all these MPs and ministers don't work specifically for the interest of only women, but for the greater good, which often reflects the interest of men.

Assess the female MP's in Ghana critically without partiality by making some background checks in their constituencies. If you do the above, you will notice that they have undertaken lots of infrastructure towards empowering women. Such interventions include Gari Processing Plants, market shelters for trading and soft loans for start-up businesses. Remember that those things are also women's interest. Besides, they encourage scholarships for girls and further look beyond women to the extent that they work for men, especially male children. Definitely. Women in leadership positions represent the interest of underprivileged women. This is because, as they have worked hard to brave the waters and shattered the glass ceiling to gain significant seats at the table of leadership and power, they become a source of inspiration to other women, especially the young girls. This alone is a major interest represented as young girls who aspire for the higher feat in life get motivated by this.

Women leaders put in great efforts to fight against discrimination, gendered violence and other vices against women which I believe constitute their interest being represented. A case that readily comes to mind is the lynching of a 90-year old woman at Kafaba and

how some women in leadership positions (Cynthia Morrison - Gender Minister and Prof. Naana Opoku-Agyemang, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Coast) took the issue up; drumming home the need to abolish all forms of discrimination against women, and especially when some of these inhumane acts are carried out by women themselves.

Adding their voices to the many others and speaking up not only for themselves but for others as well build a kind of 'support system' for women. So yes, women in leadership positions help advance the interest of the underprivileged woman.

Observations are that they only represent the ordinary woman when they want to be voted for.

However, only a few of them will honestly stand up for the rights of other women in society.

There have been various women's groups to push for the rightful representation of the interest of women, but that has still not been fully executed. There is still more to be done when it comes to women in leadership representing the interest of ordinary or underprivileged women in Ghana.

Based on the views above, it means that the inability of women in leadership to represent the interest of the underprivileged or the ordinary woman is due to structural, financial and cultural challenges. Other participants simply disagreed. Such were of the view that greed on the part of 'accomplished' women is to be blamed. For such, women in leadership appear arrogant, very special, and very difficult for the ordinary woman to approach and sometimes, detached from the 'others' (poor women). Lamisi, who is a seasoned journalist in the Bono East region noted:

It is usually during major events such as International Women's Day that you hear all these women in leadership talking about supporting the woman, representing the interest of the women at policy levels, equality between men and women, let's empower women and it ends there. Beyond that, they don't even discuss the attitudes of women in leadership towards fellow women. No female leader is interested in discussing the oppression, suppression and the 'pull her down' syndrome among women. Look at some of the women in top positions. When they are coming to the office, see the appearance alone, you dare not get closer to her, let alone discuss issues about women for her to factor in her agenda.

A student journalist at the Ghana Institute of Journalism and a resident of Kintampo, Cynthia, added that the problem starts from the low to middle-class levels. According to her, even female journalists in English-speaking Radio Stations see themselves superior to those in the local language (Twi) Radio Stations. She remarked, our journalists and celebrities who are females, just observe how they behave. Even in traffic, when you wave at them as a poor girl or market woman, see how they look at you with haughty eyes; they won't even wave back. This is what feeds into the topmost office position holders.

This view was similar to Eunice, a Community Health Nurse in Kpandai. She noted that the problem has to do with the lived experience. According to Eunice, many female leaders have not experienced the plight of an

ordinary woman. Hence, they simply do not appreciate the enormity of the problem. She remarked among others,

enter the university campuses and watch, those from well-to-do homes come together as friends and the poor girls also group together. When they mix, it is about a joint interest. Even in churches, the pastor's wife has friends and you hardly see a poor woman among her friends. Besides, ordinary WhatsApp groups for women are discriminatory. They accept people based on the schools they attended, the work they do, or their financial standing. That is the Ghanaian woman for you so if such become leaders, how can you expect them to represent the interest of all women?

5. Discussion

What are the implications of the above findings in the quest for more women representatives in decision-making positions? It must be stated that it is not the position of the authors that women only represent women or the interest of women. Technically, women in leadership are explored based on an additional responsibility' defined as representing the interest of women. This is because, apart from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the Social Welfare Department, Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit of the Ghana Police Service where such demands are justified, women's performance in leadership are judged based on their overall response to the needs of a society where women are populous. This notwithstanding, exploring the extent to which women leaders represent the interest of women is justified based on the clarion calls for more women to be given the opportunity to exercise executive power and other positions of influence. This is largely because women are good leaders and are in a better position to represent the interest of the oppressed in society.

The thesis that women leaders to a larger extent, have not been successful in representing ordinary women due to inadequate empowerment is an issue worth discussing. This view is collaborated in the 2020 World Economic Forum report which revealed that on average, the largest gender disparity is the Political Empowerment gap. According to the report, only 24.7% of the global Political Empowerment gap has been closed in 2020, despite being an improvement in the 2018 report [38]. The implication is that male dominance will continue for a little longer - a situation that will continue to impact negatively on the interest of women in society.

In Ghana, women in decision-making positions are either elected or appointed. As result, they usually find subtle ways of representing the interest of political parties more than mere sex or gender. Representation of such women, in some instances, include the need to "promote private material interests," and thus justifies the assertion that politics in Ghana has "become a theater of accumulation of private wealth" ([37], p. 120). Empirically, this position was noted by participants in the study. The theoretical implication is that both men and women who occupy decision-making positions are rational actors who represent their personal interests first before any other consideration. This was evident when a Deputy Minister (a young woman) of Communications,

lost her job when she was caught on tape saying her target in politics was to make 1 million US dollars under former president, John Dramani Mahama's regime.

The issue of budgetary constraint which militates against effective championing of women's interest is worth interrogating. In Ghana, no Ministry has ever been given sufficient annual budgetary allocation due to the country's inability to raise more revenue while servicing its mounting debt. This phenomenon is publicly acknowledged by successive finance ministers during the presentation of the annual Budget and Economic Policy Statement of the government of Ghana to Parliament. Women leaders cannot do much when they are given positions with limited financial resources to operate. Unfortunately, it has always been men who occupy the finance ministry either as ministers or chief directors, a practice which boils down to men determining the interest of women [6].

The majority of the respondents were of the view that the efforts by women leadership, though commendable, are not sufficient. The theoretical position of some scholars is that women have not been given 'real power' because they are placed in situations that make it difficult to function effectively. For instance, the laws of Ghana do not prohibit women from seeking executive and legislative power through elections but, the ridicule, verbal abuse, description of brave women as 'iron ladies', and allegations of sexual exchange, make it difficult for women to want to boldly go into the electoral contest. This is in sync with the assertion by Bauer and Darkwah ([11], p. 8), that women who choose to run for public offices in Ghana "find that their bodies are scrutinized and they are penalized for not conforming to conventional norms about women's appearance and behaviour". Besides, "when a woman candidate seeks to raise money from a man, there is an assumption of the man, or the perception of others, that the woman may have to provide sexual favours in return for a campaign donation" ([11], p.7). This, unfortunately, deepens the perception that the average woman in a position of trust might not have attained it through meritocracy. The implication is that some women leaders are not bold to approach influential men to lobby for things that will inure to the interest of underprivileged women.

Currently, the two dominant political parties in Ghana (i.e., the NPP and NDC) do not have any verifiable working plan to rectify "their failure to select women candidates in their primary elections" ([39], p. 17). This is important because the interest of the ordinary woman is better known by women at the constituency level. Hence, women are more likely to prioritize solving issues such as witchcraft accusations, female genital mutilation and childbearing for working mothers better than the successful CEOs who may have only read about them. The implication is that more women who could constitute a rallying force to champion the interest of women are indirectly 'denied' the opportunity by their political parties to become leaders. It must be noted that elected female representatives face a major task of financial demands in executing their representation functions [40]. In most instances, ones' ability to meet such incessant material and financial burden from their constituents, guarantees a better chance of re-election than merely

representing the interest of women in the constituency, which may include marital rape, for which men do not generally agree. The role of the Ghanaian woman in leadership, especially the political class, therefore, goes beyond representing only women in the constituency [40]. Besides, the low numbers of women in Parliament, where real decisions that affect women are taken, implies a more difficult task for the few women MPs to represent the interest of women [11]. In other words, the low numbers of women make it difficult for them to push for more women-friendly laws, especially because of the fear of the woman dominating the man - something that the religious community generally does not like. How do you expect to get the support of the male-dominated parliament to push for laws on marital rape, property right of spouses and the likes?

Findings from the study mirror the assertion by Bauer and Darkwah [11] that suggest that women in Ghana have long been deterred from seeking leadership positions not just due to the associated cost involved or the demeaning politics of insult, but because some Ghanaian women have little motivation to go into active politics where the real power to effect change is embedded. This may be due to the belief that one cannot effect any meaningful change vis-à-vis, championing the course of the ordinary women due to the male-female disparity.

In sum, a weak parliament, generally low numbers of women in leadership, cultural and religious beliefs that make the man a natural leader, financial constraints among other things, are some of the major challenges that stampede the effort of Ghanaian women in leadership to effectively respond to the numerous developmental needs that constitute the interest of underprivileged women.

6. Conclusion

In his article, we have explored the formalistic, descriptive, substantive, symbolic representation of women in leadership and assessed how such women representatives have represented the interest of Ghanaian women in general and underprivileged women in particular. Our analysis of the primary data, however, mainly focused on substantive and symbolic representation. We have highlighted the fact that despite the real limitations faced by women in leadership, they have chalked some remarkable success. The establishment of Domestic Violence and Victims Support Units in all 16 regions, the Human and Child Trafficking Act 2005, Domestic Violence Bill 2007, the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation in 2006, the adoption of Women Manifesto which has contributed to the increasing appointment of women to occupy top-level political positions, the National Gender and Children Policy, the expansion of regional houses of chiefs to include paramount queen mothers, free healthcare for pregnant women under the National Health Insurance Scheme, among many other things, are all efforts aimed at addressing the problems facing women in Ghana. Undoubtedly, women in leadership have played a significant role in achieving these and other feats which jointly, constitute the interest of their representatives – vulnerable women in society. This notwithstanding, the

respondents were generally of the view that women in leadership have not demonstrated enough commitment on issues that affect the average woman. These issues, which have negated the formalistic representation, include the continuous attack and sometimes lynching of women over allegations of witchcraft, sexual demand from women in exchange for jobs or grades in school, issues of maternity leave with pay among other things.

The main lessons distilled from the study are as follows: First, the 21st-century women in Ghana want more women in key positions where decisions are made. However, they expect women of substance who can stand on their grounds and not be intimidated by men in leadership, initiate a vigorous crusade against discriminatory practices against women. Second, the interests of women are enormous due to centuries of relegation to the background. Hence, there is the need to appeal to men to appreciate the real challenges women face so that they can support the course of policies that represent the interest of women. Third, a more sustainable public discourse is needed to highlight the challenges facing women, especially those in rural areas. This will make the work of women leaders easier. Fourth, the challenges of the ordinary woman are embedded within the stereotypical eye that the patriarchal society views the woman leading. Women in leadership are not necessarily assigned to deal with only issues that affect women. Besides, most of the women in leadership are there based on their achievements in diverse fields of study, knowledge and skills. But that does not necessarily mean that they understand and appreciate gender issues relating to women. Besides, the numbers have always disadvantaged women even if they all are very interested in pushing for Bills or Policies that represent the interest of women. Also, institutions such as Social Welfare, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit are under-resourced to play their part in facilitating issues that affect women. We note that if Ghana fails to properly resource these institutions and also undo the institutionalized cultural and sometimes religious stereotypes against 'the woman leader' by both men and women, there will be very little that women leaders can do to effectively represent the interest of underprivileged women.

Statement of Competing Interests

The authors have no conflict of interest.

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