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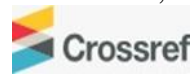
Education as an Instrument for Ensuring the Participation of Women in Politics for the Attainment of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on Gender Equality: *Empirical Lessons from Bafut in the North West Region of Cameroon*



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Abstract

Purpose: This write-up has been provoked by the gender disparity which prevails in political participation between men and women. While noting that women's participation in politics is low as compared to that of men, the article has been premised on the hypothesis that education is the only instrument that can ensure equal participation of women and men in politics.

Materials and Methods: Methodologically, the write up relied on the descriptive research design. While relying on this design, the sample size was 380 women in Bafut. These women were randomly sampled and administered questionnaires, with a response rate of 81.84% (311). Data were also collected through secondary sources from published and unpublished books. In this light, data collected through questionnaires were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), while qualitative data obtained from secondary sources were analyzed contently, by extracting relevant data to support the research questions

Findings: While relying on empirical observations from Bafut in the North West

Region of Cameroon, it is evident that women's participation in politics is significantly influenced by their level of education. The more education of women is the more the likelihood they are to participate in political activities, such as membership in political parties, voting, attending campaign rallies, petitioning an official, and attending a protest or strike action.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: This article has resolved that for Goal 5 of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of gender equality in political participation to be attainable; there is an urgent need for the government, municipal authorities, the civil society, and local traditional authorities to harness all avenues to foster the education of women and their political knowledge.

Keywords: *Education, political participation, Sustainable Development Goals, Gender Equality*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Political participation is a core element in the advancement of democracy. It is one of the main ways through which citizens are empowered to engage in activities affecting their welfare. These activities include voting, petitioning a public official, joining a campaign rally, strikes, and demonstrations. Despite the relevance of political participation, many scholars have over the years been concerned about the apathy of certain categories of persons, such as women in most aspects of political life. Authors like Khan (2010) have argued that besides other factors like income, age, and gender, education remains one of the prime determinants for women's participation in politics at large and leadership positions in particular. Also, American sociologists, like Burns, Schozmann & Verba (2001) as cited in Sahu (2018, pp 65-66) in their research on factors influencing men's and women's political participation in the USA have resolved that education remains an inevitable instrument for political participation. According to their findings, education has both direct and indirect effects on political participation.

The direct effects include the acquisition of knowledge and communication skills essential for a public date and direct training in the analysis of political issues and current events. Indirect effects on the other hand include: the benefits of voluntary engagement in school governments, clubs, sports, and school newspapers. They also provide a political field for young people with an early apprenticeship for politics, where they can exercise leadership, develop civic skills for cooperation and negotiation, and acquire bureaucratic and organizational skills essential for political activities (ibid).

Several legislations have been designed to encourage women's political participation. The most highly heralded among them is the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs were institutionalized in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) as part of its Post-2015 Development Agenda, which was aimed at creating a future global development framework to succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which ended in that year (Biermann, Kanie & Kim, 2017). These were adopted in a UNGA Resolution known as the 2030 Agenda called Agenda 2030 (United Nations, 2015). As such, on July 6th, 2017, the SDGs were concretized by a UNGA Resolution, which identified specific targets for each goal and provides indicators to measure progress (United Nations, 2017). In sum, the SDGs are a collection of seventeen interrelated objectives designed to serve as a blueprint for global peace, development, and prosperity for people and the planet, now and in the future. It largely focuses on amongst other things no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, reduced inequalities, peace, justice, and strong institutions.

Goal 5 of the SDGs remains outstanding as it advocates for gender equality by outlining five targets as follows: end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere; eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation; eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation; recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate; and to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life (UNDP, 2018). In addition to this, this goal has further advocated for the adoption and strengthening of sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels (ibid). Significant to this

goal is the fact it urges for women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making.

Besides the mentioned UN SDG, other legal instruments exist advocating for women's participation in politics: At the *international level*, the other relevant ones include: the 1945 United Nations Charter, which advocates for rights and freedoms should not be limited by a person's gender; the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which advocates for equality of all human beings; the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which in **Article 7** calls on state parties to take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country; the 1990 UN Economic and Social Council Resolution 1990/15, which calls on governments, political parties, trade unions, and other groups to adopt a 30% minimum proportion of women's leadership positions; the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, which advocates for the participation of women in power and decision making at all levels; and the 2003 UN General Assembly Resolution on women's political participation (A/RES/58/142), which in **Article 1(e)** aims to promote the goal of gender balance in all public positions, and for women have a fair and equal opportunity to compete for elective and non-elective positions. At the *regional level*, the main African legislations regulating women's political participation are the 2007 African Charter for Democracy, Elections, and Governance, which calls for equal participation of men and women in elections and governance; and the 2007 African Charter on Human Rights and People's Rights (ACHPR) on the Rights of women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), which in **Article 9.1** calls on state parties to take specific positive action to promote participative governance and the equal participation of women in the political life of their countries. At the national level, the main instruments regulating women's participation in politics in Cameroon include: Amended 1996 Cameroon Constitution, which in its preamble stipulates that all persons have equal rights and obligations; the state shall ensure the protection of minorities; and the April 15th, 2019 Cameroon Electoral Code, which in **Article 151(3)** argues that the Constitution of each list must take into account the different sociological components.

Bafut, which is the focus of this write-up, is a sub-division found in the Mezam Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. It occupies a land area of 450 square kilometres with a population estimated at over 61 315 as per the 2005 Cameroon Population Census and ranks amongst the biggest and most powerful traditional kingdoms of the Western grass fields (Nebane, 2021, pp 17-18). The main economic activity in this area is agriculture, and given the educational sector, there is a gender disparity between men and women. The literacy rate is higher amongst men than women. Being a purely patriarchal-oriented society, women's engagement in political life is limited. Public affairs are seen as the prerogative of men. This is based on the traditional and customary beliefs within this community, where women are considered property in the hands of men.

Despite the existence of Goal 6 of the UN SDG advocating for gender equality and equal participation for men and women in particular, it should be underlined here that political participation amongst women in Bafut varies according to their rate of education. The higher the educational level of women the more they are likely to engage in politics and the lower the educational level of women, the less they are likely to engage in politics. This is a clear picture of what operates in Bafut according to women's engagement in politics. This, therefore, remains a call for concern. It is on this basis that this present paper has focused on the following specific research questions:

1. How has the level of women's education affected their participation in Bafut?
2. How can formal education be harnessed and/or strengthened to ensure inclusive and effective participation of women in politics?

In view of the aforementioned, the problem statement this write up seeks to reconcile is the low participation of women in politics in Bafut despite the existence of an international instrument like Goal 6 of the UN SDG, which propagates for gender equality between men and women.

Theoretical Consideration

The Sociological Theory

The article is analyzed from the perspective of Sociological Theory. The classical underlying assumption of this theory is based on three essential works, namely, *The People's Choice* of Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet in 1944; *Voting of Berelson, Larsfeld, and Mcphee* in 1954; and the *Personal Influence* of Katz and Lazarsfeld in 1955. These works were all carried out in the Applied Bureau of Social Research of Columbian University (Sarlamano & Javano, 2014, p 1). This theory focuses on the group basis of political participation.

It argues that although people participate in politics on an individual basis, their decisions can not entirely be dissociated from collective characteristics such as social status, friendship, and other interactions. According to the advocates of this theory, a citizen's adherence to certain social strata can be a significant determinant of his/her political preferences. In brief, this approach holds that certain underlying social characteristics of the citizens the likes of class, religion, and educational level are crucial determinants for their political participation. Citizens' behaviour to participate in politics is determined by the social grouping to which they belong as supported by Sarlamano & Javano follows: "*... politics is based on social cleavage, based on which the political energy in the society is mobilized, and canalized in political subjects through which the social groups protect their interests. In this manner, politics is a matter of group interests. Since social groups are not political actors, they are represented by political organizations...*" (ibid, p 18).

In sum, this theory maintains that the participation of citizens in politics is a function of their sociological groupings in terms of socioeconomic status, religion, place of residence, and education. This theory has been criticized for ignoring other significant variables for the determinants of political behaviour such as economic considerations, political manifestoes, the media, the country's economic situation, and the context of the relationship between political parties and the citizens (Sarlamano & Javano, Op Cit.,p 153). Despite these criticisms, the sociological determination of political participation according to their group interest cannot be minimized. This is because the educational status of women in Bafut is a strong determining factor for their interest and participation in political activities.

3.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This segment is comprised of a research design, the population, sample size, sampling technique, and method of data collection and analysis.

The Research Design

The study used the Descriptive Survey Research Design because it gives room for information to be collected from a small segment of the population, which can be generalized. Also, this research design is suitable as it makes use of data collection instruments like questionnaires.

The Study Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Technique

The study population comprised all women in Bafut. As per the 2005 Cameroon population census, the total population of women in Bafut is estimated at 28, 752. Based on this population, the sample size was determined using the Kjecie and Morgan Table for the determination of Sampling Size. According to this Table, a population estimate of about 30,000 has a representative sample size of 379. On this basis and to have a high representation, the sample size was established at 380. With regards to the Sampling Technique, the Randomised technique was used to determine the target women population. This technique was suitable for this study because it provided a chance for all women in Bafut to be sampled.

Data Collection Instruments

Data for this study was collected with the use of questionnaires and observations. 380 questionnaires were randomly administered to women. These questionnaires sought to investigate the rate of women's participation in politics in line with their educational level. It comprised three sections: Section A was based on their demographic characteristics; Section B on their rate of participation in politics; and Section C on the factors motivating and constraining them from political participation. In all, 380 questionnaires were administered, while 311 of them were returned, giving a response rate of 81.84%, which is more than half of the targeted population. Data was also collected from secondary sources. This was done through the consultation of published and unpublished documents. The website of the Bafut Council, as well as its official Facebook Page, was also resourceful in this light.

Methods of Data Analysis

Data collected through questionnaires were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), while qualitative data obtained from secondary sources were analyzed contently, by extracting relevant data to support the research questions. This was done thematically according to the questionnaires. Based on the data collected, the other demographic characteristics of women in Bafut are summarized as indicated in Table 1:

Table 1: Demographic Presentation of Women in Bafut

Variables	Level	Frequency	Percentage
Age	<20	62	20.25
	21-30	91	29.26
	31-40	62	19.93
	41-50	81	26.04
	51+	15	4.82
Marital status	Married	212	68.16
	Single	81	26.04
	Divorced	07	2.25
	Widows	11	3.53
Profession	Farming	113	36.33
	Teaching	93	29.90
	Business	41	13.18
	Student	51	16.39
	Others	13	4.18

Source: Field Survey (2023)

An analysis of the respondents' demographic profile shows the following: data showed that 20.25% are below 20 years; 29.26% are between the age ranges of 21-30; 19.93% are aged 31-40; 26.04% are between the age range of 41-50; while 4.18% are from 50 years and above. This means that majority of women are youths, between the age range of 20 to 30 years old. According to marital status, the data reveals that 68.165 are married; 26.04% are singles; 2.25% are divorced; and 3.53 are widows. Majority of women in Bafut are married. In terms of profession, 36.33% are farming; 29.90% are teaching; 13.18% are into business; 16.39% are students; while 4.18% noted that they are either unemployed or into other professions. As such, most women in Bafut are farmers. Besides this demographic presentation, the succeeding section has focused on how the relationship between women's level of education and their participation in politics.

Education as a Key Determinant for Political Participation among Women in Bafut

Education remains a core determinant for political participation in any political system. It is the process through which individuals are made functional members of their society (Ocho, 2005). In every society, education connotes the acquisition of something good, something worthwhile. Burns, Schlozman & Verba (2001) assert, that education is an essential powerful predictor of political participation. It inculcates interest in political matters, and educated women would be more adept to seek elective office. Education, therefore, plays an important part in shaping one's life. In colonial times only those parents who converted to Christianity tended to appreciate the importance of formal education and were usually taught welfare and domestic subjects, such as cookery, tailoring, home science, and such subjects, meant to prepare them to be housewives and mothers. This educational system failed to empower women as equal to men in the public and development arena (Synder & Tadesse 1995).

Education increases the likelihood that women will look after their wellbeing including that of their family. There are also other effects associated with education that suggests a change in power relations within and outside the household, educated women participate more in decision-making issues than those who are not, and education increases the capacity of women to be able to deal with the outside world including government officials and service providers of all kinds (Kabeer,2005).As such, to determine the rate at which education has influenced women's political participation in Bafut, it is significant to note that most women in Bafut have the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Certificate at the Ordinary Levels as illustrated below:

Table 2: Bafut sub-division of Cameroon female educational level

SN	Educational level	Frequency	Percentage
1	No formal education	13	4.18
2	First school leaving certificates	51	16.39
3	G.C.E O levels	112	36.01
4	G.C.E A levels	60	19.29
5	University degree and above	75	24.11
Total		311	100

Source: *Fieldwork (2023)*

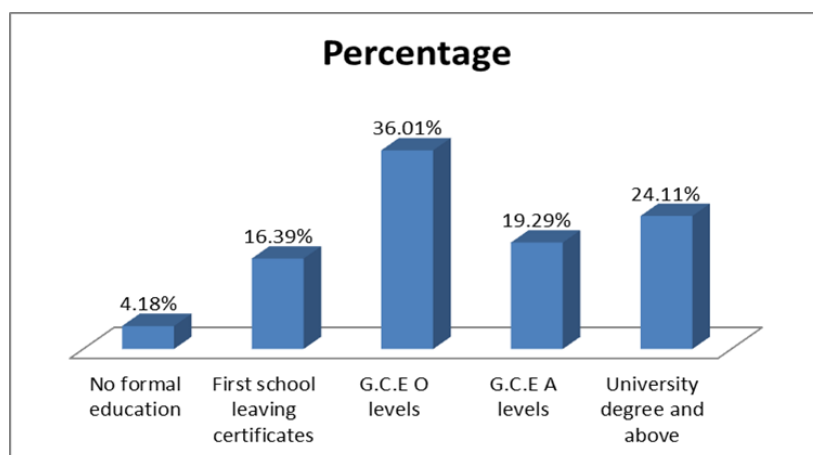


Figure1: Distribution of Women of the Bafut by Educational Level

These results indicate that only about 4.18% of the respondents have no formal Education; 16.39% with First school leaving Certificate; 36.01% with GCE O/L; 19.29% with GCE A/L and 21.11% having a first degree and above. The educational level that has the highest proportions of respondents is the GCE ordinary level which is the results possessed by 36.01%. This thus indicates that the women of the Bafut sub-division of Cameroon are fairly exposed to formal education as indicated above. This thus directs us to the following question: *to what extent has this formal education affected the participation of these women in political activities?* The answer to this interrogation is thus demonstrated in Table 3 below:

Formal Education as a Determinant for High Political Participation among Educated Women in Bafut

With regards to the relationship between the participation of women of the Bafut sub-division of Cameroon and their educational level, the results are summarized below.

Table 3: Various Types of Women's Participation in Politics Based on the Educational Level in Bafut

SN	Index of political participation	Response	Level of Education				
			No Formal Education	FSLC	GCE OL	GCE AL	University Degree and above
1	Registered membership of a political party	Yes	04	13	47	57	59
		No	09	38	65	03	16
2	Voted in previous elections	Yes	06	19	67	47	67
		No	07	32	45	13	08
3	Occupation of political post	Yes	00	00	01	03	06
		No	13	51	111	57	69
4	Attended political campaigns	Yes	06	32	57	55	47
		No	07	19	55	05	28
5	Petitioned a political and/or an administrative official	Yes	00	00	06	07	13
		No	13	51	106	53	62
6	Participated in a strike and/or demonstration	Yes	09	45	94	56	67
		No	04	6	18	04	08

Source: Fieldwork Survey (2023)

From Table 3 it could be observed that women's participation in politics in Bafut is influenced by their educational background. Majority of those participating in political activities have at least a First school leaving certification. This Table also denotes that education has over the years, influenced the participation of women in Bafut in different political activities, as discussed as follows:

Women's Participation as Members/Militants of Political Parties

A political party has been defined variously by different political scientists and scholars. According to De Grazia (1962, 9 194), it is: "*a voluntary society of propaganda and agitation, seeking to acquire the power to procure chances for its active militant adherents to realize objective aims, or personal advantages, or both*". Similarly, Oyedepo (2014, p 4) defines it as an organized group of people who come together to pursue specific policies and objectives, with the motive of taking control of state power by acting together as an apolitical unit. This definition distinguishes political parties from pressure groups and other groupings from two main dimensions as follows: primo, that political parties have clearly stated ideologies, and secundo, that political parties contest in political elections primarily to enable them to gain political power.

To Hofmeister & Grabow (2011, pp 11-13), political parties can be understood as permanent associations of citizens who are based on free membership and a program, and who are anxious to occupy a political position through the path of elections. According to these authors, six criteria exist to identify a political party as follows: it strives to influence the formation of political opinion and aims to have a general political impact; it is an association of citizens holding individual memberships; it has to demonstrate the will to consistently take part in the political representation of the people during elections; it has to be an independent and permanent organization; it shall not be formed only for one election and ceases to exist afterwards; it must be willing to appear in public and it does not necessarily need to win a seat in parliament, but it has to fulfil all the other criteria.

Political parties provide an entry path into formal politics. As an agent of political socialization, political parties provide the platform for people to be recruited and trained for different political offices. This thus implies that political parties play a political recruitment function. Party membership is often open to both genders. In Bafut, women especially the educated are militants of political parties. Their membership or militancy per se, constitutes a key aspect of conventional political participation. The main political parties that over the years have branches and members in Bafut include the following, the Social Democratic Front (SDF), the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) Party; the National Union for Democracy and Progress (NUDP); the Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC); the Social Liberal Congress (SLC); the Peoples Action Party (PAP); the Cameroon Democratic Union (CDU); and the Cameroon Renaissance Movement (CRM). These political parties have the women's wing where many women militate. The SDF party has the socialist women, while the CPDM has the WCPDM (Women's wing of the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement).

Women's Participation in Electoral Campaigns/Rallies

Women in Bafut attend campaigns and/or political rallies. This is very common during periods of election campaigns. These are periods where political parties and contesting candidates seek to market their political programs to electors to vote for them. Electoral campaign periods have certain characteristics which according to Mengnjo (2018) include the following: "*It has specific aims and is planned to achieve these; it has a definite time-span, usually short; it is intensive and aims at wide coverage; its effectiveness is, in principle, open to assessment; it*

usually has authoritative sponsorship; it is not necessarily popular with its audience and has to be sold to them; it is usually based on a framework of shared values. The campaign generally works to achieve objectives which in themselves are not controversial voting...education".

From the legal point of view, election campaign periods in Cameroon are regulated by the 2012 Electoral Code. According to section 87 (1) of this law, the election campaign in Cameroon shall begin on the 15th day preceding the election and closes at midnight on the eve of the election. During election campaigns, political parties and candidates are encouraged to prepare circulars, manifestoes, and posters at their own or their party's expense. These circulars and manifestoes following Section 87(4) are supposed to be designed in the colours chosen by the candidates or their parties bearing the initials to print their ballot papers.

The size of campaign posters is determined by the Directorate General of Elections. Similarly, campaign posters and manifestoes must be endorsed by ELECAM for them to be considered legal. In any case, this endorsement can be rejected if the circular, manifesto, or poster is tantamount to a call for violence or undermines the national territorial integrity, the Republican form of the State, State sovereignty, national unity, or incites hatred against a State official or a citizen or a body of citizens. This implies that, posters and manifestoes not endorsed by ELECAM and which are tantamount to inciting violence can be confiscated by any administrative authority. Following section 91 (1), it is the responsibility of ELECAM council branches to provide spaces for every candidate to display their campaign posters during election campaign periods. This depicts that, it is forbidden for political parties or candidates to post circulars and manifestoes in spaces not reserved for them or reserved for other candidates and parties.

ELECAM has the right to order any unlawful poster to be removed. The law also forbids the circulation of campaign posters, ballot papers, or campaign materials on Election Day according to section 92(1) 300. By Section 93, political parties and candidates authorized to run for elections may organize meetings to explain and present their election platforms and manifestoes during election campaign periods. Such meetings are supposed to be brought to the notice of administrative authorities and ELECAM at least 24 hours before the meeting can take place, indicating the time and venue. The law is also clear that, campaign meetings may not be authorized by administrative authorities to hold on public highways.

Women's Participation in Voting

Although official statistics do not exist to demonstrate electoral participation according to gender in Bafut, it is worth noting that women in Bafut also take part in choosing their representatives and leaders during any organized elections in Cameroon. As a form of conventional political participation, women in Bafut have been voting in two different types of elections, which are organized at the local and national levels. Local elections are organized to choose local representatives and officials. These elections are organized to choose local officials in the parliament and regional and local councils.

Legislative elections in Cameroon are organized to elect members into the lower house called the National Assembly and into the upper house called the Senate (Article 14 (1) of 1996 Amended Constitution of Cameroon). The National Assembly is composed of 180 members, who are elected for a five years mandate and eligible for re-election (Section 148(2) of the Electoral Code). They are chosen through a secret direct universal suffrage. These elections are organized at divisional levels, which are the electoral constituencies (Section 149(1) of the Electoral Code), but certain electoral constituencies could be created through a presidential decree (Section 149(1) of the Electoral Code).

They are elected through a list system, where contesting political parties present the list of their candidates of the same number to electors (Section 151(1) of the Electoral Code). The election of members into the National Assembly takes place via a mixed single-round ballot, comprising a majority system and a proportional representation system (Section 152(1) of the Electoral Code). This entails that, the list which obtains an absolute majority of the votes cast is declared the winner, and in cases where no list obtains an absolute majority of the votes cast, the list which obtains the highest number of votes cast is allocated half of the seats (Section 152 (3,4 and 5) of the Electoral Code).

On the other side, the Senate in Cameroon is composed of 100 members. Each region is represented in the Senate by 10 senators, 7 of whom are elected by indirect universal suffrage on a regional basis, while the remaining 3 are appointed by a presidential decree. They are elected and appointed for a five years mandate eligible for re-election (Section 214 (1,2,3 and 4) of the Electoral Code). Senatorial elections are organized at regional levels, which constitute the electoral constituencies (Section 217(1) of the Electoral Code). Senators are elected through a list system (Section 217(2) of the Electoral Code), where political parties participating in the election present the full list of 7 candidates selected from among its members (Section 218(2) of the Electoral Code). This election takes place through a mixed single-round ballot, comprising a majority system and a proportional representation system (Section 218(1) of the Electoral Code). A list that obtains an absolute majority of the votes cast is declared the winner of all the 7 seats, and in case no list obtains an absolute majority of the votes cast, the list with a relative majority shall be awarded half of the seats (Section 218 (4,5,6,7,8 and 9) of the Electoral Code).

Municipal councillors in Cameroon are elected for a five years mandate through a secret direct universal suffrage which is renewable (Section 169(1 and 2) of the Electoral Code). Each council area constitutes an electoral constituency. Voting of municipal councillors is through the list system, where competing parties submit the list of their candidates to the electorate. They are elected via a mixed single-round ballot, which is composed of a majority system and a proportional representation system (Section 172(1) of the Electoral Code). A list that obtains an absolute majority of the votes cast is declared the winner of all the seats, and in a situation where no list obtains an absolute majority of the votes cast, the list that obtains the highest number of votes is allocated half of the seats (Section 172(2) of the Electoral Code). The presidential election is organized at the national level to elect the President of the Republic. The President is elected for a 7 years mandate by direct universal suffrage through a secret ballot, which is eligible for re-election (Section 116(1 and 2) of the Electoral Code). He or she is elected by a single round ballot, and the candidate who obtains a majority of the votes cast is declared elected (Section 116(3 and 4) of the Electoral Code).

Women's Occupation of Political Offices

Women's representation and participation in frontline leadership remains a challenge the world over. This has remained the concern of policymakers and researchers as women constitute 49.5% of the world's population (Country Meters, March 2023). Besides top political offices within party structures, other political elective positions in Cameroon at the local level are those to elect municipal and regional councillors and members of parliament. Given women's representation in councils, Out of 360 Mayors, 35 of them are women. Since the creation of the Bafut Council in 1993 via Presidential Decree No. 93/321 of 23/11/1993 and operation in 1996, the council has never had a female mayor. It was only during the years 2007 to 2012 that the council had the first deputy mayor, that is, Mrs Ngwa Comfort Lem, as the 3rd Deputy

Mayor, out of three deputies. This was the same scenario from 2013 to 2020, as Mrs Ngwa Confort Lem maintained her place as 3rd deputy mayor when the number of deputies was increased to four as per the 2004 Laws laying down councils in Cameroon.

From 2020 till date, the number of women in the Bafut Council has increased. Of the 35 municipal councillors, 12 are women, and from the four deputy mayors, 2 are women, as summarized in the following table:

Table 4: Representation of Women in the Bafut Council as Councillors and Deputy Mayors

Gender/Office	Municipal Councillors	Mayor	Deputy Mayors
Male	23	01	02
Female	12	0	02
Total	35	1	04

Source: <https://www.bafutcouncil.net/board/>

The main women who occupy elective leadership political and administrative positions as deputy mayors in the Bafut council are Lum Eps Chesi Miriam Njibamum, who is the first deputy mayor, and Ambe Petoline Bih, who is the 3rd deputy mayor. These women were elected during the 2020 municipal elections. At the level of parliament, women in Bafut have never been elected into either the National Assembly or the Senate. Nevertheless, looking at the national figures, out of 180 members of the national assembly, 61 are women; and out of 100 in the Senate, 26 are women as illustrated in the Table below:

Table 5: Gender Representation in the Cameroonian Parliament

SN	Gender	Parliament	
		National Assembly (Lower House)	Senate (Upper House)
01	Men	119	74
02	Women	61	26
Total		180	100

Source: National Assembly (2023)

Petitioned a Political and/or Administrative Official

Women in Bafut have been noted to have been instrumental in working together with the men in petitioning political and/or administrative officials regarding issues affecting their general interest as a community. During the colonial era, for example, the entire population of Bafut, with women inclusive petitioned the then British Administration against the conduction of a plebiscite to determine their future. In what was entitled: “*Petition from the Bafut Population Concerning the Cameroons under British Administration*” addressed to the President of the United Nations General Assembly New York on 6th October 1957, the Bafut population noted as follows: *Bafut population protested rigorously against Foncha and Endeleys proposal asking trusteeship agreements practice stop condemns more colonialism in Kamerun stop condemns once more that is against Article 5 said Trusteeship agreement stop wishes plebiscite question integration or reunification respectfully*”(UN Trusteeship Council, Petition from the Bafut Population Concerning the Cameroons under British Administration, T/PET.4/L.64 COUNCIL 8 October 1959). With the outbreak of the ongoing armed conflict which began in the English-speaking regions in 2016, Bafut women at the individual and collective level have been able to partition administrative and political authorities as well as non-state armed groups to seek lasting solutions to this conflict, which has claimed thousands of lives. At the collective

level, Bafut women have joined their voices with women-led civil society organizations under the banner of the South West North West and Women's Task Force in petitioning both state and non-state armed groups and actors to seek lasting solutions to end this armed conflict.

Participated in a Strike and/or Protests

Bafut women have been very instrumental in most protests in Cameroon. This in particular was visible during the rebirth of political pluralism in Cameroon. Their role during this era was visible following the creation of the women's movement called the "*Takumbeng*". The "*Takumbeng*" name originated from the Society of Princes in the Bafut fondom (Fonchingong & Tanga, 2007), and in the wake of the reintroduction of political pluralism in Cameroon, it was able to extend its tentacles by bringing in activists from at least sixteen different fondoms from Akum, Bambili, Bambui, Kedjom Keku, Kedjom Ketinguh, Mendankwe, Chomba, Mbatu, Nkwen, and Santa. The group is composed of mostly urbanites from these ethnic groups around Bamenda (ibid). The women were mostly post-menopausal women who it was believed had given birth and need not be carefully protected against witchcraft or a sorcerer's harmful medicines which can cause infertility, stillbirths, or physically deformed children (ibid). Following the turbulent years of the 1990s, these women protested naked with "*peace plants*" in the main town of Bamenda and other areas of the North West Region against high human rights violations.

In the wake of the ongoing armed conflict in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon, which began in 2016, women in Bafut have participated in diverse protests against the marginalization of the Anglophones in a predominantly French administration. On August 24, 2022, dozens of women in Mambu village in Bafut protested against the killing of a 24 years old boy by the military at mile 11. The deceased had travelled from Douala to come to spend some time with his family (Mbah, 2022). Bafut women have also joined other women under the South West North West Women's Task Force in Bamenda, the Divisional capital to protest against high human rights violations in general and against women in the ongoing armed conflict in the English-speaking regions. In this light, they have been able to protest against the shutdown of schools, the killing of unarmed civilians, and the burning and destruction of both public and private property.

Strengthening Formal Education to Ensure the Effective and Inclusive Participation of Women in Politics

From the analysis above, it has been established that women's level of education has a significant positive relationship on their political participation. This thus implies that the more educated women are, the more they are predisposed to participate in political activities. As such, in order to encourage their participation at all levels, there is the urgent need for formal education to be strengthened in the following ways:

The Organization of Local Capacity-Building Training Targeting Illiterate Women

Since all women are not privileged to attain formal education, there is a need for the government and other political actors at the local level to organize capacity-building seminars at the local level in their "*local languages or dialects*" aimed at targeting illiterate women who have never gone to school. These seminars should focus on building their capacities on the necessity for them to see the need of engaging in political activities, especially at their grassroots levels. Through these seminars, women who have never had the opportunity of going to school could be empowered with the political knowledge that could enable them to actively take part in the politics of their communities.

Cooptation of Women by Political Parties and Actors

Political parties remain the practical path through which people partake in formal politics in Cameroon. As such, there is a need for political parties to coopt women into the key decision-making organs of their party structures. This move can go a long way in empowering women politically to seek elective positions in municipal councils and the parliament.

Building the Capacities of Traditional Authorities on the Relevance of Women's Education

Traditional authorities remain the custodian of customary practices. Customary practices that consider women as properties are mostly against attempts to educate women. In this light, there is a need for more capacity-building seminars/workshops to be organized to further build the capacities of traditional authorities to be promoters of women's education in their local communities. Empowering the capacities of traditional authorities on the relevance of women's education can serve as a springboard to furthering the education of women.

Building the Capacities of Men on the Relevance of Educating Women and Ensuring Their Participation in Public Life

In patriarchal societies like Bafut where women in most rural localities are hindered from going to school and participating in public affairs like contesting for elective offices, there is a need for political actors like Elections Cameroon and political parties to organize capacity-building seminars targeting men. Through these seminars, men should be made to understand the relevance of empowering and mainstreaming women into key elective political offices. This training can go a long way in eradicating the ethnocentric view held by most men that women are "politically weak" in contesting for elective positions as candidates.

3.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Political participation has remained the concern of many political scientists over the years. One of these key concerns has been linked towards women's political participation. In comparison to the male, women's participation is still limited. This accounts for why International Organisations like the United Nations framed the SDGs at large and Goal 5 in particular. This goal calls for state parties to ensure gender equality amongst other things in the political field between men and women. Women's political participation in Bafut from empirical observation is a function of their educational level. The more educated a woman is, the likelihood that she is willing to participate in various aspects of politics, such as voting, contesting in elections, petitioning a political official, and attending campaign rallies and protests or strikes. This thus implies that the less educated a woman is, the likelihood is that she is not often willing to participate in politics.

Recommendations

The write above has been able to establish that political participation among women in Bafut is still too low especially among the less educated women. This depicts that women with formal education, who constitute the minority engage more in political activities than the less educated. This this goes against Goal 5 of the UN SDG because it advocates for equal gender equality in participation and not only limited to educational level. As such, it should be underlined here that for Goal 5 of ensuring gender equality in political participation, there is an urgent need for education amongst women to be encouraged by the government, political

parties, pressure groups, and municipal and traditional authorities. Education from this perspective should be focused on the transmission of political knowledge. Besides capacity building, women should also develop the political will to partake in politics. As political parties as inevitable political actors there are also encouraged to endorse more women for political elective and appointed positions.

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