Representative Bureaucracy in the Public Service? A Critical Analysis of the Challenges Confronting Women in the Civil Service of Ghana

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**Introduction:**

In the public administration literature the debate concerning the representation of minorities in the public bureaucracy continues to attract significant attention. While a number of scholars continue to argue for such representation, others are of the view that the bureaucracy cannot, and should not be, a representative institution. Such representation, its supporters say, is not only appropriate in modern diverse societies; it may help resolve conflicts that have gripped such societies through a sense of belongingness (Esmann, 1999; Meier and Hawes, 2009). There is, moreover, “widespread acceptance of the notions that in a democracy public bureaucracies ought to be representative in meaningful ways of the citizen-clients they serve, and that representation based on demographic characteristics can lead to meaningful representation” (Halle and Kelly, 1989: 9). The degree of representativeness of a public bureaucracy can significantly affect how public servants carry out their functions, and how effective they are in the delivery of goods and services to various clients in the society.

While the debate rages on, many governments continue to develop and implement policies to enhance the involvement of minorities in their public services. The Ghanaian government has not been left out in this endeavour. Since 1957, and especially from the early 1980s, it has instituted measures to ensure a fair balance in gender representation in the Ghanaian bureaucracy. Nevertheless, the upper echelons of the bureaucracy continue to be dominated by males. For instance, since independence in 1957 no woman has ever occupied the position of the head of the civil service. Similarly, at the end of 2010, only six of 35 Chief Directors were women. Statistics from the Office of the Head of the Civil Service (OHCS) show that the number of men in senior positions (management level) at the end of 2011 was 1900, while that of women stood at 738, despite the fact that there are more women than men at the lower levels of the service. In short, women are more underrepresented as one moves up the ladder of responsibility in the bureaucracy to the managerial and executive ranks, and overrepresented in the lower echelons.

Not only does this reality undermine the equitable representation of women in society; it also precludes the integration of gender analysis into public policies and practices, thus limiting the active or substantive representation of women in policy-making; hence the needs of this vulnerable group. Ensuring fair and active representation is not only morally right; it is a *sine qua non* for modern development, because it is the professional public servant who determines the standards and regulations of public law, as well as making interpretive decisions in myriad public policy areas (Rice, 2001). Kaufman (2001) is of the view that not only do “public employees shape policy directly by the way they do their jobs; they also influence policymakers who give them their powers and tell them what to do. That is, they play a prominent part in formulating the directives they receive” (9). Representative bureaucracy is thus critical in the civil service to ensure equal access and opportunity, and the inclusion of group interests in administrative decisions.

What are the challenges confronting women in the public sector, and how can they be overcome to ensure fair representation there? In this paper we examine the barriers confronting women in their attempts to climb the bureaucratic ladder in the civil service in Ghana from the theoretical perspective of representative bureaucracy. Representative bureaucracy merits our attention because it argues that passive or symbolic representation by designated groups can lead to active representation in which the representative agents may develop and implement policies for the benefit of the group. In other words, the theory projects a strong linkage between passive and active representations. We look at this assumption by examining the hindrances to women as
agents in the bureaucracy who actively promote policies that may affect the life of women in general in Ghana. We argue that passive or symbolic representation does not necessarily lead to active representation and thus, subsequently, better policies for minorities in the society. The inability to achieve active representation may be attributed to a number of barriers to minority groups.

There is a paucity of research exploring the issue of representativeness, especially of women, in the public bureaucracy in Ghana. It is, therefore, necessary to clarify and concretize thinking on how gender influences social and institutional relations, particularly in the public service. It is also critical to explore how the civil service can enhance the participation of women in decision making positions, and foster a gender balanced environment, especially within its management structure. This paper contains important information for interrogating the dynamics at play in Ghana’s public administration system, and how we can locate minorities and their importance in the scheme of things. It will further offer a more concrete and direct elucidation of the variables that should be manipulated to improve the status of these minorities: especially women in the public administration system. Doing so will yield some implications for public policy. The paper will consider the structures that can be put in place to ensure women’s access to leadership positions and to decision-making structures and processes. In making this contribution, our goal is to demonstrate the added value of representative bureaucracy in the public sector, and the need to enhance the role of minorities within the workplace and society.

The paper is qualitative in nature. The information used for the analysis was obtained through semi-structured interviews using the narrative approach (Ospina and Dodge, 2005; 2005). The narrative approach allowed interviewees to freely share their perspectives on and experiences of some of the challenges to women in their attempt to climb the bureaucratic ladder. The interviews -- 16 in all -- were recorded and thoroughly transcribed. Of those interviewed, six are assistant directors, five are directors, four are deputy chief directors, and one is a chief director in the civil service. Interviewees have between five and 20 years’ work experience.

The paper is divided into four main sections. Section one, after this introduction, reviews the literature on representative bureaucracy, including its advantages and disadvantages as a tool in the public sector. The next section looks at Ghanaian society, its women, and the Ghanaian civil service in general. That section is, therefore, a background analysis that sets the context for our discussion. In the latter we look at the trajectories of development of policies on women in the service, starting with the colonial period. In the third section we analyse some of the barriers impeding the movement of women to the upper levels of the civil service, where they could achieve active representation. The last section concludes the paper, with a discussion of future research.

**Representative Bureaucracy: A Review of the Literature**

The consensus among scholars interested in representative bureaucracy is that the term was first coined by J. Donald Kingsley in the 1940s to examine the representativeness of the British civil service, although it had a more limited sense than the one it is currently understood to have (Denhardt and deLeon 1995; Krislove 1974; Lim, 2006; Meier, 1993; Naff, 2011; Selden, 1998). Kingsley was of the view that civil servants carry the policies of the governing party, and that those policies should reflect in all aspects of democratic institutions. He argued that representative bureaucracy is necessary because there need to be at least some administrators sympathetic to the programmatic concerns of the dominant party (Kingsley, 1944). To him, therefore, “the degree to which all democratic institutions are representative is a matter of prime
significance” (in Naff, 2011: 229). A certain degree of that representativeness is necessary because “the dominance of social, political, and economic elites in the British bureaucracy [had] resulted in policies and programs that failed to meet the needs of all social classes” (Denhardt and deLeon, 1995: 32). Kingsley’s idea has been criticized in the literature. It is not, however, our intention to reproduce those criticisms here (Krislove, 1974).

The idea was, however, later taken up by a number of scholars, especially some Americans, and used to examine the impact of representativeness on the bureaucracy in the United States. Since then other scholars have attempted to use the theory to analyse the extent of representativeness in the bureaucracy in other socio-economic contexts in both developed and developing countries (Groeneveld and Walle, 2010; Naff, 2007). Despite the growing interest in the subject, the answer to the question of what constitutes representative bureaucracy continues to change, thus leading to some degree of controversy (Denhardt and deLeon, 1995; Kim, 1994; Rosenbloom and Featherstonhaugh, 1977). This controversy has been compounded by the different forms of representative bureaucracy, and the emergence, in recent times, of the notion of diversity management in the public sector (OECD, 2011). It must thus be noted that there is no shortage of literature on representative bureaucracy because of its long history in the public sector. What is, therefore, presented here is a short review of the existing literature as preparation for analysing the Ghanaian case.

Groeneveld and Walle (2010) have found that the literature identifies three dimensions of representative bureaucracy. They are mutually inclusive, yet have significant differences, which must be thoroughly understood in any critical analysis of the concept and for its use as a policy tool in the public sector. The first dimension is historical: according to the authors, it can be found in the political science literature that looks at the idea of representation from the civil service perspective as “the ruling class because it helps states to establish control and guarantee harmony and stability” (240). The second is the public administration perspective, with its strong emphasis on reconciling bureaucracy with democracy and on equal opportunities, and its distinction between active and passive representations, while the third is found in the more recent literature on diversity management, with an emphasis “on the benefits of diversity for the performance of public sector organizations” (204).

It can thus be seen how difficult it is to define the concept more precisely. As noted by Kerngahan (1978: 490), “there is disagreement in the literature as to what representative bureaucracy means, what purposes it serves, what degree of representativeness is desirable and what variables should be considered because it is in practice extremely difficult to achieve such a microcosmic representative bureaucracy.” Be that as it may, there is a general agreement among scholars that the concept is correctly understood to mean that public organizations should be a reflection of the population of the citizenry; or, simply, the diversity of the population (Andrews, et al. 2005; Naff 2011). Wilson (2001: 6) says that the term representative bureaucracy is often employed to denote (or imply) what is in the main, a refereeing function for bureaus or bureaucrats. They are expected to mediate between the various special interests involved without regard to the possibility, or even likelihood, that the bureaucrats already have an independent view of what the general interests are, based on values and background, or may reach such an assessment as a result of such mediation. According to Roch et al. (2011), the concept is used to “consider whether a public organization employs a bureaucracy that matches the general population or salient indicators of diversity, such as race, ethnicity, or gender” (392-393).
Van Riper has offered a broader definition, one that seems to have become the standard definition in the literature, and which we adopt as our working definition in this paper. According to him, a representative bureaucracy is

one in which there is a minimal distinction between the bureaucrats as a group and their administrative behaviour and practices on the one hand and the community or societal membership and its administrative behaviour, practices and expectations of government on the other. ... To be representative a bureaucracy must (1) consist of a reasonable cross-section of the body politic in terms of occupation, class, geography and the like, and (2) must be in general tune with the ethos and attitudes of the society of which it is part.

**Forms of Representation in Representative Bureaucracy:**

A significant discussion of the literature on representative bureaucracy is concerned with the issues of “representation.” Indeed, the inability to define it has been attributed to the confusion over the word “representation,” or “representativeness” (Krislov 1974). Rosenbloom and Featherstonhaugh (1987) pointed out this problem when they noted that “the lack of clarity found in the treatment of the idea is at least in part due to a fundamental ambiguity inherent in the concept of representation itself.” Similarly, Mosher (1982) is of the view that “there is confusion of at least two quite different meanings of representativeness, as there is confusion in the meaning of responsibility” (14). Kim (1994: 386) also notes that “foremost among the pitfalls in the use of the term representative bureaucracy is a tendency to fail to specify the sense in which the word representation is being used.” Clearly, to understand representative bureaucracy requires examining representation and its different forms. It is thus necessary to clarify representation or representativeness in the bureaucracy.

No discussion of the ideas of representation or being representative can, however, take place without an understanding of political representation (Mansbridge, 2003; Pitkin 1969), because “modern liberal democracy, [which majority of countries in the world have become,] requires systems of representation as a concomitant of the participation and implication of all adult citizens in society’s decision-making” (Stevens, 2009: 120). Pitkin (1967) has provided the simplest form of definition of representation. According to her, representation is simply to “make present again.” Representation thus denotes “the meaning present in some sense of something which is nevertheless not present literally or in fact” (8-9). Dovi (2011) is of the view that “political representation is the activity of making citizens’ voices, opinions, and perspectives 'present' in the public policy making processes.” To Dovi, therefore, political representation occurs when political actors speak, advocate, symbolize, and act on behalf of others in the political arena. In short, it is a kind of political assistance. According to Stevens (2009: 120), representation in this sense “occurs when some, but only some, of the members of any group are authorized to undertake actions on behalf of all, actions that are regarded as legitimate and binding.” Pitkin (1972) argues that “all government officials, all organs of the state, anyone who performs a function for the group may seem to be its representative...Judges represent the state in this way. So do ambassadors” (41).

Meier (1993), however, thinks that representation is not a process that is amenable to rigid specification. He goes on to argue that the “definition implies that a representative exercises some choice on behalf of the represented. Because the representative might possess superior information or better judgement, representation may or may not produce the exact
outcomes that the represented wants. Rather the process should produce the same outcome that 
the represented person would produce if the represented person could be there and actively 
participate in the bureaucratic process” (7).

Political representation, according to Mansbridge (2003), may take different forms: 
promissory, anticipatory, gyroscopic, and surrogate. According to her, the promissory is the 
traditional model of representation, which focuses on the idea that during campaigns 
representatives make promises to constituents, which they then keep or fail to keep, while 
anticipatory representation flows directly from the idea of retrospective voting. Representatives 
focus on what they think their constituents will approve of at the next election, not on what they 
promised to do at the last election. In gyroscopic representation, the representative looks within, 
as a basis for action, to conceptions of interest, “common sense,” and principles derived in part 
from the representative’s own background. Surrogate representation occurs when legislators 
represent constituents outside their own districts.

Krislove (1994: 23) says that the “simplest sense of representativeness is that of agency: 
a representative is one sent to make some specific representations. He has a job to do and is so 
authorised.” If we accept that representation is making present again, and that in presentation 
actors speak, advocate, symbolize and act on behalf of others in the political arena, then 
representative bureaucracy or representation in the bureaucracy will simply be seen as actors 
speaking, advocating, symbolizing, and acting on behalf of others in the bureaucratic, rather than 
the political, arena.

In his discussion on representative bureaucracy, Mosher (1982) distinguished two main 
forms of representations. These are active, or functional, and passive, or descriptive 
representations. Meier (1993: 7) says that "passive representation is a characteristic while active 
representation is a process.” Mosher (1982) defines active representations as when “individuals 
are expected to press for the interests and desires of those whom they are presumed to represent, 
whether they be the whole people or some segment of the people” (14). In other words, in active 
representation, the individual(s) in the bureaucracy will be pushing for the interest of those they 
represent. As noted by Riccucci and Meyer (2004), “the theory of active representation holds, 
for example, that women as compared with men working in the bureaucracy are more likely to 
push for programs and issues that benefit women in the general population.” Sowa and Selden 
(2003: 701) take the view that “active representation takes the assertion that certain attributes 
such as race, ethnicity, and gender which lead to early socialization experiences and, in turn, 
shape the values and attitudes of administrators -- a step further than passive representation. 
These values and attitudes then can be conceived of as directly influencing the behavior of 
administrators, directing them toward using their discretion to foster improved equity for those 
who have been underrepresented in the implementation of public programs.” Consequently, in 
active representation, bureaucrats use “their discretion to advocate for the interest of their 
constituents and eliminate discrimination that has an impact on one group or another among the 
agency’s clientele” (Wilkins and Keiser, 2004:88). In a nutshell, in active representations, 
representatives will take actions that will be in the interests of those whom they are presumed to 
represent (Naff, 2007).

The second type of representation is passive representation, which “concerns the origin 
of individuals and the degree to which, collectively, they mirror the whole society” (Mosher, 
1982: 15). Passive representation is “concerned with the bureaucracy having the same 
demographic origins (gender, race, income, class, religion, etc.) as the population it serves” 
(Wilkins and Keiser, 2004:88). Passive representation may be regarded as an aspiration in the
sense of making the bureaucracy more democratic or alleviating social tensions; but it is just as often regarded as a denial of individual merit-based recruitment and individual citizenship rights (Groeneveld and Walle, 2010). Passive representation may be understood in two ways: (a) the composition of the bureaucracy mirrors the demographic composition of the general population; and (b) in terms of whether it increases or decreases the representation of women and minorities in the bureaucracy. In passive representation there is, therefore, the idea of symbolism; that is, a symbolic representation of groups considered as minorities in the society.

There has been no dearth of literature on the relationship or link between the two forms of representations (Meier, 1993). In fact, Mosher (1982), who developed the typology, succinctly argued that passive representation may lead to active representation. Since then, numerous scholars have tried to either prove or disapprove this assertion. Indeed, a casual examination of materials produced in the last 30 or so years shows increasing emphasis on this link (Dolan and Rosenbloom, 2003; Liam, 2005; Roch and Pitts, 2012). The fundamental argument underlying most of these studies is that it is active representation that can bring the changes that the poor, the weak, and minorities need to enjoy any meaningful life out of policies developed and implemented by the public authorities.

Not all, however, agree with this assumption. In fact, some scholars have cleverly pointed out that passive representation can benefit vulnerable groups in a society. Lim (2006) has shown how passive representation can bring much needed benefits to the group represented. In other words, symbolic representation produces many benefits in the same way as active representation may to those represented. Lim’s argument is in support of Mosher (1982), who had earlier argued against active representation by noting how it can subvert the democratic principles in a society. Be that as it may, both active and passive representations bring many benefits to the represented. The question is, what are the barriers that may impede passive and active representations in bringing those benefits? This is the question we will explore later in the paper.

The Importance of Representative Bureaucracy:

By the bureaucracy, we mean the civil service arm of the executive branch of government, rather than the entire public sector arena. The civil service is essential because it is the main organization for the development and implementation of government’s policies. As noted by Long (1952: 810), “the bureaucracy is in policy, and major policy, to stay; in fact, barring the unlikely development of strong majority party legislative leadership, the bureaucracy is likely, day in and day out, to be our main source of policy initiative.” Consequently, the bureaucracy exerts enormous influence on how a society is governed. It can make or break the society through its discretionary power in terms of policy development and implementation. As conceded by Long (1952: 813),

Given the seemingly inevitable growth in the power of the bureaucracy through administrative discretion and administrative law, it is of critical importance that the bureaucracy be both representative and democratic in composition and ethos. Its internal structuring may be as important for constitutional functioning as any theoretical or practicable legislative supremacy. That wonder of modern times, the standing army possessed of a near-monopoly of force yet tamely
obedient to the civil power, is a prime example of the efficacy of a balance of social forces as a means to neutralization as a political force. A similar representation of the pluralism of our society in the vitals of the bureaucracy insures its constitutional behavior and political equilibrium.

To either avoid or deal with this dilemma, many scholars have endorsed the theory of representative bureaucracy, according to which bureaucratic power can be made more responsive to the public if the personnel who staff administrative agencies reflect the demographic characteristics of the public they serve (Sowa and Selden, 2003:700). What, then, are the benefits of representative bureaucracy?

Selden (1998) has identified four major benefits that the idea brings to a society. First, she notes the importance of passive representation: “[P]assive representation is important because variations in demographic background are associated with differences in socialization experiences. Individuals’ attitudes and values are shaped by their background and socialization experiences. Consequently, bureaucrats with different value systems should behave differently” (43). Lim (2006) holds that even without minority bureaucrats intentionally advocating for the interests of their minority clients, passive representation can produce substantive benefits for clients, through unintentional changes in the behaviour of minority bureaucrats, changes in the behaviour of non-minority bureaucrats, and changes in the behaviour of clients. Herman (2007) argues that passive representation can produce benefits through better communication between the client and the bureaucrat, and can increase the likelihood that clients will utilize the services that the bureaucracy or the bureaucrat provides.

Another benefit of representative bureaucracy is that “a bureaucracy that reflects the diversity of the general population implies a symbolic commitment to equal access to power...When members of distinctive groups become public officials, they become legitimate actors in the political process with the ability to shape public policy” (Selden 1998:6). In other words, representative bureaucracy can lead to the legitimatization of government, which in the modern sense is good governance. This is because the legitimacy of the government will not be questioned if the citizens feel that they are well represented in the bureaucracy (Thieleman and Stewart, 1996). As noted by Naff (2007), a representative bureaucracy signals that diverse communities have access to the policy-making process, leading to a greater governmental legitimacy. Riccucci (2010: 697) says that with representative bureaucracy, governance is strengthened to the extent that governing structures are representative of the people. Meier and Hawe (2009: 282) note that “a bureaucracy that accurately represents its citizens serves as a strong positive symbol that the governance regime is open and non-discriminatory.”

A third benefit is that representative bureaucracy will influence how items are prioritized on the political agenda, as well as leading to effective policy outcomes. Kranz (1976: 110) notes that representative bureaucracy will “lead not only to more democratic decision-making but to better decisions because it would expand the number and diversity of the views brought to bear on policy making.” According to Selden (1998: 7), “a bureaucracy that reflects the demographic composition of society will incorporate a greater spectrum of opinions and preferences into the agenda-setting and decision-making processes and, as a result, should be more responsive to those groups.” If this is done, it will lead to an acceptable policy, which will in turn make policy implementation easy. Consequently, these groups with socialization processes and shared norms will support practices and initiatives that will lead to more effective policy outcomes (Roch, et al., 2010: 39). This incorporation of opinions can be easily achieved “since the agency
representatives differed in background and outlook, they approached the problem from different angles and with different points of emphasis” (Levitan, 1946: 567).

Another widely held idea is that representative bureaucracy leads to the promotion of better administrative responsibility by increasing the responsiveness of bureaucrats to the public (Kim, 1994: 389, see also Saltzstein, 1979; Selden, 1998). Kernaghan (1978) is of the view that the search for responsiveness through representativeness implicitly supports administrative responsibility in the subjective sense, and is in keeping with the theory of representative bureaucracy (508). He cogently argues that administrative responsibility may be enhanced in the bureaucracy in the sense that members of well represented groups may be prevented from ignoring or minimizing the interests of underrepresented groups (509). They fear a political backlash that could result in conflicts, which may affect the general development of the country.

It is also believed that representative bureaucracy can lead to the resolution of ethnic conflicts, especially in societies where ethnicity and race are significant issues (Esman, 1999; Meier and Hawe, 2009). Using the 2009 riots in France as a case study, Meier and Hawe (2009) show how a representative bureaucracy could have avoided them through symbolic (passive) representation in the bureaucracy, and how it would have been seen by those who believe that they have been and are being shut out of the French bureaucracy when it comes to employment. They contended that bureaucrats exercise discretion based on value judgments; however, given the current composition and structure of the French civil service, the interests being represented are most likely those of the elite (280). Most of the rioters saw, and continue to see, the French bureaucracy this way. Concisely, representative bureaucracy can lead to political stability in an ethnically divided society through distributional equity in terms of national development (Meier et al., 1999).

**Problems of Representative Bureaucracy:**

In the foregoing discussions we identified the benefits of representative bureaucracy to modern society. Despite them, a number of scholars see some problems with a bureaucracy that is representative of its population. They think that there are serious weaknesses in the case for representative bureaucracy, ones that must not be glossed over (Kim, 1994; Subramaniam, 1967).

Kim (1994) has identified five major criticisms of representative bureaucracy. First, he notes that more representativeness does not necessarily lead to more responsiveness, inasmuch as similar social backgrounds do not necessarily lead to similar experiences throughout life. Second, he notes that there is much concern about the linkage between social origins and values. This is because the socialization process in which bureaucrats find themselves is a long one, and it keeps changing as a result of changes in the societal environment. Third, he says that responsive bureaucracy does not always result from a bureaucracy that happens to be representative of the general population. Fourth, he notes that critics are concerned with the disagreement in or confusion over defining representative bureaucracy. It could lead to a situation where “every economic class, caste, region, religion in a country is represented in exact proportion to its share of the population” (390). Subramanian (1967) argues that representative bureaucracy can result in an ineffectual bureaucracy, since the bureaucracy is expected to be responsive to both the interest of the section of the population it may represent, as well as the general interest of the country. He notes that “if the various classes represented have all different and conflicting interests and if their members in the bureaucracy advocate mainly class interests
-- in accord with the basic argument -- the result is likely to be a divided and even ineffectual bureaucracy” (1014).

Others critics maintain that representative bureaucracy can lead to an element of bias in policy development, something the bureaucracy is meant to eliminate (Lim, 2006). Such bias will go against the fundamental principle of the bureaucracy as a neutral organization, which is to design and apply basic principles in policy development and policy implementation in a neutral manner to all citizens, irrespective of certain specific characteristics (Meier and Hawe, 2009: 275).

There is also the notion that representative bureaucracy may affect the merit system of recruitment, which in turn may affect the efficient and effective operation of the bureaucracy (Lim, 2005; Meier and Hawes, 2009; Rich, 1975). In other words, and as argued by Esman (1999), in representative bureaucracy there must be a trade off between efficiency and effectiveness of public service (see also Sowa and Selden, 2003). From this perspective, critics argue that governments will need to lower standards to achieve more representative bureaucracies (Meier and Hawe, 2009: 276).

Ghanaian Society, Women, and the Civil Service: A Background Analysis:

In this section our intention is to briefly discuss Ghanaian society, and especially how the prevailing cultural environment significantly affects both the role of women and management as a whole. Without this, it will be difficult to explain it to those who have little or no knowledge of the barriers women face in the Ghanaian public sector. This cultural environment has included what has been described in the literature as a "glass ceiling" for women. We will also briefly discuss some of the initiatives that have been undertaken over the years to address this problem. The discussion is brief, because of the abundance of literature on the problems facing women in Ghana in general, and there is no need for us to repeat it in detail here.

Ghana is a diverse and multicultural society. Its socio-economic and political developments have also been defined and shaped by varying internal and external factors and forces such as colonialism, political instability, economic recovery programs, and natural disasters, to mention a few. Culturally, it is a predominantly patriarchal society, despite that fact that the woman’s place is more respected than can be found in most Western developed nations.

It must, however, be acknowledged that inasmuch as patriarchy existed in Ghana long before colonization, colonialism came to reinforce the existing social order by continuing to project men in all spheres of life, and especially in public life. Although post-independent governments have attempted to alter the woman’s place in public life, their efforts have not yielded much fruit because of the persistence of the cultural environment. That cultural environment in relation to public life can be explained by referring to Hofstede’s (1980: 45-46) four cultural dimensions. These are:

- Power distance, which indicates the extent to which a society accepts the fact that power, in institutions and organizations, is distributed unequally;
- Uncertainty avoidance: that is, the extent to which society feels threatened by uncertain and ambiguous situations, and reacts to them by providing career stability, establishing more formal rules, not tolerating deviant ideas and behaviours, and believing in absolute truths and attainment of expertise;
- Individualism, a loosely knit social idea in which people are supposed to take care of themselves and their immediate families only; collectivism, on the other
hand, is characterized by a tight social rule, where people distinguish between in-groups and out-groups; in the latter they expect their groups (relatives, clan, organizations) to look after them, and in exchange for that they feel they owe absolute loyalty to them; and

- Masculinity, or the extent to which the dominant values of society are "masculine": in other words, assertiveness, the acquisition of money and things, and not caring for others or for the quality of life of other people.

These four dimensions of culture produce a behavioural pattern that affects people in any given context, and which they take with them when they join organizations, and which “in turn influence the internal work culture, facilitating certain job behaviours and inhibiting others” (Mendonca & Kanungo 1996:69). Hence, any understanding of the woman’s place in public life, especially in the civil service in Ghana, cannot be comprehended without looking at these four cultural dimensions. We find, however, that power distance, individualism, and masculinity dominate the culture in the civil service, which in turn continues to affect women in the workplace. It must also be said that society, traditional practices, and culture permeate management of modern organizations. Hence, a complex situation has emerged whereby traditional Ghanaian behaviour, beliefs, practices, and attitudes, which often militate against Western modern management systems and practices, continue to affect both decision-making and organizational performance (Gardiner, 1996).

The cultural environment projects the male over the female; and this projection affects the decision on who is to be educated in the family, especially among those with meagre resources. From this perspective, women were and, in some cases, are still considered inferior to men, and were and are encouraged to take charge of the home while the men attend school. Thus, although women’s right to work was fully recognized in traditional society through customary laws, this right was limited to domestic chores, which limitation continued to undermine their ability to gain formal sector employment (Manuh, 1994). Greenstreet (1972: 117) believes that this problem is due to the subsistence nature of the economy of Ghanaian traditional society. In this economy there is a division of labour between men and women, with the main functions of women being looking after the home, raising children and giving regular assistance with farm work, while the men undertake the more arduous tasks.

Even since independence government initiatives have continued to draw on the existing patriarchal structures in ways that deepen the social and gender divides. Deep seated cultural, institutional, and political barriers have ensued, which have conspired to create gender disparity in almost all spheres of the Ghanaian woman’s life, whether at the workplace, home or in society (Mensah-Kutin, 2009; Mikell, 2007; Yenika-Agbaw, 2002). Most women in Ghana face myriad gender-related problems and, as a consequence, are uniquely placed to bear the brunt of gender imbalances. In this cultural environment they are effectively under the control or authority of men (initially their fathers or other male members of their family, and their husbands) for much of their lives, although they may gain in status and influence with age. Women’s decision making role in Ghana is thus constrained in both private and public spheres. Where women do exercise political power in the traditional arrangement, however, it is largely in parallel structures or by influencing male authorities (Oppong et al., 1975; Perrow, 1977).

What we have today in Ghana is a society where cultural patterns and traditions continue to favour and promote male dominance, creating a masculine society and a significant power distance, which continues to affect women, not only in public life, but also at home (Hampel-
Milagrosa, 2009; Pellow, 1977). As Mensah-Kutsin (2009) puts it, the reality of the existence of gender inequalities is a fundamental dynamic in the overall hierarchical structures of relationships that characterize all the political, economic and social processes.

Until independence in 1957 the civil service of Ghana was the preserve of British colonialists. The British occupied the higher echelons of the service, with the indigenous Ghanaians (mostly men) at the lower rank performing clerical duties. As succinctly put by Van Allen (1976), when they needed literate Africans to form a supportive mediating structure for colonial government, the British sought young boys for schooling. Thus, instead of promoting equality in the society, colonialism rather perpetuated the status quo by favouring males over females in public life, especially as colonial administrators continued to rely on the chieftaincy institutions for their indirect rule policy (Shaloff, 1974). Even where attempts were made to integrate the indigenous people into the administration, it favoured men over women. According to an AfDB (2008) report,

While it [the colonial administration] integrated men into the newly created economy (participation in the commercial economy and formal employment), social (formal education of boys) and political systems, the colonial ruling of Ghana put restrictions to women’s participation in economic, social and political roles outside of their home. Access to and benefits from the formal sector were also unequal, creating conditions that favored largely men (3).

We must, however, recognize that although the colonialists continued to favour men in public life, women continued to form part of the civil administration from the 1890s; and by the 1930s they constituted about 8% of public servants, and gained admission to the executive class during the 1950s (Amos-Wilson, 1999).

At independence Ghana inherited the British public administration system, with the civil service organized along British lines. The civil service, as a result, constitutes one of the most enduring legacies of British colonial rule (Berle, 1994). Unfortunately, at the time of independence the top cadre of the service was more British, with the indigenes occupying the lower levels. This is not surprising, as the “Africanization” policy developed in the early 1900s had not yielded much fruit by the time of independence (Adu, 1969; Shaloff, 1974).

It was against this backdrop that independence was granted. To free itself from colonial shackles, the first post-independent government, the Nkrumah government, embarked upon an Africanization policy that aimed to fill the colonial civil service with indigenous people (Ayee, 2005; Haruna, 2003; Owusu and Ohemeng, 2012). Although the policy created some capacity problems, it nevertheless saw the rise of women to the top cadre: that is, the administrative class of the civil service (Amos-Wilson, 1999; Owusu and Ohemeng, 2012). It must be acknowledged that the Nkrumah government attempted to project women in public office by reserving seats for them in Parliament and giving them opportunities to pursue education and formal work (Denzer, 1992; Manuh, 1991; Tsikata, 1989).

The Nkrumah government's attempts to improve the status of women in the public service were enshrined in the Industrial Relations Act of 1965. It outlawed all forms of discrimination against women in employment and in the workplace. Tsikata and Seini (2004) are of the view that the government did this because it was concerned with finding work for its educated activists, some of whom were women. It was therefore not a conscientious effort to reshape the gender imbalance in society, but rather a way to keep party supporters satisfied that the basic traditional structures that continued to impede women's advances were not touched.
Despite this, little was achieved in terms of women's participation in the civil service. According to Mensah-Kutin et al. (2000), while the Nkrumah government can be credited with a progressive outlook on women, its policies, both formal and informal, did not fundamentally change the lives of women, even if they did offer them a higher profile in national public life. Although women worked in the civil service, the service was still more considered a men's club, with women in clerical positions.

Governments following the Nkrumah regime also attempted to progress and enhance the status of women in public life. For example, the National Liberation Council (NLC) government that assumed power after the overthrow of Nkrumah in 1966 introduced the equal pay for equal work policy. This policy brought women to a par with their male counterparts in formal employment, especially the public and civil services. In 1971 the Progress Party (PP) government, under Dr. Busia, also instituted paid maternity leave for women in the public service (Gyekye et al., 1998). It did so to create incentives for women in the service. Despite the introduction of these measures and the improvement of women’s workforce participation, biased cultural attitudes toward females persisted at least until the middle of the 1970s (Haruna, 2003).

Thus it was that under the various military rules that began in 1972 and continued until 1992, further attempts were made to ensure that women were more integrated into the public sector, and that these cultural biases were dealt with. As noted by Manuh and Anyidoho (2008), the tenure of military regimes from the early 1970s coincided with increasing awareness of and advocacy for women’s equality and empowerment at international levels, and this awareness was actively acknowledged by the various regimes during the period. For example, the National Liberation Council (later Supreme Military Councils 1 & 2) established the National Council for Women and Development (NCWD) 1975 under the Office of the President (then Head of State), to ensure the welfare of women and to advise the government on issues affecting them (Chao, 1999). Coincidentally, the United Nations declared 1975 the international year of women.; the creation of the NCWD thus reflected developments for women internationally. The NCWD initially focused on income-generating activities, training and awareness-raising for women, but subsequently made women’s rights a public issue through its advocacy work and public education and, also, through its projects, which gave them access to ordinary women (Mensah-Kutin et al., 2000). The NCWD was, therefore, the focal point for advocating women’s issues until the early 1980s.

In 1982, under the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), which had come to power on December 31, 1981, a new organization for women, the 31st December Women’s Movement (31st DWM), was established to champion the cause of women and, especially, to get them involved in public life, with the First Lady, Nana Konadu Agyemang Rawlings, as its head. It must, however, be said that the establishment of the 31st DWM meant it would be competition for the NCWD as the main organization for advocating for the needs of women (Manuh and Anyidoho, 2008). In 1985, to counter the popularity of 31st DWM, the leadership of the NCWD changed; the new leadership pushed the organization to assume national stature, mobilizing women behind the regime and dominating the landscape for women’s work for over a decade (Manuh and Anyidoho, 2008).

The change in leadership of the NCWD and the establishment of the 31st DWM brought women’s issues to the fore, including with various empowerment initiatives, and the encouragement of girls to go to school and take up science subjects. This became known as the girl-child project, and it continues today. Even with the dynamism of these two organizations, little was achieved in terms of actually getting more women into the upper levels of the civil
service (Haruna, 2003). In fact, if anything at all happened, the organizations championed the "liberation" of women from the biased cultural practices that barred their path to development, and encouraged them to be more active in the informal sector, rather than pushing for laws that could dismantle the barriers to upward progress in the civil service and the public service as a whole. The 31st DWM was, for instance, more interested in establishing small-scale enterprises for women, as well as day-care centres that could help them generate income for themselves.

A study conducted as part of the Women in Public Life project in 1998 found that women's potential in Ghanaian society remains under recognized in the public service (WPL, 1998). The study revealed that most public institutions were more interested in the “masculine” work environment, in which women continued to be underrepresented, less educated, and less competitive. It noted that in terms of management, “women constitute[d] only a fraction of the management and leadership of their organizations” (4). In 1984, for example, out of the 1416 people in the government administration, only 190 (13%) were women; of the 715 managing directors, women numbered only 42 (6%); and out of the 236 in the legislative bodies, only 11 -- (5%) -- were women. In totality, women comprised only 10% of persons serving on public bodies (Boadu, 2001: 21); and this had not changed much by the latter part of the 1990s.

The lack of progress in getting women into public life, especially the upper echelons of decision making, prompted the New Patriotic Party (NPP), which assumed power in 2001, to establish the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWAC) to strengthen the institutional foundation for promoting greater responsiveness to gender issues. The Ministry was, therefore, to be the government machinery that would facilitate the creation of an enabling environment for gender equity and women’s empowerment in the public sector by initiating, coordinating, and monitoring gender responsive concerns (Allah-Mensah, 2005).

In 2004 the Ministry developed a National Gender and Children’s Policy as an integral part of the national development planning. The overarching goal was to mainstream gender concerns into the national plan to improve the social, legal and civic, political, economic and cultural conditions of women and children (African Development Fund, 2008). Although some progress on gender issues has been made since 2004, more is to be done. As a result, the current NDC government is now developing an affirmative action legislation that will compel organizations, especially public ones, to be more gender conscious.

Despite all these initiatives, women continue to gravitate to the lower levels of the public sector and, in particular, the civil service. According to Amos-Wilson (1998: 31), “despite the apparent opportunity for women since 1963 to enter the most senior roles in public life, a mass breakthrough of what is frequently termed the ‘glass ceiling’, that is access to the most senior jobs of all, making policy and managing the civil service, seems elusive as ever for women.” Today, although women constitute more than 52% of the population, they only make up of 32% of the entire civil service, with most in the secretarial and clerical classes. Only 12% of the decision-influencing category – the administrative class – is female (Offei-Aboagye, 2000). A study by Allah-Mensah (2005) of some ministries in 2005 painted the abysmal picture of women missing from the top levels of these ministries, including that of the MOWAC. The breakthrough for women to the upper levels of the civil service thus continues to be a mirage.
Women, the Civil Service and Managerial Positions: Analysis of Barriers to Active Representation

In what follows we will analyse some of the numerous impediments that continue to hinder women in moving up the bureaucratic ladder. They make it difficult for the civil service to achieve active representation, despite the passive representation of women at the lower levels of the service. The analysis focuses on (a) the inability to address the historical and traditional issues, (b) subtle discrimination, (c) personal obstacles, and (d) government’s commitment to issues related to women. These four factors consistently came out, and were emphasized by interviewees.

Historical and traditional issues:

We have already noted the effect of historical and traditional practices and the various initiatives that have been undertaken and continue to be undertaken by government to counter them. In spite of this, most of our interviewees still blamed the inability of women to move up the bureaucratic ladder on these historical and traditional practices. This is not surprising, as the literature on women in management has consistently claimed that such historical and traditional practices constitute a significant barrier in breaking through the glass ceiling (Maume, 1999; Yishai and Cohen, 1997). Many social and cultural factors account for the exclusion or marginalization of women from managerial positions. Key among these are the culturally traditional domestic roles assigned to them, whereby they are made responsible for the home, which affects their rights from childhood, through upbringing and socialization. Right from the start, then, fewer girls than boys have access to education, and are more likely to drop out of school; they are not supported to continue to higher levels of education that would enable them to compete for managerial positions because they are socialized to take care of the home. This affects the number of females who attain higher education and the opportunity to enter the public service. On this subject, interviewees succinctly and consistently argued that the various initiatives undertaken have not been deep enough to address these profound problems, and that any initiative or reform that fails to do so is bound to be less successful in pushing women to the upper echelons of the civil service. A senior civil servant, for example, lamented:

The problem is historical, as well as traditional. You know traditionally, a woman is not valued in terms of the formal education she attains or even in terms of the higher education. During the period before and immediately after colonization, very few women pursued higher education because they were socialized into believing that their place were [sic] in the home. My mother missed her educational opportunity by doing menial jobs to take care of her brothers who were in school. The men were rather encouraged to pursue higher education because they were to be the financial providers of the home. Thus you find more men taking up leadership positions at workplace while the very few women who had the minimum qualifications took the lower level jobs.

Thus, inequality in the workplace has its roots in the sex differential before and during the colonial period, and the ripple effect is being experienced in Ghana and most African societies today. This problem was embedded in the governance structure and in education.

In terms of the governance structure, Greenstreet (1972) shows how the colonial government consistently discriminated against women through explicit policies in the public
sector. For instance, in 1928 the government stipulated that women in the service who were getting married should resign from their positions. This policy was later, in 1950, codified into the Pensions Ordinance. Furthermore, she notes that in 1936 the government pursued a policy that “ruled that the resignation of pregnant women should be a condition of appointment” (119). Similarly, a 1948 Labour Ordinance prohibited the employment of female labour in certain occupations, such as mines and night work. The effects of these policies were that women moved more to the informal sectors, thus restricting those who could have gained promotion to managerial positions. These policies, therefore, created a glass ceiling for women in their chosen careers.

Education is the *sine qua non* for effective participation in any economy. As Wright and Perrone (1977) state, education serves as a legitimation for inequalities of power and helps socialize people into different work habits, and the patterns of discipline and social demands of different positions in the production process. Thus, for women to progress to managerial positions, policies that affect their education must be fully recognized, and changed.

The traditional roles and expectations with the gendered division of labour continue to influence people’s behaviour in the workplace. An interviewee noted,

> [t]here is always a non-engagement of women by their directors/boss. You will not progress due to socio-cultural practices. They think because you are a woman your family responsibilities will not allow you to perform, so they will not even bother to offer you the opportunity.

Women's natural biological reproductive role has also been used as an excuse to support the notion that the home is their place. Traditional roles obviously sometimes do translate to the workplace, to the extent that most women are not seen as workers or employees, but are, first, framed by their identity as a woman; although no one is hired on the basis of sex identity, but rather on merit. This sex differentiation has more subtly given men greater opportunities in the workplace. Granting them privileges by such methods has perpetuated male dominance. Johnson (2005) stresses that male dominance creates power differences and distance between men and women, thereby reinforcing inequalities. Male dominance also means that where there is concentration of power in one single authority, men are most likely to have it (Johnson, 2005). This situation has increasingly prevailed in Ghana, and has penetrated the civil service. An interviewee stated:

> The men think they are the leaders in everything and, therefore, have authority over you. Even when you are the head of department they think they should still give you directives, and so they want to be in the helm of affairs. It feels as though they doubt your capabilities.

That leadership is male is a cultural stereotype. In terms of the Ghanaian traditional setup, it is an accurate one, where the man’s image as the head of the family and the decision maker has to be respected and preserved. So profound a belief is it that it is still upheld by some highly educated men. This belief reinforces inequalities for women, and perpetuates a system of privilege for men. A female interviewee summed it up:

> Although you have highly educated male colleagues, they still operate in a traditional mindset. For these men, they believe that traditionally, a woman’s place is supposed to
be in the home and not in the formal work setting. So even when you struggle to enter the workplace, you are seen as an intruder. Your male colleagues see you as not belonging to that place.

Clearly, then, the workplace is characterized by norms and values mostly consistent with traditional socio-cultural factors, with women’s decision making limited to social aspects of the family, and males being the key power holders. Ghanaian society is still very much male dominated, with men little inclined to change their perceptions of and attitudes towards women.

**Subtle Discrimination**

Women’s participation and representation in the workforce is considered a right. This right has been recognized in several regional and international human rights instruments; notable among them is the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women. The government of Ghana, as a signatory to these conventions, has committed itself to acting on gender issues and gender equality at all levels of society. Further, the 1992 Constitution mandates government to ensure fair treatment of men and women. This notwithstanding, women continue to face subtle discrimination in the civil service.

Two forms of discrimination, subjective and objective, have been identified in the literature. Subjective discrimination “exists when an individual or group, on the basis of their own subjective perceptions, define their situation as discriminatory” (Hopkins, 1980: 131). Naff (1995: 538) sees it “as the perception that a work-irrelevant criterion -- in this case sex -- affects how one is treated or evaluated on the job.” Objective discrimination, on the other hand, is a matter of the exact number of discrimination cases in workplaces. A key aspect of it is wage disparities among different groups of people at the workplace.

In Ghana subjective discrimination is more the norm, since all objective discrimination has been outlawed since independence. As the main policy-making and implementing institution of the government, the service would, one thinks, be the leading example of gender indiscrimination. Unfortunately, this has not been the case. The problem is that such discriminatory practices are very subtle. Thus, unlike objective discrimination, which can be dealt with by laws, subtle discriminatory practices are difficult to remedy because the issues cannot be legislated.

A number of interviewees identified some of the discriminatory practices they have experienced at the workplace. For instance, one noted:

> In fact, when I compare myself with my male colleagues and consider where they are and where I am today, I am inclined to believe that if I were a male, I would have advanced further than where I am now. Not because I am not qualified or do not have the skills, but it is all because of gender. It is so subtle that you cannot place your finger on it.

Another said:

> Someone in my department thought that I was young in the service and, relatively, too young to rise. It was like, “She has a master’s degree, so she feels that she needs to rise”. This person actually held on to my position for two years, and refused to make me rise. At a point, much as I opposed it, but I realized that hard as I tried, it was
not going to work, so I had to give up. Eventually, I was promoted, and that was just about a month ago.

A significant portion of the literature dealing with women in management issues indicates that promotion mechanisms have been raised as a potential barrier to female career progression in the public service (Catalyst, 1990). The same is true in the Ghanaian civil service. The Chief Director position is deemed to be a career progression; and yet, as has been noted, in the entire service only six women currently occupy this position. The inability of women to attain that level is based on the system of promotion and opportunity for career development in terms of training, conference attendance, and duty travel. There thus seems to be some mistrust about the transparency of the entire system, particularly when it comes to promotion and opportunity.

Opportunities for career development and progression include the ability to pursue further education at home or abroad, as well as to travel and participate in international conferences, workshops, and meetings. Most of the women interviewed, for instance, felt that their opportunities to progress are limited compared with their male colleagues. An interviewee remarked:

"Sometimes you realize that only the men are those who are selected to go on the duty travel, even, for trips within Ghana in my department. So I asked for an explanation, and was told that, 'Well, as for the women, they will say that they have to stay and take care of their children and their families, so they will not get time to go on such trips.' This is a generalization, and a wrong assumption. I, in particular, have never been offered the opportunity; if they did, I would definitely go."

To buttress this assertion, another interviewee opined:

"It is often assumed that because you are women and you have family responsibility, the opportunity to go for a trek will not be of interest to you at all. Sometimes, with delegation to international conferences, it is mostly skewed towards men. They do not take into consideration gender parity."

Discrimination and bias were echoed in Pointer’s (1996) research into local government in England, which found that female employees felt that they had been discriminated against at some point in their career. Conscious or unconsciously, women are far removed from decision making, and find themselves underrepresented in the governance structure of their organizations, and at forums that discuss managerial issues: they are thus not able to raise those issues. Women’s participation in and representation at such forums are crucial, since many decisions that affect the various stakeholders in society are deliberated upon. Their lack of representation at such meetings limits their ability to influence decisions and policies. At the same time, it deprives them of the ability to learn new techniques for managing organizations and to use in the decision making process, should they happen to find themselves at this level.

**Personal obstacles**

Self-confidence, competence, positive attitude, initiative, and educational advancements, among other factors, constitute vital components of human capital. Studies have shown that a potential barrier to career progression may be present in women’s own view of themselves and their attitude to work (McStravog, 2006). A number of studies have also shown, and continue to show, that educational advancement may help to eliminate the glass ceiling and, thus, pave the way for women to get to the top of the organizational hierarchy. Having a higher educational
degree is, therefore, helpful for moving up the organizational ladder; although other dynamics, such as experience, may also be useful. The information gathered from the interviews suggests, therefore, that some women are more content to stay on the periphery at work to avoid responsibility and the acrimony of bureaucratic politics.

Until recently, many women in the civil service in Ghana did not really aspire to higher academic pursuits. Most of them lacked, and still lack, the ambition and self-confidence to do so, or to see themselves as potential sources of new and innovative ideas. Furthermore, some were, and still are, content with the level at which they find themselves. Until recently, a large majority of the women who constituted the bulk of workers in the lower ranks had either completed secretarial school or had the Ordinary or Advanced Level Certificate, with only a small number attaining a diploma or a higher National Diploma from a post-secondary institution.

In the past two decades, however, some women in the service have returned to pursuing first and post-graduate degrees. It must be acknowledged that times are changing, and with the world economy becoming more knowledge-based, and with technological developments, without at the very least a first degree and a number of years of experience one is unlikely to be able to rise to the administrative class or into the senior executive group of the service. The educational qualifications and working experience, not to mention the obviously necessary written exams and interviews, are unattainable if someone ignores opportunities to upgrade their assets. Until these are properly combined, then, women will continue to stagnate at their present levels.

Women’s personal attitude to work, their self doubt, and lack of motivation, were consistently emphasized by our interviewees. A senior executive, for instance, commented:

Women have to change their mindset. Because much as we think that men are sometimes stifling our progress, we also have to be proactive. I sometimes take up responsibilities that my male counterparts do not want to take. We need to take up initiatives. We should not accept that it is a man’s world. No, we should be able to break through by developing ourselves more.

Another was of the view that

[w]omen have to learn to motivate ourselves. We have to learn to be diverse and versatile, and try to break out the nuts we have ‘shelled’ for ourselves. I think we should encourage women to take such responsible positions.

Yet another was unequivocal that

[w]omen should see themselves as equal creatures as men. The moment we succumb to the idea of men being superior, we become dependent on them. We need to move from dependency to independence.

The sense of a need for more ambition and the “women are their own enemies” syndrome could also be found in the perception of leadership positions occupied by women. Most interviewees felt that women in leadership are not respected by other women in the service. I work in a predominantly female organization, and I have faced a lot of challenges from my own female colleagues. They do not respect the position you occupy; sometimes they do not see you as one of them. So you do not get the needed support.

Such an attitude on the part of other women compels some women in leadership positions to adopt male attitudes in order to succeed in their profession (Davidson, 1999). As McStravog (2006) puts it, such a tactic requires the suppression of qualities that are seen as feminine: being person-oriented and sensitive to others’ needs. The reason is that “women do not acknowledge
what their fellow women have done,” says an interviewee. A number of interviewees were adamant that women need to band together to support other women who have climbed the ladder, if the so-called glass ceiling is to be broken. For instance, one interviewee noted:

As women, we should also learn some of the tricks of the trade. Men can manipulate us to their advantage. We need to love ourselves and unite against a ‘common enemy.’ We need to support each other. We need to change our attitude. We need to appreciate and commend fellow women on their achievements. We need to appreciate and support ourselves.

Another quibble was that
[y]ou go to a predominantly male organization, and the men team up against you. So in both ways you do not get the needed support. The cultural things are still very strong. Unless we [women] reorient our thinking as both men and women, and value women, and to see them [women] as competent enough to occupy leadership positions, we will continue to stagnate.

Another interviewee also remarked:

There are some unwritten workplace cultures where the men support each other to move up; the women do not do so to each other. So you find your colleague woman in a higher position, and instead of teaming up to support her, we rather work to pull them down. The men capitalize on this to move forward. So it works against us.

**Government’s commitment to issues relating particularly to women:**

In spite of the various commitments made by government since independence, including the signing of various international treaties to empower women, in reality very little has happened. It is worth mentioning that while in recent times the ministries of Health, Education, and Food and Agriculture have adopted gender policies that have yielded some positive results in terms of increased attention to gender issues, overall it has been quite difficult to sustain a number of the initiatives undertaken by government. In 2003, for instance, Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) were mandated to set up gender desks at the various offices. These gender desk offices were expected to contribute to policy formulation in the various MDAs by way of promoting gender mainstreaming. Unfortunately, these offices do not have the necessary capacity or resources to effectively influence policy and, therefore, exist in name only (Adusah-Karikari and Akuoko, 2010). Additionally, concerted efforts to address such issues as the absence of gender responsive budgeting, that will ensure that policies and programs for addressing the issues are well implemented on sustainable basis, are inadequate.

A number of interviewees expressed enormous concerns about government commitments to increasing the participation of women in decision making. While the majority commended government for a number of initiatives on gender issues already undertaken, these interviewees were of the view that a lot more needs to be done to enhance active representation in the public bureaucracy and the political sphere. To these concerned interviewees, little has changed over the years because of the slowness with which policies are undertaken and implemented. For instance, it is difficult to see any significant change in women's representation with the creation of the MOWAC. In fact, some interviewees thought the situation is getting worse, considering the number of women in Parliament and Cabinet and the upper echelons of the bureaucracy, not to mention public boards and other institutions. So much of what the government has done, and continues to do, can, therefore, be described as simply tokenism.
In 1998 the government of Ghana put in place an Affirmative Action Policy that called for at least 40% representation of women in appointments to the public service, committees, boards, and other public institutions. Over the years little effort has been made to make this a substantive policy, backed by law; and government has not been held accountable for implementation of the policy. On this an interviewee commented:

I know that now MOWAC is trying to move the affirmative action policy from policy guidelines to legislation, and it is believed that once it is legislated, it will be easier to enforce it. The argument that is often put up is that the qualified women cannot be found, but I remember MOWAC put up the directory of women in relevant positions and qualifications to guide those making appointments; but you still find that fewer women were appointed.

Another respondent described the government’s affirmative action directive as a paper tiger. The interviewee noted that:

Although the government issued an affirmative action directive, which called for a 40% quota for women’s representation in policy-making bodies, it is just on paper. Enforcement of the directive has been very challenging. So you still find a board of nine members with only one woman. Hence, the affirmation policy is not followed to the letter by the government itself as the appointing authority.

The inability to enforce the quota directive can be squarely blamed on the fact that it was an administrative directive with no adequate incentive to enforce it. The directive was left to the whims and caprices of managers to implement, without any accountability regime in place to ensure that it is adequately carried out. To avoid this problem, in 2009 the MOWAC, in collaboration with and with support from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, held a policy dialogue to discuss measures to increase women’s participation and representation with stakeholders, with the overall objective of collating views for the development of Affirmative Action (AA) Legislation. Thus, the belief is that if an AA is legislated, it will serve as a stick, and force the authorities to implement the policy directive.

Conclusion

The intent of this paper was to examine whether passive representation can lead to active representation, with special reference to the civil service in Ghana, and to contribute to the literature on representative bureaucracy. Through interviews it was ascertained that this passive-active link has not been realized in Ghana because of four main stumbling blocks; and that if Ghana and, perhaps, other developing countries want to achieve such representation, it is necessary to solve these problems. We realized that the challenges that women face are multifaceted: culture centred, indicating that gender-based social roles irrelevant to the workplace have been transferred there; history centred, personality centred and politics centred. Resolution of these conundrums requires a multidimensional approach, from all segments of society. The reality underpinning the issues at stake is the need to clarify and concretize our thinking on how gender influences social and institutional relations. The findings of this study have shown that efforts to deal with these issues should take place in a more concrete and systematic manner, and that there should be a model that includes accountability regimes to ensure that government’s policies on gender are fully implemented. It is an irony that even with a considerable increase in the number of jurisdictions in which the government of Ghana has established women’s policy machinery, an agency dedicated to promoting equality and
improving the status and conditions of women, both within the state and in the bureaucracy, gender issues persist in state institutions.

Basing our conclusions on the issues we have identified in this paper, we believe that the onus is on government to show a serious commitment to gender issues in a more concrete and systematic manner. Government should be held accountable to the conventions and protocols they signed on to or ratified at international conferences. The political and bureaucratic leadership must show commitment to gender equality, if all the efforts being expended are to yield the desired results. The leadership should "walk the talk," and stop paying lip service. There should be continuous appraisal and analysis of government policies and other initiatives, and of their implementation, as well as the development of needed programs in light of implementation difficulties and the rapid changes in the socio-cultural, economic, and political environments, so as to be able to bridge the inequity gap and, where necessary, enact legislation that aims to create awareness about the issues and the stereotyping that discriminate against women. There should be gender training and sensitization for policy-makers, and tools and systems to support women that will enhance their upward mobility in the civil service, as well as in other state institutions.

Manuh and Anyidoho (2008) have confirmed that the MOWAC lacks both the vision and the capacity to lead Ghanaian women up the path to empowerment. This is a matter of great concern, inasmuch as for some of the issues that have been identified what is required to bring about the needed change is an appreciation of the need to actively empower women and remove the barriers that continue to impede their participation in the upper levels of the public administration system. The MOWAC, therefore, needs to be well resourced and well positioned at the centre of policy-making. As Sawer (1996) recommends, women’s policy machinery should maintain a strong presence at the centre of government (the “hub”), as well as within specific government departments (the “spokes”). In fact, it is disheartening that the civil service does not even have its own gender policy to coordinate the efforts of the MDAs. Additionally, there are no structures available through which women could seek redress when they are discriminated against. If the MOWAC is well positioned, it can enhance some of these efforts to the benefit of all women.

Charity, it is said, begins at home. Some of the women in the civil service need to work on their personal development, and be self-motivated and assertive in all aspects of their lives. They should not wait and expect "manna to fall from the skies," so to speak. As recommended by McStravog (2008), female staff should apply for posts even when they feel that rival applicants are better qualified, even if merely to benefit from the interview experience. The crux of the matter, however, is that there needs to be an attitudinal change in all spheres of the society. Most of the women in the service continue to dwell on the periphery, and not at the centre. A concerted effort by the government, society, the civil service itself and, in particular, the women is needed to help push forward the agenda of active representation in the bureaucracy.

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