



## Women Participation and Party Politics in the Gambia's Democratic Process, 1997-2020

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### Abstract

For an all-inclusive party politics in a democracy to be achieved, all members of the society, irrespective of sex, religion and class, must be engaged in the spirit of human rights and freedom. This study investigated women participation in party politics in the Gambia with an established all-inclusive and gender-friendly mechanism under the second republic. It explored the extent of conformity with global practices and national policy on gendering in the country. The study extrapolated, through the gender lenses that are descriptive in analysis, on women's participation in party politics with focus on various challenges besetting the process as a result of males' dominance and government inadequate national policies to address the quagmires. For this reason, efforts are stepped up by human rights activists and gender scholars on how best to continue to address discrimination issues against women and how their participation level could be increased. Findings concluded that, if an all-inclusive party politics is to become realistic and effective in the Gambia, a public-private partnership and government re-strategy, through policy frameworks that are dynamic and pragmatic and which will be consultative enough in nature would be ideal.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Gender Studies, Participation, Party Politics, Women Empowerment.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background to Study

#### 1.1.1. Gambia's Party Politics: The Context and the Evolution

The Gambia like any other nation in the sub-Saharan Africa emerged from a colonial experience, transformed democratically from the traditional society of Africa to a modern democratic nation in 1965 with an attained full political independence led by Dawda Kairaba Jawara who became the first political leader. This development heralded party politics in the Gambia that dated back to the Rate Payers' Association (RPA) designed to serve as a liaison between the local people (the Gambians) and the colonial government then (Hughes & Perfect 2006). This link was meant to provide a pool of men to stand elections for the Bathurst Urban District Council (BUDC) established in 1930. The BUDC was reconstituted as the Bathurst Advisory Town Council (BATC) in 1935. In the first BATC election in 1936, the RPA won all six seats open to Africans as they were called then instead of Gambians. This marked the beginning of the RPA's dominance of Bathurst politics and in sense the beginning of party politics in the Gambia, believed to be male dominated by then (Hughes & Perfect 2006; Faal 2008; Omotosho 2017).

Until 1960, Politics in the Gambia was dominated by the Akus (who were Yoruba ex- slaves dumped at Bathurst and Freetown from Europe after the slave trade ended, and the Wollofs [Hughes & Perfect 2006; Faal 2008]. Meanwhile, the first quasi- political organization in the Gambia was formed and led by Edward Francis Small, a referred father and doyen of the Gambian modern politics. Small, was a radical nationalist whose political movements gave impetus to electoral and party politics in the Gambia and on no circumstance could party politics history in the Gambia can be discussed without a mention of the name of Edward Small Francis [Hughes & Perfect 2006; Faal 2008; Omotosho 2017].

Small in 1917, joined with other militants to found the Gambia Native Defensive Union (GNDU) that collaborated with other West Africa to establish the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA) at a conference held in Accra in March 1920 [Hughes & Perfect 2006; Faal 2008]. Small heralded an era of political activism in the tiny but beautiful Gambia, using his journalist professionalism and political astuteness to achieve this noble goal. In the development of trade unionism, Edward Francis Small was at the forefront. He founded the first Gambian Trade Union, the Bathurst Trade Union (BTU), although, the activities of the Union did not extend beyond the colony area, it was strong enough to organize the first labor strike in Gambian history in 1929, making one of the most successful strikes in Africa before the second world war [Hughes & Perfect 2006]. Indeed Edward Francis Small participated fully and led in the many political organizations and activist movements that shot The

Gambia to the forefront of political leadership and advancement, not only within the British West Africa until the Independence time but in the whole of the sub-Saharan (Omotosho 2017).

Some of these movements included; The Rate Payers' Association and the Bathurst Urban District Council (BUDC) as previously mentioned, established in 1930 and later renamed the Bathurst Advisory Town Councils (BATC) in 1935 [Hughes & Perfect 2006]. These two movements later dominated Bathurst politics, with Edward Small emerging as the first appointee of BATC to the legislative council in January 1942 [Hughes & Perfect 2006]. Edward Small went on to represent the municipal council in the legislative council between 1942 and 1947 and when the elective principle was first introduced by the British colonial government in the Gambia for the legislative council in 1947, he became the first Gambian to win a popular vote.

Sponsored by his labor Union, Small defeated Sheik Omar Faye and I. M. Garba Jahumpa to become the elected representative for Banjul and the Kombo area in the Legislative Council [Hughes & Perfect 2006]. Edward Francis continued to play active and important role in Gambia's electoral and political process as an activist, trade unionist and journalist. Party Politics in the Gambia and the establishment of political parties as well as the manner in which these activities went on, up till the independence time in 1965 did contribute to the successes later recorded in the electoral and democratization process in the Gambia. Political parties were not established until after the second world war with the first being The Democratic Party founded by the Rev. J. C. Faye in 1951 who himself, played active role in the political and electoral journeys of the Gambia. He was elected as the first member in the 1951 elections [Faal 2008].

In January 1952, The Muslim Congress was established as the second party under the leadership of I. M. Garba Jahumpa. The Muslim Congress came into being as a fusion of the Bathurst Young Muslim Society with a number of similar Muslim Organizations in the Kombos and the protectorate [Faal 2008]. The third political party was the United Party (UP) formed as an outgrowth of the 1951 elections. Its leader was a law graduate from Britain Mr. P. S. Njie who returned to the Gambia only in 1948 to give activism to Gambia's political advancement. UP was formed in 1952 and won the Legislative Council elections in 1954. Next was the Gambia's People's Party (GPP) formed before the 1954 elections by St. Clair Joof. However, the founder died so soon and the party could not last.

The last of the major Gambian political parties to be created was the Protectorate People's Party (PPP) later renamed the People's Progressive Party (PPP) [Hughes & Perfect 2006; Faal 2008]. The PPP was formed in 1959 by people of protectorate origins, residing in the colony, in response to the extension of the franchise to the protectorate by the 1960 constitution. It was the 1960 constitution we have seen that extended the franchise to the protectorate. This constitution for the first time divided the protectorate into electoral districts and twelve representatives were to be chosen from these on the basis of Universal Suffrage as members of the new House of Representatives. Leadership of PPP soon passed to Dawda Kairaba Jawara, an Edinburg trained veterinarian, who resigned his post as head of department in the colonial administration. PPP later won the 1960 elections held under the 1960 constitution which was a main contest between it and the UP with seven seats in the legislative assembly [Hughes & Perfect 2006; Faal 2008].

The 1960 constitution and its elections results created a political conflict in the country because, firstly, none of the parties that contested the elections could win a clear-cut majority in the new House of Representatives. The 1960 constitution also failed to provide provisions for a "Chief Minister" to coordinate the work of the new ministries that were created. When Governor Edward Windley decided to appoint a chief minister, the Protectorate chiefs gave their support to P. S. Njie who became appointed Chief Minister in March 1961 [Faal 2008]. P. S. Njie's appointment as chief minister led to the resignation of the PPP leader Dawda K. Jawara as 'Education Minister'.

The PPP would particularly condemn the power of thirty-five chiefs to select eight members to the House of representative. It was learnt that shortly after the 1960 Gambia Workers Union Strike, the precipitated political crises by the PPP marked a definite advance towards self-government with the party emerging as the most militant advocates of rapid decolonization [Hughes & Perfect 2006; Faal 2017]. The precipitated political crisis by Sir Dawda K. Jawara- led party, and the labor strike crisis eventually paved ways for the convened Bathurst and London constitutional conferences of 1961, the talk results of which produced the 1962 constitution that paved the way for The Gambia's full internal self-government.

Despite this, and notwithstanding, the PPP increased the tempo of agitations for independence. The new British Colonial Secretary, Mr. Ian Macleod was skeptical about Gambia's political independence even though he was convinced of self-rule process and attainment. Instead, Macleod the new colonial helmsman was anxiously suggesting the idea of unification being negotiated with Senegal by Banjul in place of independence [Hughes & Perfect 2006; Faal 2008]. In the general elections held on May 1962, the PPP defeated its main political rival, the UP, and it now devolved on Jawara who became the new Premier to negotiate the final stages of decolonization with Britain.

Perhaps, faced with the stark economic realities of the Gambian situation, the PPP in power were less insistent that independence now must come at once [Faal 2008]. Immediately the march to independence commenced, the Senegambia unification received a boost and with P.S. Njie as Chief Minister, a joint Senegalo -Gambian Ministerial Committee was set up which requested the United Nations to study Senegambian association for a possible unification. In contrasts, the UN Commission rejected the unification bid, stressing that the idea is unrealistic. Rather, it recommended closer association in stages. When the UN Commission submitted its report, Jawara's administration in Banjul, it was learnt, sent a powerful delegation to negotiate closer union with Senegal, while the UN's Legal and financial experts were engaged on advisory role on the matter. Little or no success was made.

Nevertheless an agreement was reached that the two countries i.e. Senegal and The Gambia River Basin, sign a defense pact and share diplomatic missions abroad [Faal 2008]. While the government of Senegal welcomed an eventual merger of both countries, it was the political leaders of the small Gambia who feared that they would be submerged in all ramifications, saying, they might later be deprived of equality in citizenship upholding in a French-speaking country. The PPP government and their supporters were united in the view that the interest of the Gambia in self-rule and economic development, not the British anxiety to rid itself of a liability, should determine the future of the country Gambia [Faal 2008].

They opted for independence. A constitutional conference was later held in July 1964 in London on the Gambia's political future where it was agreed that Gambia should become an independent sovereign state on February 18th, 1965, though, could continue to cooperate with Senegal. The Gambia became independent under the leadership of Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara who himself became its first President after a successful referendum was held in April 24th, 1970 for a republican status [Faal 2008].

Nonetheless, after a rule of thirty years or more, Jawara was overthrown in a bloodless military coup by a group of young soldiers from the Gambia National Army as earlier remarked, which created the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC) with Lt. Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh as the head of state. The AFPRC, who initially announced a four year transition period to return the country to civilian rule, finally, after consultation with the people nationwide accepted two year transition period [Faal 2008; Omotosho 2017]. The AFPRC was later transformed into a political party called the Alliance for Patriotic Re-orientation and Construction (APRC) for the purpose of contesting the September 26th, 1996 presidential and general elections in a multi-party democracy with now retired Colonel Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh contesting as president. He won landslide and became the first president of the Second Republic of the Gambia [Faal 2008; Omotosho 2017].

Given the above exploration, it can be assumed that men dominated the pre-independence as well as post-independence political parties affairs in the Gambia up to the beginning of the second republic when coup interrupted the first republic for the inauguration of the second republic. In the second republic, when Yahya Jammeh became the civilian ruler, many policies came up to ensure and guarantee women's participation especially as the regime was a people-oriented and women-friendly one with women's role given more spaces both in partisanship and in leadership. It established The "NATIONAL WOMEN COUNCIL" to boost women's role in leadership and national life and make for the shortfall of the past; a policy geared towards gender equality and women empowerment (The Republic of the Gambia 2019). In recognition of this gesture, Yahya Jammeh government made more significant reforms to strengthen gender policy frameworks leading to a re-affirmation which says; *"While significant steps have been taken for the empowerment of women through several legislative acts, as well as vigorous efforts to ensure gender parity in primary education, the welfare of the Gambian women continues to lag significantly behind that of men"* (The Republic of the Gambia 2019).

Government therefore in its New Development Plan, determined to promote gender equity, equality and empowerment of women and girls for sustained socio-economic development. Key measures or priority areas planned for included gender mainstreaming; capacity development of women entrepreneurs; establishment of a fund to improve access to finance like Osusu; legislative reforms and advocacy for enhanced representation and participation in decision making; gender based violence reduction programmes; and doing away with harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation(FGM) and child marriage". (The Government of the Gambia 2019).

This research assesses women's participation in party politics in the Gambia with a re-examination of how effective this participation level had been or worked in achieving active women's roles and leadership in power. The research explores the mechanisms in place at the state level for this in the second republic while investigating challenges on the way of process and progress for an all-inclusive and gender-friendly party politics and governmental affairs in the country which favored women leadership roles.

## **2. Party Politics and Democracy in the Gambia: Is Women Participation Effective?**

Democracy cannot live up to its promise if part of the population is not adequately represented in leadership – be it in politics or in any other aspect of life. Regrettably, women, persons with disabilities (PWDs) and young people who usually dominate the larger portion of the population are often excluded from leadership in most parts of the world, especially in developing nations(WFD 2020). In The Gambia, women represent more than half of the population (50.5%). Women also comprise a majority of all Gambian registered voters by about 58%. Despite this concerted effort, the political arena in the country is largely dominated by men. For instance and as mentioned previously, out of the 58 members of the Gambian National Assembly, only six are women. On the cabinet level, there are only four women among 23 ministers. The challenge of inequality in politics does not stop there; it runs down to the local leadership level where women constitute only eight out of the 120 councilors in the country (WFD 2020). Women are also under-represented in relevant positions within political parties and the civil service. For instance, out of the 16 currently registered political parties, none has a woman party leader. Study confirmed that a lot of women are active in political parties as supporters, mobilizers, and voters but not as decision-makers (WFD 2020).

Despite this level of achievement and the very important legislation enacted, Gambian women are yet to still enjoy the benefits of these special measures. They had to compete with men who had a large head start over them in a terrain that they are not familiar with (ADCHRS 2012). Generally women have operated in informal and private spaces where they were expected to be "seen and not heard" as the public spaces were very much male dominated and controlled (ACDHRS 2012). The limited presence of women in the National Assembly is the result of their poor political engagement and their limited presence in political parties leading structures. Women's participation often remains marginal and this is evident in the very low numbers of women in the National Assembly and even in the cabinet (ACDHRS 2012).

The African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS) observed the following:

"Using the five point framework of the UNDP and National Democracy Institute (NDI)'s Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties, A Good Practices Guide to Promote Women's Political Participation listed below, it is evident that the political parties fall short of meeting the globally agreed targets. These are:

1. Legal framework and governing documents are gender sensitive
2. Measures taken to promote women's participation in decision-making structures of political parties.
3. Women's wing or section established are strategically positioned within the party
4. Targets set for women's participation in party conventions"

(ACDHRS 2012; Njie 2010). This framework is capable of improving and sustaining moves to push women's roles in party politics and national governance, if, only it is sustained and respected (ACDHRS 2012).

### *2.1. Defining Political Participation from the Gender Mainstream*

The term 'political participation' has a very wide meaning. It does not only relate to 'Right to Vote', but simultaneously relates to participation in: decision-making process, political activism, political consciousness and the likes. This means, women's participation in political activities transcends mere party memberships to leadership, activism and decision-making as is the case in a country like India and America. Women in India participate in voting, run for public offices and political parties at lower levels more than men. Political activism and voting are the strongest areas of women's political participation. To combat gender inequality in politics, the Indian Government had instituted reservations for seats in local governments' political offices (United Nations 2014; Pragma 2014). Women turnout during India's parliamentary general elections was 65.63%, compared to 67.09% turnout for men. India as a country ranks 20th from the bottom in terms of representation of women in Parliament (United Nations 2014; Pragma 2014).

Women have held the posts of president and prime minister in India, as well as chief ministers of various states. Indian voters have elected women to numerous state legislative assemblies and national parliament for many decades (United Nations 2014; Pragma 2014). In the Gambia, the reverse is the case as a result of many hurdles that impede the possibility to this and the progress expected aftermath (United Nations 2014).

### *2.2. Hurdles to the Realization of Women Political Leadership and Party Participation in the Gambia*

Gambian women are raring to occupy more leadership positions in politics. However, long-standing barriers have ensured that women are excluded from active political participation and leadership. Neneh Freda Gomez, a founding member of the Citizen Alliance party, a new registered political party deplors the situation of Gambian women's exclusion from politics. According to her, "*We are in this situation because we are made to...women are never factored in when men sit to plan and make political decisions.*" (WFD 2020).

The barriers to women's equation in politics in the Gambia are structural, socio-cultural, and institutional. Most women in the Gambia remain uneducated, the poorest and the most politically disempowered due to societal norms that favour men over them. The Gambia is generally a patriarchal society. Socio-cultural barriers do not encourage women to lead. Aside, violence, or threats of violence often serve as obstacles to women's political participation. Such violence takes a variety of forms including character assassination and defamation, harassment, insults and slander, sexual violence, assault, as well as targeting of relatives and supporters (WFD 2020).

When it comes to institutional barriers, women are often excluded in leadership due to a lack of, or inadequate appropriate policies, laws and institutions that prohibit discrimination; inefficiency and the limited capacity of state institutions to mainstream service delivery to women; minimal enforcement of policies and laws that advocate for women's political participation rights; and a lack of data and follow-up measures that monitor and evaluate mechanisms that track the implementation of current reforms meant to empower women (WFD 2020).

The 1997 Constitution is the basic law of the land. The Preamble states that "the fundamental rights and freedoms enshrined in this constitution will ensure for all time respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to ethnic consideration, gender, language or religion.". Section 33(1) provides for the equality of all persons before the law and that no person shall be discriminated based on different grounds including gender. In terms of specific legislations promulgated for the protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls, The Gambia in 2010 enacted the Children's Act of 2005, the Trafficking in Persons Act of 2007, the Tourism Offences Act of 2003, Women's Act which was amended in 2015 to prohibit FGM/C in The Gambia, the Domestic Violence Act 2013 and the Sexual Offences Act 2013, and the Labour Act of 2007, the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission Act 2017 which have all been promulgated to address shortfalls in women's representation of the past (The Government of the Gambia 2019).

Subsequently, under Adama Barrow, the National Development Plan 2018-2021 was formulated as successor of the Programme for Accelerated Growth and Employment (PAGE) 2013-2015. The plan took into consideration of ensuring that gender is fully integrated as a critical enabler in the Medium-term development policy framework for The Gambia. This for the first time the Beijing Platform of Action twelve critical areas of concerns including the Sustainable Development Goals are being implemented and monitored through the National Development Framework. Access to justice and equal protection before the laws for women and girls have been guaranteed under section 7 of the Women's Act 2010 which provides that every woman is entitled to equality and justice before the law and to equal protection of the law. Government is obligated to provide legal aid support; ensure that law enforcement organs are equipped to effectively interpret and enforce gender equality rights; ensure that women are equitably represented in the judiciary; and take adequate steps for reform discriminatory laws (The Government of the Gambia 2019).

Gambia Government also took legal action to elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, girls and persons with disability under section 14 of the Women's Act 2010 also obligates government to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. The provision is quite comprehensive and calls on Government Departments and other public institutions to implement measures, policies and strategies to eliminate discrimination, including periodic training of personnel on gender and human rights, and mainstreaming gender perspective in planning and programming of all activities and initiatives were made (The Government of the Gambia 2019).

Considering the slow progress in achieving gender equality Government took steps to initiate temporary special measures in favour of women in accordance to section 15 of the Women's Act 2010, deals with temporary special measures to be adopted by every organ, body, public 12 institutions, authority or private enterprise aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women. Under this section a distinction is made between de facto and de jure discrimination. Considering the social and cultural set up of The Gambia, there may be instances where even though the law does not create or cause any impediment for women, the social and cultural environment may not be conducive for the achievement of equality. In such an instance, Government and all private institutions are called upon to take positive steps to achieve genuine de facto equality (Government of the Gambia 2019).

The inheritance rights of a woman are determined by her personal law, as in The Gambia, inheritance is a matter for personal and customary law. The Sharia Law is applicable for Muslims, statutory law for Christians and customary law for persons who are traditionalist. This means that apart from a few mandatory exceptions contained in laws like the Women's Act, 2010 and the Children's Act, 2005, the applicable family law to the people of The Gambia is dependent on one's personal law.<sup>2</sup> The 1997 Constitution does not have a specific provision with

regards to women's ownership of land. However, section 22 deals with the protection from deprivation of property. This section can invariably protect land ownership. The Women's Act contains several provisions in relating to ownership to land, namely: Section 41 states that a woman has the right to acquire her own property and administer and manage it freely (Government of the Gambia 2019).

I. Section 43 guarantees women's equitable rights as men in case of separation, divorce or annulment of marriage.

II. Section 33(4) goes on further to ensure equitable sharing of the joint property derived from the marriage.

III. Section 44 protects widow's rights and provides that a widow has the right to an equitable share in the inheritance of the property of her husband.

IV. Government is obligated under section 52(2) to take all appropriate measures to promote women's access to, and control over, productive resources such as land, and guarantee their right to property.

The Gambia is signatory to and has committed herself to the implementation of the International Conventions, agreements and declarations which are directly relevant to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration, namely, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, The African Union Solemn Declaration on Gender Equity in Africa, and several other human rights instruments (Government of the Gambia 2019; WFD 2020).

Since the coming in to force of the Beijing Declaration in 1995, the Gambia took series of initiatives to harmonise and domesticate the twelve critical areas of concern of the declaration and these included: The promulgation of the first Generation Policy known as the National Policy for the Advancement of Gambian Women (NPAGW) 1999-2009, the Gender and Women Empowerment Policy 2010-2020, The National Health Policy. "Health is Wealth" and the Health Master Plan 2008-2020; The Education Policy 2004-2015, Education Sector Strategic Plan 2013 – 2022: the Medium Term Plan 2006-2009, "Rethinking Education for Poverty Reduction" and the education Strategic plan 2016-2020; National Employment Strategic and Policy 2016 – 2025; National Nutrition Policy 2010 – 2020; National Plan of Action for Accelerated Abandonment/Cutting of FGM in The Gambia; the Gambia's development Strategy and Investment Programme for 2012 to 2015, National Policy on Non-Formal Education 2017 – 2021; National Population Policy 2016-2020; the National Social Protection Policy and Strategy 2016 – 2020; The Gender Mainstreaming and Women Empowerment Strategic Plan, 2010 – 2015; and National Plan of Action Against GBV 2013 – 2017 (The Republic of the Gambia 2019).

Even though significant progress has been made in enacting laws, formulating and adopting policies, Plans of Actions and strategies addressing women's human rights and welfare and developmental needs, the reality is far apart from these stated intentions. Cultural patterns, traditional roles, religious beliefs, patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes continue to prevent women from exercising the rights contained in these guarantee. These and other socio-political instincts have continued to abate women's full rights to party participation and leadership in the Gambia (Government of the Gambia 2019; WFD 2020).

As a matter of fact, and as it should be understood, democracy is about fair representation of all interest groups in the society and the low representation of women appears a violation of their right to participate and have a say in their own development. One of the drivers of governance is the full and active participation of women in the democratization process, not only as supporters and electors but as participants in the decision making process at all levels. The low representation of women in the National Assembly in The Gambia does not reflect legal restrictions – women can vote, support candidates, and run for office. Two main factors can be attributed to the low representation of women- the selection processes that favour male politicians and the socio-cultural factors that militate against their participation (ADHRS 2012; Omotosho 2017).

### *2.3. Women Inclusiveness in Active Politics: Justifications and Contexts for Empirical Illuminations*

Political participation includes a broad range of activities through which people develop and express their opinions on the affairs that affect them directly and how that is administered. Women's political participation is a fundamental prerequisite for gender equality and genuine democracy. It facilitates women's direct engagement in public decision-making and is a means of ensuring better accountability not only to women but to all citizenry (Women Deliver 2018). Women's political participation results in tangible gains for democracy, including greater responsiveness to citizen needs, increased cooperation across party and ethnic lines, and more sustainable future for peace, growth and development in the state (Women Deliver 2018).

There is growing recognition of the untapped capacity and talents of women and women's leadership. Over the last two decades, the rate of women's representation in national parliaments globally has incrementally increased from 11.8 percent in 1998 to 17.8 percent in 2008 to 23.5 percent in 2018. Some regions have seen particularly dramatic increases, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, where in the last 20 years the number of women in parliaments has risen from 11 to 23.6 percent, and the Arab States region, which has seen an increase from 3.1 to 17.5 percent (Women Deliver 2018).

Globally, representation is still well below the 30 percent benchmark often identified as the necessary level of representation to achieve a "critical mass" – a considerable minority of all legislators with significant impact, rather than a token few individuals – not to mention falling short of women's representation as half of the world's population. Accordingly, the meaningful participation of women in national, local and community leadership roles has become an important focus on global development policy. Still, some may ask why it matters if women become political leaders, elected policymakers, or civil society activists. This makes a sense in that women are better managers of resources than men who spend buoyantly. Their experience in home keeping is a valuable asset for national governance when allowed to be utilized at the macro level of management. This is the argument raised at global conventions for women's participation in party politics and leadership as a justification for good and inclusive governance (Women Deliver 2018).

In most Third World nations in particular and in the sub-Saharan Africa most especially, women comprise half of their countries' population, and yet they hold only about one-fifth of government elected positions. Women in key positions in government have shown that they are as capable and effective as their male counterparts in assuming leadership and decision-making role. Their participation in politics helps advance gender equality and

affects both the range of policy issues that get considered and the types of solutions that are proposed. Research has indicated that whether a legislator is male or female, this has a distinct impact on their policy priorities. There is also strong evidence that as more women are elected to office, there is a corollary increase in policy making that emphasizes quality of life and reflects the priorities of families, women, and ethnic as well as racial minorities. It lowers down considerably the practice of discrimination and prejudice in societies, creating rooms for equity and justice in the world of freedom and human rights (Women Deliver 2018; Republic of Philippines 2022).

In the Gambia, women do not only engage in domestic work but largely take up roles as bread winners of their families. They engage in rural farming especially those in the remote regions to cultivate for subsistence living. On this account, women deserve to be placed on priorities regardless of culture and social inhibitions, to take up roles in the public service for their energetic physique and humane character. It is important in the spirit of human rights and freedom from slavery and inhuman domination (Women Deliver 2018).

#### *2.4. Supporting Women Participation in Party Politics in the Gambia*

Government and other stakeholders should invest in women. They should set up ambitious training and mentoring programs for them to be trained. Necessary legislations should be carved out to boost their recognitions and encouragements by removing their phobia. We should also establish quota or zipping system in order to ensure gender balanced lists for women. The women should be funded to contest. Violence against women such as sexual harassment, beating by men and over-denials of public good rights like political participation in party politics, viewed as only men's affairs should be discouraged and legislated against. Society should also change the "long hours" culture in politics so that women can be part and still manage their homes. Government should provide childcare facilities for children to be taken care of when mothers are away. Women should be encouraged to go for more education and political exposures that will provide them with the art of public behavior and practice (Women Deliver 2018; Republic of Philippines 2022).

### **3. Women Participation in Party Politics in the Gambia: A framework from the Gender Lenses**

Women participation as we understand it from the analysis above is known to be imperative to a viable and inclusive political process and good governance system in a state, particularly, in a state like the Gambia where women form the greater percentage of the entire population of the country. As a theory-building, this study employs the gender-based approaches to unveil and further authenticate the validity of this claim with a proof that is empirically supported for verification. According to this theory, equity and justice are paramount for considerations if a state is to progress with balance for sex representation that is unambiguous and non-discriminatory in nature. This is because, modern governance embraces democracy where respect for human rights and the rule of law are central and where constitutional provisions are made available to cover and protect the individual in the state for equal rights and even representation. It then forecloses that irrespective of your sex, tribal affiliation and religion, as far as you are a citizen, the individual is covered by law for equal representation rights. It is these rights and laws that leverage the justification for the application of gender balance (Jule in Michalos 2014).

Another justification is in the state policies made to protect women against gender discrimination and denial of opportunities in the public life. These policies as is the case in the Gambia, enunciated in the review above, sprang from the various international conferences on gender equation such as the Beijing Declaration on the status of women among others (Jule in Michalos 2014).

While gender theory is the study of what is understood as masculine and/or feminine and/or queer behavior in any given context, community, society, or field of study (including, but not limited to, literature, history, sociology, education, applied linguistics, religion, health sciences, philosophy, cultural studies, the term sex refers to categories of the biologically observable human body, female and male or intersex (i.e., nature), while the term gender refers to the categories of social expectations, roles, and behaviors, feminine and masculine (i.e., what is nurtured). As a matter of fact, some have however argued that even biological sex is socially constructed and that masculine and feminine behaviors may be deeply rooted in physiology as well as biology (Halberstam, 1998; Fausto-Sterling, 2000). The word gender can also be used as a morphological form in some languages (such as the masculine or feminine used for syntactic meaning as in French (Jule in Michalos 2014).

Gender theory developed in the academy during the 1970s and 1980s as a set of ideas guiding historical and other scholarship in the West. In social history it particularly thrived in the United States and Great Britain, with far fewer followers on the European continent. Essentially this theory proposed looking at masculinity and femininity as sets of mutually created characteristics shaping the lives of men and women. It replaced or challenged ideas of masculinity and femininity and of men and women as operating in history according to fixed biological determinants. In other words, removing these categories from the realm of biology, it made a history possible. For some, the idea of "gender history" was but another term for women's history, but for others gender theory transformed the ways in which they approached writing and teaching about both men and women. To some extent it may be hypothesized that the major change brought about by gender theory was that it complicated the study of men, making them as well as women gendered historical subjects (Smith 2019).

The relevance and or applicability of this theory to this study is its usefulness to explain the context for women participation in party politics in the Gambia and the alacrity for justification and validation. The theory provides a framework for the study exploration and assessments; the very basis for unearthing the rationale for women's involvements in partisan politics and public leadership in the government of the Gambia and perhaps elsewhere.

#### *3.1. Gender Equality Perspective Mainstreamed Into Policy Development for Critical Action: The Gambia Experience*

The analysis of the legal framework and governing documents of 7 out of the ten registered political parties in the Gambia reveals that only the PDOIS Constitution has a gender equality clause. The provision is for "equal male and female representation in the Central Committee from the seven administrative areas (ACDHRS 2012). Hence at each time there must be at least seven female representatives in the Central Committee, one from each region and one in Charge of the Bureau for Women and Child affairs". While the Constitutions of other parties for

example the APRC Constitution commit to “securing gender equality in all spheres of national endeavor and eliminating gender discrimination in all its forms and manifestations by providing equal opportunities for both men and women”, the provisions for women’s representation in the various organs of the party are not based on equal representation but on token numbers allocated to women in these structures. The only position that calls for equal representation of men and women in the organs of the APRC is that of Administrative Secretary which requires that one of the positions (First and Second Administrative Secretaries) must be held by a woman (ACDHRS 2012).

The creation of special positions for women on the organs of the party is the main measure that is used by political parties to promote women’s participation in the decision making structures of party. Women are represented on the National Executive Committees (NEC), Coordinating Committees at the central level and the Divisional Executive Committees at the decentralized levels. The level of participation differs from one party to the other. For example the UDP indicate that 35% of the membership of the Organizing Committee, Campaign Committee and Central Committees are women and 40% of the NEC (10 out of 25) are women<sup>3</sup>. The APRC makes provisions for the position of National Women’s Mobilizer, Assistant Women’s Mobilizer and Deputy National Mobilizer Women. The occupiers of these positions are members of the Constituency Executive Committee, the Divisional Executive Committee, the Coordinating Committee and the NEC. By default other women can be represented on these Committees through their Ministerial, National Assembly or other portfolios (ACDHRS 2012).

All the political parties have institutionalized women’s wings within their party machineries. The women’s wing is essential in terms of agenda setting and pushing for parity representation. All the political parties acknowledge the important role that the Women’s Wing play in mobilizing membership, fundraising, campaigning for and supporting candidates for elections who are mainly men. Despite this acknowledgement of the supportive role that women play in party politics, this has not been reciprocal as men have not supported women to attain leadership positions within political parties or to stand for elections (ACDHRS 2012). The women’s wings of political parties have given visibility to women and provided them a platform for participation but has not integrated them into central power structures. It is the only organ within the political party that has a 100% female representation as the only criterion for membership is being a woman (ACDHRS 2012).

All the parties have set targets for women’s participation in political conventions. The APRC makes provision for 5 delegates from the Youth and Women’s Wing to attend the Divisional Party Conference. They also have voting rights. The Divisional Conference precedes the National Congress. No targets are set for women’s representation at the National Congress but as all the organs of the party including Ministers and all Members of the Party’s National Assembly Group are voting delegates. As women are on these structures their participation is assured but not to the same levels as that of men as they are already under-represented in these structures. Gender neutral policies are applied in the selection of party’s candidates for elections. For example PDOIS holds primaries to elect the Presidential candidate. The person with the highest number of votes is the Party’s Presidential candidate. Candidates for National Assembly elections are selected by the party members in each constituency on consultation with members of the Central Committee. The Central Committee is required to work towards facilitating diversity at this level through gender, regional and ethnic balance (ADHRS 2012).

All the party manifestos commit to mainstreaming gender perspectives into development concerns. Human development, poverty alleviation and improving access to basic social services particularly for women are high on their agendas. Reducing illiteracy among women and ensuring their continuing education is seen as tool for attaining these targets. Social protection issues such as childcare and parental leave and human rights issues are addressed as well as physical concerns- reproductive rights, physical safety and gender-based violence and elimination of harmful traditional practices (ACDHRS 2012).

Women comprise more than 50 percent of the pool of those eligible to stand for election and hold political office in The Gambia but that proportion is not reflected in the composition of the National Assembly and other decision-making bodies (ACDHRS 2012). While the percentage of women in the National Assembly has grown over the past two decades, the pace of improvement has been slow; parity between men and women in parliament remains a long way off. The reasons for the low representation of women are multivariate. Some of these reasons contained in A Capacity Needs Assessment of Women in Decision Making undertaken by the Women’s Bureau in 2008 and reaffirmed in a recent workshop organized by the Female Lawyers Association of The Gambia (FLAG) include:

1. The non selection of women candidates for elections by political parties
2. Women shying away from presenting themselves as candidates for political leadership because they lack the self confidence and courage (borne out by the few women who contest elections) as they are unable to withstand the psychological and emotional stress of abusive and derogatory language used during political campaigns; they are also unable to face the shame of losing and consequently would rather not try than lose; they generally do not have the educational qualifications stipulated in the election laws or they simply cannot afford the actual and opportunity costs of election campaigns (ACDHRS 2012).

The outcomes of the 2012 National Assembly Elections attest to all of the above. Women were visibly absent from the process and this has translated to their under-representation in the 2012-2017 legislative body. Only the APRC fielded female candidates. The 3 female APRC candidates represented a slight increase 1 candidate (33%) increase over the previous legislative elections. With only 3 (6.25%) female candidates out of 48 elected positions this is a far cry from the 33% recommended in the Women’s Act. All the 3 women were elected (one was returned unopposed for the third time). Only one opposition party the NRP contested for the elections but did not put forward a female candidate. The other opposition parties in The Gambia did not present candidates as they had boycotted the 2012 National Assembly elections on the grounds that the playing field was not level (ADHRS 2012).

Because of the boycott 18 independent candidates emerged to contest the elections one of whom was female. The independent female candidate for Banjul Central lost the elections even though she performed quite well despite all the odds stacked against her-lack of backing of a political party and a hostile environment. This has greatly impacted on the diversity of the National Assembly in terms of gender representation and presence of opposition members. The current National Assembly consists of 53 members (48 directly elected seats and 5 appointed members). The distribution by sex is 7.55% women (3 elected and 1 appointed) and 92.45% (49) men. Women candidates are rare in opposition political parties especially at the grassroots level (ADHRS 2012).

Having failed to attain this important target of 33% female representation in the 2012 National Assembly elections it is now contingent upon the political parties to seize the opportunity to increase the participation of women in the upcoming local government elections scheduled to take place in 2013. The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Decision Making Project (2008) had paved the way for women to successfully stand for elections at the local government level by building their capacity through leadership training. This resulted in 28 female members contesting for the 2008 Local Government Authority (LGA) Elections (ACDHRS 2012).

Out of 28 female candidates who stood for elections 16 (57%) of them were elected. The increased participation of women in the LGAs notwithstanding this represents only 13.44% female representation as compared to 86.55% males. Even though male councilors greatly outnumber that of females this is a marked improvement on previous years when there were practically no women in LGA administration. Female representation in other governance structures at the decentralized level is abysmally low. There are no female Mayors or Chairpersons of Councils. Under the traditional leadership structures there are no women chiefs and out of the 1873 villages only 4 (0.20%) are headed by women<sup>4</sup>. Women are rare in opposition political parties at the grassroots level, as well as at the level of leading structures (ACDHRS 2012).

The low participation of women in the governance structures and at the political party level is a cause for concern and many organizations including the Women's Bureau, the ACDHRS and women rights NGOs supported by the UN agencies in The Gambia, the European Commission and OXFAM through the "Raising her voice" have implemented programmes and activities that are designed to increase women's participation in governance. Prior to the 2012 National Assembly elections, FLAG and the West Africa Network for Peace Building (WANEP) to name a few engaged with political parties and women's groups to encourage them to select women candidates and motivated potential women candidates to apply for selection by their parties. This however did not materialize due to the factors indicated in 4.10 above. There is also a bias in favour of men in the way that candidates are selected, as the parties would rather go for safe seats than field candidates on the basis of promoting gender equality (ACDHRS 2012).

#### **4. Recommendations and Useful Hints for Improved Women Participation in Party Politics and National Governance of the Gambia**

Despite incremental progress over the past 16 years the 7.55% of women parliamentarians remains well below the internationally agreed target of 30%. Where women constitute half the population in a political system like the Gambia which supports equality, fairness and equity, and where both women and men are legally eligible for political office, women's participation ought to be equal to that of men. As this is not the case in the Gambia, this signifies serious flaws in the political system and it must be addressed through institutional measures and appropriate legislations of the Acts of Assembly in consonance to global practices (ADHRS 2012; Omotosho 2017).

Representation is not only a means of ensuring individual participation. It is also the responsibility of the representatives to act on behalf of the constituents, including women, who elected them and reflect their ideas and aspirations. Women's disproportionate absence from the political process would mean that the concerns of half the population cannot be sufficiently attended to or acted upon (ADHRS 2012);

Political parties are important structures for policy development and for setting political priorities, and are therefore one of key institutions through which gender equality should be promoted. However, few of the political party manifestos and Constitutions that promote gender equality uphold these pledges in practice, and few women hold the top decision-making positions within their ranks (ADHRS 2012);

Political parties should move from rhetoric on gender equality to genuine reform agenda of their systems, structures, selection procedures and attitudes to make pave ways for even representation of women and men in positions of power and decision making. In addition, political parties should prioritize providing resources to women's wings in political parties so that they can fully carry out their mandate. For example for;

##### **4.1. Political Parties**

1. Women's wings should lobby their political parties to nominate women candidates to run for elections. This is because it is far more difficult to win elections without the backing of a political party, especially at the national level. Women seeking to enter into politics must turn to political parties and garner support from their female colleagues already established in women's wings.
2. Provide timely financial support for women contestants both in capacity building and during campaigning to address women candidates' relative lack of access to resources due to their low economic status. New candidates need exposure and understanding of the campaign strategy: this initial stage is normally self-sponsored and can disadvantage women who are not economically powerful.
3. Reviewing party political manifestos and the internal organization of political parties so that there are measurable and concrete indicators for increasing women's participation in the decision making processes at the party level and in the electoral processes at all levels.
4. Develop and maintain a database of viable potential female leaders and provide them with mentors consisting of past and present women politicians to groom the future women political leaders through one to one peer advisory sessions; training the identified female leaders on how to run effective campaigns and building their competencies in campaigning related topics (ACDHRS 2012; Omotosho 2017).

##### **4.2. For Government**

5. Law reforms are required in relation to Section 105 of the National Constitution to allow local languages to be used in the National Assembly; passing legislation on proportional representation and the Constitutional requirement (section 70) that political candidates should go on leave without pay for 1 year in order to be eligible to contest in an election should be also be amended to enable unsuccessful candidates to return to work immediately after elections. They should;
6. Apply the gender parity principle in all decision making bodies and political party candidate lists: This can be achieved by applying a quota system for women. This will
7. Require a review of the election act. Consultations on how this will be done will be necessary but the time to ACT is NOW. Lessons can be learnt from Rwanda – a country that is leading in this direction.



8. Level the playing field socially and economically: Gambian women have less access to resources than men in all aspects of life, including education, and therefore have fewer economic opportunities than their male counterparts. Lack of economic power has major implications for women in terms of accessing electoral positions, especially in relation to expenditure needs during campaigning.
9. Provide potential women candidates with the necessary resources—financial, technical and material—to mount a respectable campaign by so doing it is expected that they will perform better than they are doing now.
10. Training for all state organs such as the police, the security apparatus and the media to treat all political parties equally and to ensure their access to the state media without fear of intimidation and guarantee their safety and protection during campaigns.
11. Strengthen capacity of institutions such as the National Council on Civic Education so that citizen participation is enhanced and based on informed choices (ACDHRS 2012; Omotosho 2017).

#### *4.3. For Civil Society Organization (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs)*

12. There must be a behavioral change communication to bring about a change of mind set, attitudinal and behavior change towards women vying for political leadership for all political parties, the media and the State to combat the cultural practices that inhibits the participation of women.
13. Advocacy for law reforms in the following areas should be prioritized: advocate for legal and constitutional reforms especially those that militate against gender inequality and for implementation of a quota system which can be used as an opportunity to increase the number of women in political offices.
14. Build capacity of political parties through promotion of the human rights instruments that provide for women's increased participation in politics through training and engagement with the political party leaders on the need to implement the globally and nationally agreed targets.
15. Build strategic alliances: Religious leaders are an important ally as they can play a lead role in breaking down the myths and stereotypes surrounding women's participation in politics as this has been a major barrier in debarring women from political leadership (ACDHRS 2012).

#### *4.4. Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs)*

These organizations the world over must be prepared to;

16. Fund NGOs/CSOs and religious groups, support women's rights and women's empowerment programming through civic education, adult and non-formal education; constitutional and legislative reform, leadership training and gender training for governance structures at all levels.
17. Support South-South and North-South women's solidarity through experience-sharing and organized-networking on how best to push for more women participation in decision-making structures and on what works best in different contexts for women to be supported (ACDHRS 2012; Omotosho 2017).

## **5. Findings and Achievements of Objectives**

It is always important to ensure primary objectives of study are achieved and this aligns with the research questions. The findings carried out on this study were the level and dimension of women participation in Gambian party politics and its sustainability to achieve parity with men. Findings confirmed that women participation in party politics in the Gambia was real and is still in place through many legislative Acts in place by the government and the various consultancies carried out by development institutions and human rights centers like the African center for democracy and human rights based in the Gambia, the women rights bureaus and so on. However, in spite of all this, and despite spaces created in the political parties for women's increased roles, and their chances to contest elective positions, challenges still mar the optimum level of participation. Indeed, discriminatory measures were also induced to achieve this optimum; women are still behind men's participation level. This means, women participation in party politics is in existence both by law and by culture but the same culture and social instincts still in place in communities are still largely effective to hinder women's optimum involvements.

On the foregoing, therefore, and after critical investigative explorations and analysis carried out through this study, party politics in the Gambia is still not all-inclusive and gender-friendly. Challenges like cultural affinities, social instincts and men's domineering power—plays and patriarchy still mar women's chances for full competitions. This connotes that for a fairer democracy to be attained these challenges must still be addressed and further government actions and the efforts of the stakeholders are still germane to make this to work and to sustain the trend. The current measures by the government since 1997 to date in place to meet the global targets being anticipated are not sufficient to achieve the sustainability of women's participation level in party politics and this must be reviewed periodically. This development informed the various recommendations made to make the suggestions above work. The Gambia is still below the average level of participation by women in party politics as is the case with most sub-Saharan countries like Nigeria unlike countries like India and Europe. With more efforts by the stakeholders, the Gambia will attain the global targets as well.

## **6. Summary and Conclusions**

This study had investigated women's participation level in party politics in the Gambia basically to determine and/or establish its dimensions, dynamics and patterns, the role of the government and other stakeholders and development partners. The study had examined whether party politics in the Gambia is all-inclusive and gender-friendly. It had surveyed the challenges obscuring the process and progress women's participation level and how it can be improved overtime.

Findings confirmed that party politics in the Gambia is still not all-inclusive with women falling short of activeness despite having dominance in population and despite increases in education for them and the various policy measures that the government had put in place to remedy the problem. These according to study is not unconnected with the patriarchy structure in place in the communities, the cultural and social factors among inherent in the society and the need for more legislations that are gender-inclined to be sponsored and concerted efforts by public-private partnerships to promoting female-friendly governance and party-making affairs in general. This will give room for a political, social and economic sustainable government from the grass root to the center.

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