



### **GENDER DIFFERENTIALS IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE SOUTH WEST REGION OF CAMEROON: THE IMPLICATIONS ON WOMEN DEVELOPMENT**

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#### **Abstract**

*In the wake of democratic governance across nations of the world, gender differentials in political participation have been a subject of debate. This study argues that although there are constitutional provisions and public policies which guarantee equal participation in the political process in Cameroon, gender differentials still persist. The paper uses data from a survey conducted in the South West region in 2012. After examining basic patterns of differences in participation in political activities, it used the chi square test to determine the relationship between gender and political participation in the South Western region of the country. The findings show that there are gender differences in political participation in the region with more men being actively involved than women. It also found that there is high tendency for more women to engage in politics related activities with improved political structure and processes in the region. The study recommends among others that government at all levels should apart from their women empowerment agenda; provide a level playing ground that could enthrone gender equity. Yet, the introduction of policy and programmes that would ensure active engagement of the women population in economic activities is imperative.*

**Keywords:** Feminism, Effective, Equity, Political Activities, Service Delivery

#### **Introduction**

In recent times, nations of the world have witnessed increased discussions and heated debates on gender issues with emphasis on women liberation, emancipation, empowerment, protection of the rights of women, the rights of lesbians, rights of gay, bisexual and transgender issues. These gender discussions and debates have been devoted to gender identity and gender representation (gender identity refers to the simple ability to label oneself man or woman. While gender representation relates to one's ability to control or influence decision making in terms of resource and political control). Generally, men and women differ in their activities regarding access and control over

resources, participating in decision processes and in addition are involved in social and political activism.

In the wake of democratic governance, gender discrimination remains a major issue in political processes and socio-economic development in most societies in the globe. This brings into question, the representative nature of existing political structures. In view of the various forms of discrimination inherent in gender studies, this study looks at the level of gender differences in political participation and the implication on women. Available data on gender and participation in politics and positions of power, decision making in the public and private spheres and civil societies demonstrate that despite efforts, initiatives and operational strategies put in place, resistance to the advancement of women in positions and professions and fields traditionally dominated by men still persist with the gap seriously working against women. Example, at global level, the gender gap in parliamentary seats revealed that women constitute 19.2% in the House of Representatives, and 17.8% in the senate. (Inter-parliamentary Union, 2009). This severe gap along gender lines in socio-economic and political processes has given rise to many movements, theories, declarations from state governments and institutions which are geared towards minimizing the gap. Among these declarations are the 1979 UN Convention on the elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which addressed issues pertaining to the rights of women to education, inheritance, credit and opportunities on equal bases with men. It also reaffirmed the equality of human rights for women and men in societies and in the family. In the same vein, it obliged States to take actions against the social causes of women's inequality; called for the elimination of laws, stereotype practices and prejudices that impair the wellbeing of women (UNDP, 2005). The World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 at Vienna affirmed that "women's rights are human rights" (Delahanty, 2005:5-10). The Beijing platform of Action in 1999 re-emphasized the protection of women from domestic violence and sexual harassments. Inglehart & Norris (2003) maintained that gender gap in important areas of human capabilities have impacted negatively on the lives of women and girls. It has engendered severe gap in political participation with more men significantly involved in a number of outlets than women such as strikes, campaigns, demonstrations, contacting political officials and party memberships.

In Africa, this gap in political participation along gender line works against women, marginalizes them in both socioeconomic and political spheres. It has left women economically weak, politically disadvantaged, and largely excluded from the structures of political power in their societies. Howard (2006:114), argued that African women are the invisible farmers of African agriculture because of their extraordinary labor contributions to farming noting that rural women work 2-6hrs longer than rural men daily. He contends that development planners fail to recognize the important role of women in the development process. This situation no doubt undermines the socio-economic and political development of African women. In a patriarchal society like Cameroon, gender disparity and the marginalization of women still persist and women are still seen to be at the margin of the society and are considered as child producers and family caregivers in order to perpetuate their husbands' family line. On the socioeconomic status of women in Cameroon (all ten regions inclusive), the government of Cameroon, contended in paragraph 13 of its report, to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2008 that women worker in Cameroon suffer from various forms of discrimination. It noted that 31% of the female population is economically active but that "the overwhelming majority of women are to varying degrees financially dependent on men", acknowledging that women are poorly represented among employees of businesses. The Government attributed this under representation to limited access to training, the reluctance to hire

women, and “the confining of women to certain administrative roles and other sociological and family-related considerations” (ESCC, 2008). According to IWRAW (2001:1), illiteracy for women under 25 years is 29% against 15% for men. Women constitute more than 20% of workers in Cameroon, but only 5.2% are found in skilled jobs. In the wake of these developments, women in the south west region of Cameroon are still restricted in almost all important areas of human capabilities. Here, the status of a woman is still a reflection of the stereotype of cultural views of the woman’s role in the society being that of child-raising and home-making. She is afforded limited opportunities to explore wider aspirations and attain her maximum potentials outside these cultural stereotypical boundaries. This invariably has resulted in the girl-child being given little or no opportunities for further education. Abua & Fonchong, 2004 maintained that women tend to have limited access to formal education because early marriages are often imposed on young girls or they get pregnant out of wedlock. In the wake of this reality, the region can boast of only 6 female mayors out of the 30 in the South West region of the country. There has never been a female governor, the number of female councilors stood at 154 out of 877 from 2003-2007. This low representation of women at various branches of government is at variance with the expectations of Article 25 and 26 of the covenant of the United Nations Human Rights Commission. (FIDA, 2008:2). It is also at variance with the BPFA target of 30% women representation in political institutions in world societies. The women of the south west region work as much as the men but majority of their works goes unaccounted for as they are poorly represented in the area of decision making. Gender disparity is reflected in every aspect of life in the region and this incapacitates women, making it impossible for them to contribute meaningfully to the political system that determines their existence. These expectations of international frameworks which aimed at minimizing or eradicating gender inequality were predicated on the hope that state parties would address the socio- economic problems inhibiting gender equity in political participation. An investigation into the implications of disproportion in political processes in the South West region cannot be overemphasized. Therefore this study is an examination of the implication of gender differences in political participation and its implication on women development. In doing this, the study will provide answers to the following questions: Is there any differences between gender and membership of political parties in South West region of Cameroon? What factors account for gender differentials in voting during in the South West region of Cameroon? Is there any difference in gender and attendance of political campaigns and rallies during elections South West region of Cameroon? What is the implication of gender differentials in political participation on women development?

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Analysis**

It is customary in social and management sciences research to begin an academic investigation by combing the conceptual and theoretical terrains of the subject matter of analysis. Though, consensus may not be achieved on the validity or otherwise of such enterprise. Nonetheless, it is an exercise worth pursuing if only to sketch the parameters of the subject matter. The concept gender according to Ewuim, Agbodike and Igbokwe-Ibeto (2015) refers to the roles, responsibilities, opportunities, privileges and expectations ascribed to males and females by the society /culture. This definition indicates that the society determines these roles and expects men and women, boys and girls to behave in specified ways. In other words, what the society expects the man to be, the role he should play at home, in the market, office, government and so on is different from the roles the woman is expected to play.

Gender issues in every discourse are often controversial because of their sensitive nature. This can be seen in the definition of the term 'gender' itself. Often the term gender is interchangeably used with 'sex' though scholars have established a clear dichotomy between both terms. USAID (2007) defined sex as the biological characteristics that define humans as male or female, while gender is the economic, political and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being 'male' or 'female' Though the concept of "gender" has been given different interpretations over time giving the diverse views of scholars in the field, feminist theories and political imperatives are centered upon the idea of significance of gender as a social force, in shaping all areas of life (socio-economic, political, cultural etc).

Nicholson (1998), Pilcher & Whelehan (2004) all argue that sex is the anatomical difference between man and woman while gender is used to denote the social expectations of behavior, competency and status assigned according to biological sex and distinguished as "masculine" and "feminine". Gender, is the socio-cultural category that refers to the expectations, attitudes and ideas that attach them to "male" and "female" used to distinguish the cultural and social characteristics of being a man and a woman. Some critics oppose this traditional view by questioning the conventional assumption that gender differences (and subordination) between men and women are rooted in their biological differences. Rather, they claimed that all the characteristics acquainted with masculinity such as rationality, aggression, domination and public life, are a result of social construction as well as the characteristics associated with femininity such as weakness, vulnerability, submission and privacy.

Arising from the above definitions, this study see gender to include a whole sets of ideas, competence and behaviors of a particular sex e.g 'female' and qualities that are associated with men and women which are more socially and culturally, than biologically determined. Noting that the gender tend to denote socially constructed roles for men and women in public and private life as the economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female: the family, workplace and in public sphere different and separate. It is within these descriptions that the study agrees that details on gender relations tend to include a strong element of inequality between men and women and this varies from country to country.

Inherent in the many definitions of political participation, is the common characteristics situated within the limitations of activities that are geared towards influencing the "state. According to Uhlaner (2001), political participation refers to activity by private citizens designed to influence government decision-making. Verba et al. (1995:38) state that "by *political* participation we refer simply to activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action – either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies. It is worthy of note that political participation takes several forms amongst which include voting in national and local elections, working in campaigns, contacting public officials, attending political meetings, membership in political parties or clubs, engaging in illegal or legal protests of which all are geared towards influencing government policies and actions. Pateman (1990) opined that political participation has effect on policy choices and outcomes and it ensures superior social outcomes because of participation's role in aggregating information and preferences. To this study, political participation includes membership of political parties, voting in elections, and participation in political campaigns/rallies.

As a multidimensional process, development which entails moving from a less to a more desirable state has been defined differently by scholars, though all varied definitions connote positive change. In this light, Todaro (1991) defines development as a multi-dimensional process involving the recognition and re-orientation of the entire economic and social order. He argued that development in its essence represents change of which the basic needs and services, desires of a social system would be met without reservations and that society/ systems transcend an unsatisfactory life's condition to a more satisfactory one. In the same vein, Igbokwe-Ibeto (2003) opined that development is not only needed to improve the standards of living of the citizens and their material advancement but also to ensure socio-economic and political transformation as well as technological advancement of the society at large. In the discussion here in development is seen within the context of continues process of quality change in the life of individuals and the society at large.

Attempts have been made by feminist scholars to explain women marginalization in all spheres of life. These theorists have all call for equality for women and campaign for women's rights engage in critical dialogue with mainstreaming philosophical views and methods. Among the many theories is the socialist feminist theory, theory of representation theory and liberal feminism. This study however is anchored on the liberal feminist framework .The theory whose proponents include Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), John Stuart Mill (1806-1873, 1989); Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902) posits that all people are created equal and that culture and attitude of individuals are responsible for promoting gender conflict The liberal feminist theory serves as a tool of analysis for this study because it projects the different levels of the nature and dynamics of women's subordination in male dominated world societies. The theory holds that "female subordination is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that block women's entrance to and success in the so-called public world", and they work hard to emphasize the equality of men and women through political and legal reform.

The subject matter of the paper could be predicated on several theoretical platforms, especially in the social and management sciences where perspectives often differ based on a scholar's orientation and worldview. It is in the light of the foregoing that we undertake this endeavour. When issues of gender differentials and political participation are mentioned in contemporary times, the political culture, elite theory, theory of two publics and nature of society theories come to mind. While other theories may be relevant in their right, we anchor the paper on the liberal feminism theory. In making socioeconomic development an integral part for understanding women's political participation, liberal feminism theorists have raised the relative importance of education and work as prerequisites for sustainable development of a country. For instance, they argued that a high proportion of women in legislative parliament can be seen in countries with high levels of income and this cuts across level of education, healthcare services among others. The demand for equality lawfully (as stated under law), socially, economically, is at the heart of liberal feminism and this has direct bearing on the subject matter. The theory works within the gendered social system is geared towards diminishing discriminatory effects on women, and this addresses the objectives of the study. According to Matland (1998:109-125) socioeconomic development can bring about unforeseen cultural, traditional, and perception shifts regarding women and transforming gender roles which may lead to political balance and gender equality.

### **Africa and Women Political Participation**

The recognition of gender equality in politics as an important global issue dates back to women movements in 1970s (Bratton 2002:115-147; Bratton and Haynie 1999:658-679; Dotson and Carroll, 1999; Swers 2000; Thomas 1994). Amidst world declarations and conventions, political participation in Sub-Saharan Africa still reveals a gender gap with evidences reflecting, that women tend to vote and participate politically in between elections to a lesser extent than men. (Bratton, 1999, Bratton & lambright, 2006) .

So far Sub-Saharan African countries that have reached the BPPA target of 30% for women representation in parliament include, South Africa, Liberia, Mozambique 38%, Rwanda and Uganda. Stretching this further,( AWAD, 2009:1) stated thus “Rwanda has made ever more significant moves with a record level of 48.8% in the lower house and surpassing the Scandinavian average of 40% ” Today Rwanda’s new constitution reserves 24 out of 80 seats for women in the lower house and 6 out of 20 in the upper houses of parliament respectively. Since 1970s many international, regional and national efforts have been generated to address gender inequality by placing women in the positions of influence because of the assumption that women in power would be more likely than men to represent women’s interests. Coffle and Bolzendahl (2009:245-264) in their study ‘Gender gap in political participation across Sub-Saharan African nations, took a look at less institutionalized types of political participation, with small or no gap in registration to vote, attempting to differentiate between the patterns of gender gap in Industrialized and Sub-Saharan African nations in political participation, the study indicated that gender differentials in one of the most important form of political participation –voting is shrinking to the point of significance in industrialized nations, as well as even reversing; while gender gaps persist in most other types of political participation and men are significantly involved than women in a number of outlets such as strikes, demonstrations, contacting political officials and political party membership in sub- Saharan African nations.

In order to determine how large the gender gap is and where it occurs, Coffle and Bolzendahl agreed that gender remains a meaningful source of inequality in political participation. The section of their contribution which has direct bearing on the study is their findings which suggested that modernization has a role in shaping equal outcomes across sub-Saharan African nations. The length of time a nation has permitted women to vote and the presence of women in ministerial or political positions, and other development indicators such as GDP per capita are positively linked to gender equality in participation.

This is also reflected in their regression results which showed that two of Africa’s wealthiest nations, like Botswana and Namibia, often have the smallest gender gaps. Corroborating this position, Reynolds (1999) concurred however, that the number of competitive multiparty elections since 1945 and the number of years since women were allowed to stand for election were significantly related to the percentage of women in parliaments and cabinets, thus providing evidence for the importance of long-term democracy and women’s participation in nations of the world. Paxton (1997:442-468) hypothesizes that democracies will have more women in the parliament because democracies reduce artificial and arbitrary barriers to power and are therefore more likely to promote the interests of those not in power.

It is worthy of note herein that gender gap in political participation varies according to how participation is measured. To this effect, Paxton et al (2007) differentiates between more 'institutional' and 'less institutional' forms of participation. They argued that among the institutional forms of participation, while voting gaps appear to be shrinking, participation in political parties and running for political offices remain dominated by men. Furthermore, among the less institutional forms of participation, gender difference patterns vary even further (Coffle and Bolzendal (2009). They among other scholars argued that women tend to be as likely or more so as men to engage in individualistic forms of participation such as signing a petition, political communication or donating money. Men are more likely than women to participate in collective forms of participation e.g demonstrations, or directly contacting a politician (Burns, 2007; Coffle and Bolzendal, 2009; Marien et al, 2009; Parry et al 1992).

In the case of Africa, Duke (2010:8) stated that the status of women in African politics, largely excluded from participation in the decision-making processes and mainstream activities of most facets of life, including politics. In an attempt to explain the gender gap in political participation in Africa, Duke projected the factors that hinder women's participation in democratic politics and traces them mainly to the existing institutionalized structures, beliefs, and value systems. He further argued that although there are liberal constitutional provisions and public policies which espouse and advertise the full guarantee of women's rights in a number of African countries, the reality on-the-ground shows that deep traditional and cultural barriers which constrain women continue to exist.

In the case of Cameroon, the country's political landscape has been significantly marred by widely reported malpractices perpetrated by both formal and less overt informal political structures and institutions that have negatively affected women. This gender disparity persists in areas such as education, health, employment and ensures severe discrimination at the public and private sphere, reinforced by a male-dominated and patriarchal society. This situation is known to be totally disruptive and extensively undermines the normal functioning and predictability of formal political processes. Men have manipulated and exploited various constituents including women, to accede to, and stay in power. As a result, women face exclusion, subjugation and systemic discrimination within state institutions, especially at leadership and decision-making levels. Writing on the gender equality laws in Cameroon, Nkolo (1997:13) posited that although egalitarian principles are enshrined in the Cameroonian constitution, their reflection in various legal instruments turn to marginalize women in such areas as family life (A), and economic and public life (B) stretching this further Nkolo (1997) argued that:

*the egalitarian principles conflict with other principles as it upholds that the husband is the head of the family and family estate. (Section 213 of the civil Code) Section 1421 of the civil code further stipulates that 'the husband alone shall administer the joint estate. He may sell, alienate and mortgage it without the consent of his wife. This leaves the women with little or no decision in the execution of family estate and in the discharge of her matrimonial duties. Further, this places any action by the women at the 'generosity' of the man.*

Thus, laws of the land severely perpetuate gender inequality. The section of her work which has direct bearing on the study is the description of the laws as it affects women in terms of their ability to improve their socio-economic status and further compete favorably in the political process of the nation. To this she end Nkolo (1997) noted that:

*the principle of the freedom of trade and industry officialized by law no 90/31 of 10 August 1990 governing commercial activities in Cameroon, marginalizes women in the economic and public sector, especially married women who have to obtain permission from their husbands to engage freely in trade due to marriage regulations”*

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As a result, this places any action by the women at the ‘generosity’ of the man pointing out that the laws of the land severely perpetuate gender inequality in private and public spheres, thus adversely affecting the political participation of women. In the same vein, Mungwa (1999:12) in analyzing the formal human rights framework in Cameroon, maintained gender inequality exists in Cameroon, and is exacerbated by bad governance, mismanagement, corruption and in virtually all sectors of public life.

Looking at some factors that may account for gender disparity in south west region, literature reveal that the following: local traditional/cultural beliefs and values: traditions and customs have mainly defined and ascribed separate roles to males and females. Evidently, the male roles are more empowering, the female roles are disempowering. These gender roles and societal expectations hinder the participation of women in politics. Secondly the patriarchal system inherent in Cameroonian societies, men remain at the helm of affairs and make decisions even when the issues border on women. The few women who venture into ‘the man’s world’ feel inhibited to speak, especially when they are in large, male-dominated assemblies.

Thirdly the economic dependence of women on men make them vulnerable. Women in Cameroon suffer an acute lack of access to capital for business and other purposes. With limited access to land or total denial of land-ownership rights, women’s unequal access to, and control of, resources is therefore an important problem and it forms the basis an disproportionate level of political participation according to gender.

Fourthly, relative illiteracy and low educational levels of women is emphasis. According to Negash, (2006), two-thirds of the approximately 880 million illiterate adults in the world are women; 60 percent of the 135 million children in the world between ages seven and eighteen who are not receiving education are girls; and, only one out of every four girls who begin primary school remains in school four years after. These statistics of course paint a dismal picture about the state of women/girl-child education across the globe. The situation in south west region is not

far from this as enrolment figures by sex in secondary schools revealed that in 2000/2001, 69503(48.5%) girls and 73855(51.5%) boys in 2005/2006 the figures stood at 105993(49.1%) for girls and 110095(50.9%) for boys, in 2007/2008, 110511(49.4%) girls and 113291(50.6) boys and in 2008/09, the enrolment figures stood at 116956 (47.3%) boys and 130531(52.7%) (Ministry of Secondary Education, 2010).

### **Methodology**

The South West region of Cameroon, has a population of about 1, 316, 079 inhabitants (2006 estimate) and covers a landmass of 25410km<sup>2</sup>. The total female population stands at 649257. (CBSPS, 2009) The region has six divisions namely Fako Meme, Manyu, Koupe-Manengouba Lebialem, and Ndian, 26 subdivisions and 5 districts. The early 1990s saw the emergence of multiparty politics in Cameroon and a period for greater political engagements. Several elections have taken place but the study specifically namely 1992, 1997 and 2004 elections being the first few elections following the emergence of multi-party politics. The target population of the study includes adult men and women in the South west region aged 20 years and above. The study adopted the multistage random sampling technique to determine the sample population. Out of the six divisions three divisions were randomly selected. From each of the three selected divisions, two sub-divisions were randomly selected thereby constituting six sub-divisions. Again from the already existing council areas, two council areas were randomly selected from each sub division comprising urban council and rural council areas. The selected council's areas included Limbe City Council and Idenau rural Council from Fako division, Manfe and Upper Bayang Council areas from Manyu division and Kumba City Council and Mbonge council areas from Meme division. Further, one village was randomly selected from each council area and one or two or three main streets and households were randomly selected were selected using simple random sampling method. A total of 1500 men and women were selected for the study. In addition, 2 key informants were purposely selected for the study.

The study used socio-economic status which index is income and educational levels as independent variable; and three dependent variables for the analysis of correlates of political engagement or participation in the South West region of Cameroon. The index for dependent variables includes membership of political parties, voting in elections, attending political campaigns and rallies. To analyze the data obtained from the questionnaire, the chi square test was employed. The chi square test was used to determine if there is statistical significant difference in the participation in political activities (membership of political parties, voting in elections and participation in political campaigns/rallies) between men and women in the South-West region. The results of the interview were used to substantiate the results of the questionnaire. Out of the 1500 questionnaire distributed, 1430 was returned for analysis. The analysis of the data for this study is presented below:

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

**Table 1:** Cross tabulation of responses on Gender and membership in political party

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>		<b>Total</b>	
	<b>count</b>	<b>exp count</b>	<b>count</b>	<b>exp.count</b>	<b>count</b>	<b>exp. count</b>
Yes	385	316.4	251	319.6	636	636.0
No	323	391.6	464	395.4	787	787.0
Total	708(49.5%)		567(39.7%)		1427(95.5%)	

”

**Source: Field Survey 2012, Chi-square sig Pearson  $\chi^2 = 53.461$ , df 1, p= .000**

To determine if there is difference in the membership of political parties along gender lines in the South West region of Cameroon, the chi-square test was used; membership of political party was chosen as the dependent variable and gender which is the ability to label one's self male or female was chosen as the independent variable. Gender difference in membership in political participation is prominent as seen in table 1 above. 385(26.6%) of male respondents agreed that they are members of various political parties as well as 251(17.6%) of female respondents. To check whether these numerical differences are statistically significant, the chi-square test was employed. The results showed a statistical significant relationship between gender and membership in political parties in the south west region. The calculated chi-square value of 53.461 is greater than the critical  $\chi^2 = 5.991$ . This implies that the difference is statistically significant for men and women who are registered as members of political parties in the South West region. This structure of party membership is in favour of the male gender as the number of men is higher than that of women. This implies that being a man does not invariably affect registration as a member of political party. But as a woman, membership of political party is limited somehow. Thus more men are members of political parties in the region than women. However, gender differences in political participation that are observed in large national population surveys such as the works of Burns, Schlozman & Verba (1995) support this result.

**Table 2: Cross tabulation of responses on gender and voting in elections**

Responses	Male		Female		Total	
	count	exp count	count	exp.count	count	exp. count
Yes	440	388.4	326	422	766	766.0
No	239	290.6	334	144.4	573	573.0
Total	679(47.5%)		567(39.7%)		1339(93.6%)	

**Source: Field Survey 2012, Ch-square sig: Pearson  $\chi^2 = 32.453$ , df 1, p= 000**

Table 2 illustrate that 440(30.8%) of male respondents stated that they vote during the elections in 1992, 1997 and 2004. Again, 326(22.8%) of female respondents agreed that they voted as well. The chi-square analysis showed a statistical significant relationship between voting in elections and gender. The computed chi-square value of 32.453 is greater than the tablevalue of 5.991. Hence there is a statistical significant relationship between gender and voting in elections in the South West region. Further look at the data revealed that more male voted in all three elections selected for the study. This implies that the difference in voters' turnout in the South West region of Cameroon is in favour of the men. Voting in election is considered a vital aspect of political participation. High voters' turnout for men in the south west region is an indication that men are more politically conscious in the region, and understand the need for political engagement as well as their desires to influence the political system. A basic precondition for women's political participation is their right to vote. The quest for women suffrage commenced in the 1920s. Cameroonian women acquired the right to vote in 1945. The results revealed an increasing trend in women's political participation (291 women as members of political parties, and 391 voted during elections). This is an indication that women's political action has greatly improved. This is supported by the works of Konde (2005) who stated that an improvement on women's political action in Cameroon is against their initial role in political engagement during pre-colonial and colonial days which was basically to support men's political aspirations as. However, women's political action is still limited and needs to be expanded. More so low voters' turnout for women

in the region does not invariable reflect their inability to contribute meaningfully to the political system. This is seen in the almost equal participation between male and female as reflected in the percentages (male 47.5% female 46.2%). The implication of these results is that there is generally a high level of political knowledge in the South West region; as a result, political engagement is boasted. Having political knowledge plays a vital role in influencing political participation and ensures active participation in the political processes. This is seen in the higher voters' turnout for men than women during general elections

**Table 3:** Cross tabulation of responses on Gender and attendance of political campaigns and rallies during elections

Responses	Male		Female		Total	
	count	exp count	count	Exp.count	count	exp. count
Yes	474	461	410	422	884	884.0
No	145	157	157	144.4	302	302.0
Total	619(43.3%)		567(39.7%)		1186(83%)	

**Source:** Field Survey 2012, Pearson  $\chi^2 = 28.36$ , df 1, p= .002

The above table shows that 474(31.3%) of male respondents attend political campaigns or rallies as well as 410(28.7%) of female respondents. To check whether there is statistical significant relation between the variables the chi-square test was employed. Gender was chosen as the independent variable and attending political campaigns or rallies as the dependent variable because it is a political participation related activity. The chi-square analysis shows a statistical significant relationship between the variables ie gender and attendance of political campaigns and rallies. The calculated chi-square value 28.36 greater than the critical chi-square value of 3.841. The results show that, men attend political campaigns and rallies more than women according to the table above, thus it is not unlikely that during campaigns and rallies men would push for policies and programs that would best suit their interests.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The results presented above as well as previous studies on the subject matter reveal the need for examination of gender gap in experiences and practices to political engagement. More so, the literature strongly reveals that men and women are affect differently in their engagement in politics. Hence the study focused on income and educational levels as independent variables. Respondents were asked of their income and educational levels and their participation in politics related activities. The expectation is that higher income and educational levels would ensure higher level of political engagement. However, consistent with several literatures on gender and political participation, the study found out that men tend to participate more in politics related activities than women. The reason for women's low engagement in politics may not be unrelated with their level of income and education. There is a tendency for more men than women to be employed and enrolled in institution of learning.

The findings of the study is supported by the works of Schloman et al (1994) who in an attempt to provide explanations to questions on gender inequality in political participation, posited that systematic and individual differences between men and women in terms of socio-economic resources partly accounts for the differentials, stating that women are more or less not likely to engage in politics because of their lower access to such resources. For example, men are more likely to be employed full-time than women, and employment is positively related to political

participation, information and efficacy. Furthermore, women employed or not are more likely to be burdened with house and care work, placing further demands on their time and resources, leaving them less available for political participation.

### **Conclusion**

In sum, we have dwelt extensively on the issues of gender differentials and political participation South-West region of Cameroon as captured by scholars and social commentators with an attempt at clarifying the intellectual “cobweb” surrounding gender differential and political participation and its implications on women development. In addition, searchlight was also beamed on the theoretical framework for a better understanding of the concepts under interrogation. Thus, different theories on the concept of gender, political participation and women development have been espoused as postulated by scholars. An attempt has also been made to establish the nexus between women political participation and women development in South-West region of Cameroon.

From the findings of the study, it is possible to conclude that women’s political participation increased as their levels of income and education increased. No doubt this increases their chances to benefit from the existing political processes in country and region. Based on the research findings, the study recommends the government to engage in an empowerment agenda, provide a level playing ground that would enthrone gender equity. Further, the introduction of policy and programs that would ensure active engagement of the female population in economic activities is imperative.

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