

ECOWAS and Women Representation in West Africa

Obamamoye BF*

Department of International Relations, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

*Corresponding author: Obamamoye BF, Department of International Relations, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, Tel: +2347032689184; E-mail: obamamoyebabatunde@yahoo.com

Received date: August 04, 2016, Accepted date: August 30, 2016, Published date: September 01, 2016

Copyright: © 2016 Obamamoye BF. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Abstract

Contrary to the assertion regarding general exponential increase in women's political representation in Africa, alarming political marginalization of women in West African sub-region continues, where women manage to occupy marginal percentage of the elected parliamentarians and subsequently maintain relative inarticulacy in the decision-making process of their respective states. This article therefore examines ECOWAS as potential norm entrepreneur within the context of women representation in parliaments in West Africa. It further interrogates rationales propelling argument for women adequate representation, presents situational analysis of women's under-representation in West Africa, and argues for indispensable role which ECOWAS could play in augmenting the presence of women in national parliaments. It concludes that in spite of the enormous domestic challenges confronting women's representation, ECOWAS within the confines of normative actor, has a needed responsibility that could contribute to gradual overhaul of the hitherto high under-representation of women in the parliaments.

Keywords Women; Women representation; ECOWAS; Norm entrepreneur and West Africa

Introduction

The marginalization of women in political representation, though with varying degree, is a chronic and ubiquitous phenomenon in different regions of the world [1]. Compared to their men counterpart, the level of women participation in decision-making and representation as the members of national parliaments is uninspiring and debilitating. It remains an enduring and pervasive experience in the 21st century, to the extent that political decision-making in some states in the international system is stereotypically assigned to men, while women concentrate their attention on issues of low politics. Where they are not totally hindered, democratic institutions through which the representatives are elected could not sustain persistently the incremental level of women's political emancipation or fast track the proportional level of women's political representation without implementation of affirmative action [2]. The near silence of the one-half population in national governance at a broader degree in many states has created wider concern and dilemma, not only for women's group but also scholars. With specific examples majorly from Nigeria and Ghana, this paper interrogates prospect of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) playing the role of norm entrepreneur within the context of high women under-representation in parliaments in West African sub-region for three fundamental grounds.

First, West Africa states are currently maintaining recalcitrant, thorny and awkward stance to the global campaign for gender equality/fairness in national political representation. Contrary to the assertion regarding general exponential increase in women's representation in Africa as presented by some scholars [3,4], alarming political marginalization of women in West Africa continues. With the exception of Senegal, women in the sub-region manage to occupy marginal percentage of the elected parliamentarian seats in their

respective states and by implication maintain inarticulacy in the governance process. It apparently became pathetic in the 21st century that while substantial number of states (Rwanda, Seychelles, Mozambique, South Africa, Angola, Tunisia, Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia) from other African sub-regions have advanced and emerged as global quintessence of gender friendly democracies on the basis of the proportion of women in parliaments; internal dynamics in many West African states keep on upholding the hard-line masculine that virtually neglect unique contribution of women to policy making. This has generated women's perpetual clamour for adequate representation in many of these states, pointing attention to their population strength and inclusive representation as pertinent attribute of democracy. Second, there is a paucity of robust scholarly articles interrogating the distinctiveness of political gender lop-sidedness in West Africa as well as the prospect of ECOWAS as normative actor regarding augmentation of women inclusion in national decision-making process of member states. Meticulous interrogation of the dynamics of ECOWAS responses to the alarming under-representation of women in the region through its institutional framework compare to other sub-regional organizations has not been thoroughly explored. Many contemporary academic works on the supranational organization revolve around issues such as economic integration [5,6], peace and security [7], peacekeeping operations [8-10] and free movement of persons [11,12]. It invariably created vacuum in the knowledge industry regarding the peculiarity of women's political plights that traverse across the sub-region.

Lastly, within the milieu of broader notion of women's exclusion from participation in governance, many scholars have attempted to espouse arguments on the factors propelling the political marginalization of women or how such factors could be effectively managed or subdued. Dahlerup and Freidenvall [2], Krook [13] and Ndlovu and Mutale [3] have articulated adoption of affirmative action, in form of gender quotas, as dependable means with verifiable impact or potential prowess for overcoming descriptive political relegation of women, while scholars like Tremblay and Pelletier [14], Caul [15],

Kittilson [16] and Kunovich and Paxton [17] concentrate on the indispensable role of the inherent attributes of political parties such as ideology, organizational structure, gender-sensitive policies, percentage of party's women activist, ratio of women party leaders and candidates in enhancing the election of women political leaders. Predominantly, many of these scholars attributed the explanations and required solution to women's political under-representation via presence or absence of national policies (reserved seats, legislative quotas and type of electoral system) or political parties' characteristics. In essence, such perspectives reveal national and sub-national analysis of *why* and *how* questions, but neglect the viewpoint from supranational outlook. These, among other factors, necessitate the rationale for this short intellectual overture.

Thus, the central focus of this article is to present an argument for adequate inclusion of women in the legislative process in West Africa sub-region through the role(s) of ECOWAS as sub-regional organization. While acknowledging the sovereignty of member states over domestic politics and the impact of internal factors on women's representation, this article accentuates the prospective and conceivable influence of ECOWAS as an effective sub-regional organization in generating desirable states' responses to women's political predicament in their domains. Drawing from the thesis of norm entrepreneurs, the article deems and reflects ECOWAS as a potential gender equality norm entrepreneur with prowess foreseeable influence on the comportment of member states regarding institutionalization of domestic policies or measures for women's political empowerment. To this effect, first, the next section of the article interrogates factors precipitating the demand for passable women representation in national decision-making. In the following section, through the contention that the emergence of gender equality norms depends on norm entrepreneurs, it avers indispensable and potential roles which ECOWAS could play in modulating the behavior of member states towards national institutionalization of effective policies as a means of overhauling women's high under-representation. Finally, the article appraises the different phases of women's political plight in West Africa and resultant response from ECOWAS; and how the organization could play the role of normative actor like the Southern African Development Community (SADC) towards augmenting women's proportion in national parliaments in the region. It concludes that in spite of the presence of myriad domestic challenges confronting the women's representation, ECOWAS has the prospect of playing the role of gender norm entrepreneur that will gradually ignite adoption of national gender sensitive laws that will upturn women's representation in parliament across West Africa.

Why Women Representation?

Underpinned by the pervasive and protracted marginalization of women in the political configurations in many states of the world [18] clamour for gender parity/fairness in national representation has occupied the front burner of theoretical debate in the 21st century. Right from the inscription of the notion of gender equality in the UN Charter in 1945 [19], the intensity of advocacy and clamour for the rights of women participation in the governance of their respective states has gained incremental demand. Different international organizations, civil society groups, women advocates and scholars have devoted momentous exertions in advancing argument towards the women's political emancipation. In this regard, the United Nations had organized conferences and codified international documents that are playing significant role in shaping the orientation of women for

political pursuit. The UN's 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action accentuates that active involvement of women in government is not only *sin qua non* for social justice and inclusive democracy, "but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account". Inter-Parliamentary Union (2015) maintains that women's passable presence in governance tends to achieve two important non-contradictory goals 'fairness' and 'positive contribution to society'. Couple with the rise of international women's movement and women's domestic struggle, the message of necessity of women in national decision making has become clearer like never before in the 21st century [20].

Unsurprisingly, the press for women occupation of critical mass [21] or parity in parliaments in their respective domains is bolstered within the milieu of premises. In the first instance, women constitute half or more population in most countries of the world, including West African states [22]. Any state where this demographic analysis is not applicable, the difference would be very slim. Therefore, exclusion of the half of the population out of the national executive and parliamentary decision making process, argue by the advocate of women in governance, will amount to disempowerment of the same group of people. Second, persistence domination of municipal parliaments by men without adequate incorporation of women will only breed policies, acts, laws and social structures that are patriarchy or gender-insensitivity in nature [17]. Effective inclusion of women in legislative processes on the other way round will invariably reinforce the level of 'women-friendly policy' that is germane to their empowerment as women tend significantly towards representation of women interest [23-25]. The implications of the relegation and infinitesimal number of elected women in the area of input and the persistent hegemonic monopoly of state elected representatives by men then will only lead to the societal detriment and wastage of human resources. It is on this particular rationale that Goldstein and Pevehouse [26] presents difference feminists argument which avers that perpetual international conflicts would have been averted if women had been given enough leadership avenues to apply their home like pacifist nature in inter-state relations. Nevertheless, such line of reasoning fails to explain why country like United Kingdom of Great Britain, under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher, 'the Iron Woman', prosecuted a violent conflict with Argentina over the Falkland Islands in 1982. Related to the above is the notion that women's interests can only be effectively, meritoriously and realistically defended by women who have undergone certain peculiar experiences and fathom the yearnings of female gender [25,27]. Underscoring the above claim or assertion, the resounding and emphatic theme from the interviews conducted by Fallon [24] with respondents revolves around the primacy of "women representing women within politics".

Fourth, there is an assertion that power sharing parity between men and women has a direct and positive effect for women empowerment as agitated by different non-state actors since the late 20th century. That is, comprehensive women's empowerment would amount to incomplete task without the complementary political inclusion and representation in governance. Fifth, unlike the scenario during despotic regime, the holistic notion of democracy suggests a liberal system of governance where every citizen (irrespective of your gender, race, colour and background) has equal access to political entitlements not only in the arena of voting, but also identical right to representation [23]. In this regard, Stockemer [28] posits that 'democracy, by definition endows citizens with equal rights; this should guarantee the fair representation of major cohorts of the population including women.' Hence, the overarching power influence of men and

intensity in the political marginalization of a teeming population of women after the wave of democratization that spread across continents [29] has generated intense mobilization on the part of women's group and feminist advocates; and empathy from international organization for women's adequate representation. Fallon, Swiss and Viterna [23] capture the avowal in synopsis when they said that "increasing levels of democratic freedoms should, in theory, improve women's access to political position". Drawn from the foregoing, the advocacy for women adequate representation has attracted the participation of key players and taken global dimension in the 21st century with exigency implementation of affirmative action by some states [30]. The *précis* is that, activism with diverse strategies for women in governance are designed for empowerment, equity, fairness and representation of women's interest [20,31]. In other words it is more concerned with *who* represents – women, *what* is represents – women's interests and *how* is represented – through women in governance.

ECOWAS and the Power of a Norm Entrepreneur for Women's Presentation

The capacity of a calibre of international organizations, like ECOWAS, to effectively modulate and direct the behavior, actions, inactions, characters and domestic policies of member states towards widespread regional acceptability of and encouragement for progressive increment in women's representation in parliaments can be orchestrated thorough the 'norm entrepreneur' model. The term, norm entrepreneur, could be traced to the scholarly work of Sunstein [32]. Norm on its own can simply be defined as the standards of common expected deportment among a given actors which restricts the choice of actions, legitimates the rights acts and forbids the wrong ones [33-35]. The geographical confines of such shared behaviour may be communal, national, sub-regional, regional or global; while the purported actors in this sense could be individuals, group of non-state actors or states. However, due to the fact that some new norms will not emerged in a vacuum without a rigorous means of initiation propelled the need for norm entrepreneur. As espoused by Sunstein [32], Finnemore and Sikkink [33] and substantiated by Souaré [34], a norm entrepreneur is an individual, political actor or international organization that initiates new standard of behaviour among a group of players, mobilizes and convinces members about its appositeness for the purpose of modifying a particular prevailing behavior. The effectiveness of such norm emergence depends on the strong desire of the norm entrepreneur, its application of the right instrument for persuasion and the degree of influence on the members of the community. For international organization, it the first stage of long processes of moderating the behaviors of member states which permits the standard setting of what comportment is appropriate at a given point in time. Norm cascade and internalization [33] will not occur without the initial role of the norm entrepreneur. Putting into consideration how international factors, like domestic issues, continually restrain the choice of actions [36] available to states, the power of international norm in influencing the internal political dynamics of states cannot be over-emphasized. This does not negate the fact that states and other international actors at times do violate formal or informal agreements sanctioned by international organizations they are committed to; but in most cases mindful of the implications. Sovereign independent states deliberately comply at different points in time with plenitude of supranational directives of international institutions and norms not necessarily because of the fear of concerted coercion, like the case in Iraq in 1991, but to avoid been stigmatized, defamed or exoriated [22,34].

With the benefit of hindsight, the ECOWAS, as a reputable sub-regional West African organization, has displayed the power of norm entrepreneurship over the years on specific issues different from gender matters. The organization has been able to direct the actions and comportment of the member states as a response to collective interests. Notable among others, is on the free movement of persons from one member state to another without visa within three months. Such adventure was unimaginable during the pre-1975 era before the establishment of the organization in the region. But courtesy of the 1979 Protocol Relating to Free Movement of Persons, in the name of regional integration, states in West Africa find it easier and pleasing in allowing the nationals from sub-regional neighbors into their territories without the application of conventional procedures. In the same vein, after the signing of the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance in 2001, sub-national actors such as political parties and states leaders understand the repercussion of and position of the organization to unconstitutional accession to power in any states of the region as exemplified in Cote d'Ivoire during the former President, Laurent Gbagbo, recalcitrant attempt. This invariably contributed to the internationally celebrated decision by the former President of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan, and his political party, People Democratic Party (PDP), to voluntarily hand over the mantle of leadership to another political party after 16 years of uninterrupted governance by the party.

Apparently, the inference that could be drawn from the above experiences of ECOWAS in line with the potential power of a norm entrepreneur is that, regulation of state behavior by international institutions is not restricted to a particular subject matter, but cut across wide range of issues, including mandating state legislations or policy development with respect to affirmative action for improvement of women representation in national decision making. Through this strategy, ECOWAS can act as a distinct political actor and develop a robust norm in form of protocols or pronounced resolutions that will call the attention of the member states to women's representation in political decision making via internal measures and the same time facilitate the articulated stance of the United Nations and African Union on gender representation equity. In this respect, the gradual embracing notion of quota for women's adequate representation in the contemporary time has its source in international norms [37] articulated under the auspices of the UN since the 1979 Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Since then, more than 120 countries have adopted gender-oriented quota for equity in National Assemblies [38]. With a deserving attention, many states outside the sphere of West Africa have institutionalized distinct measures or quotas mainly for women's involvement in governance. Kenya, for example, developed a new constitution in 2010 which maintains that "no single gender should hold more than two-thirds of elective or appointive positions" [39]. Equally, India legislative body passed the Constitutional Amendment Act in 1992 that entrenched one-third representation for women in the local bodies [40]. Similarly, one-third quota is not only adopted for women's inclusion in local governance in Pakistan, but also legislative reserved seats for women in the national legislative body [13]. Basically, many states across the world with substantive women representation in parliaments put in place deliberate laws or policies necessitating the increase of women in decision making. One of the precipitating factors that compelled the legislative actions of the states mentioned above involves the influence of the United Nations' position on gender equality, [22,20] and many regional organizations.

From the foregoing, if ECOWAS takes the issue of women in governance as paramount, as reflected in the 2001 ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good governance and 2003 Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women, endorsed by ECOWAS; the organization can influence the disposition of member states on the need to overhaul exclusion or marginalization of women in parliaments across West Africa. This an external dimension of the missing links that contributed to the absence of municipal legal measures for women's political empowerment across the region. Of course, the central argument is not to attribute the causes of women's massive under-representation in West Africa to ECOWAS. As mentioned earlier, they are predominantly by-products of the interplay of socio-cultural domestic factors in these states. Notwithstanding, the central contention of this article accentuates that the sub-regional organization can play the role of normative player in overhauling the enduring political relegation of women through development of formidable norms and standards for member states. For emphasis, ECOWAS is not considered here as projecting the masculine disposition of her member states, but as a distinct legal entity that has interest in gender equality as reflected in the aforementioned Protocol. It is imperative due to the negligence of state actors to respond to women's political yearnings in West Africa over the years. Since different cultures, traditions, electoral environments and status quo prevailing in many states in West Africa are not favourable to meet up with women's critical mass during elections; progressive advancement in the area of passable women representation in national parliaments earnestly demands supranational regime and engagement. Ostensibly, this is not because the organization has the capacity to forcefully compel states in this regard, but partly because states consciously or unconsciously pay attention to widely acceptable norms in the comity of nations as espoused by supranational body through concerted agreement with fear of being left out [41] or desire to serve as role model.

Exclusion, Marginalization and ECOWAS Response to Women's Political Plights

Women in West Africa over the years have experienced different phases in the sphere of representation in the government of their respective states. These range from virtual exclusion to exclusion to the contemporary marginalization. Right from the gradual independence of states from the colonial powers in the late 1950s, decision making process and governance in many West African states have been preoccupied as responsibilities of men with near absence of women. The pattern of the colonial policies and administration carried out by Britain, France or Portugal in the region conspicuously prepared men as the capable hands with unique quality to take the mantle of national leadership, while women only played complementary roles mostly at the domestic level [42]. Consequently, the political achievements of women in West Africa prior to the emergence of colonial rule as powerful and relevant Queen mother among the Akan in Ghana [43], potent *Iyaloja* and *Iyalode* in Yoruba Land in Nigeria [44] and other germane roles in the traditional institutions across the region were relegated. Not surprisingly, men dominated the available leadership positions in many West African states during the first wave of western democracy in the region. In spite of the remarkable contribution to anti-colonial struggles and resistance mounted by women, in Nigeria for instance, against colonialists and their policies; women constituency only produced two federal senators between 1961 to 1966 [45]. It was only the recognition of the invaluable contribution of women to the independence of Ghana that prompted the legislation of

the first ever 1959 affirmative action in African continent in Ghana which reserved 10 special seats for women in the Ghanaian national parliament [42,46]. In other words, it demanded legislative intervention before women could secure 10% of the total members of Ghanaian Parliament. Women's virtual absence in national governance during the early post-independence years in West Africa is not only applicable in Ghana and Nigeria, but in other states in the sub-region.

However, women's political plights became worse from the late 1960s as 'men in uniform' expanded their area of interest from national defense to political administration. This led to the complete exclusion of female gender from national policy-making responsibilities during the military regimes, virtually in all West African states [42]. During the period, welfare and economic motives dominated the attention of women's civil society organizations with limited, if any, yearning for political relevance. When women were trying to solidify their voice and find their bearing from the late 1980s through women's organizing, they were further co-opted and cocoon by the ruling political elites precipitated by the wives of the heads of states in many West Africa states [43]. It became complicated with the absence of freedom of speech and association as paraphernalia of military regimes.

Nevertheless, factors such as the global awareness of the notion of gender equality, intensification of the international women's movement, codification of multilateral agreements on women's empowerment, convocation of international women's conferences, and third wave of democratization [24] have rekindled women's clamour for passable representation in national political arena across West African states in the 21st century. Through the civil society organizations and related agencies, contemporary women's activism in many of these states has recorded redirection to political pursuit by focusing on the struggle for exponential upturn in the proportion of women representation in reference to many international agreements ratify by many of these countries. Commenting on the external factors in internal women's struggle, [22] accentuates that "while international documents and meetings serve as catalysts by introducing or popularizing new ideas and strategies for increasing women's representation, most of the 'work' in these campaigns is done by domestic actors". In this case, proliferation of women's groups with special interest in governance could not allow women to stop pressing for political pursuit. The Coalition on the Women's Manifesto for Ghana, for instance, published a political document in 2004 titled *The Women's Manifesto for Ghana* which articulated unacceptability of women's political marginalization in Ghana and demanded for 50% representation of women in the national parliament by means of affirmative action. In Sierra Leone, a civil society organization called 50/50 Group led by Dr. Nemaia Eshun-Badan in 2002 enunciated demand for 'gender equality in government and for maintaining a high public profile' for women's benefit. Similarly, Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC) as well as a host of other organizations in Nigeria focus specifically on public advocacy for affirmative action legislations that would enhance women's political inclusion in governance.

However, despite global and internal awareness on the need for immediate response to women's political plight, women under-representation situation in West Africa remains unabated. Contrary to the arguments posit about the exponential increase in women representation in Africa [3,4], there is massive marginalization in the gender composition of parliaments in different states with women bearing the onus. Currently, 15 countries out of 16 states in West Africa have less than 14% women in national parliaments (World

Economic Forum). Peculiarity of West Africa in this political gender bias analysis would be unravelled when contrasting with other sub-regions of Africa where more than 11 states recorded 20% and above women in single and lower houses of parliament [30,47]. With the benefit of insight, the placement of women in government and their descriptive representation in West Africa is highly uninspiring and disheartening. Apparently, there is no single reason that is sufficient to justify the chronic and ubiquitous gender imbalance in political arena in the sub-region. Women are confronted with numerous sub-national issues and challenges which is hindering their conspicuous presence in National Assemblies. It is highly connected with some factors prevalent in the political milieu in West Africa such as entrenched masculine culture, ferocious nature of electioneering process, gender-insensitive structure and policies of political parties, financial incapacity of many women and indifference response to the call for gender-based affirmative action by national governments. Others include patriarch dominance of political parties, cultural and religious restrictions, and societal gender stratification [25,48,49]. Limited number of women has potency to scale through the hurdles of political party's primary election, where virile postures prevail. The election environment too in many West African countries is very hostile to the extent that only few women can develop audacity and overcome such snag. Even when eventually emerged as flag bearers, in most cases, find it difficult to secure required votes for victory. The appalling summary of women's overall political representation in West Africa is inimical to women's aggregate interest.

Obviously, the present women's political relegation status is not hidden from the knowledge of the ECOWAS' leaders. The disparities was emphatically stated by the 2004 ECOWAS Gender Policy final draft that 'women are at a disadvantage in terms of access to political and other forms of representation' [50]. It was further reinforced by the former Director of ECOWAS Gender Development Centre, Aminatta Dibba, in 2010 that 'the challenges facing the fight for [political] gender equality ... are indeed enormous' in the region [51]. Being influenced by this reality and international community consensus on gender equality [52], ECOWAS' 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance incorporates a striking clause on women's political representation as it affects member states. Article 2(3) of the agreement states that:

Member states shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that women have equal rights with men to vote and be voted for in elections, to participate in the formulation of government policies and the implementation thereof and to hold public offices and perform public functions at all levels of governance (ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance).

Indubitably, this is one of the clearer expressions from ECOWAS concerning prescribed standards for state actors in order to give more room for women's representation in their respective domains. It portrays ECOWAS interest in combating hitherto gender political imbalance that put women on the receiving end. Howbeit, such contention is not potent enough to generate states' commitment, since women already have equal right with men, at least in theory, to vote and be voted for in these states.

Drawing from the interest in women's representation, as potential gender equality norm entrepreneur, the sub-regional organization needs to develop distinct protocol mainly for gender fairness representation that will require the ratification of member states with clear process of implementation and evaluation. A pointed example in this case is SADC which has contributed to articulated commitments

mainly for the advancement of women's descriptive representation in the Southern African sub-region. In 1997, the Heads of States and Government of the SADC unequivocally entrusted on the member states, through the Declaration on Gender and Development, the responsibility of accomplishing at least 30% representation of women in national elective offices latest by 2005 [53]. It was a profound and historic declaration that divulges serious readiness of the SADC for women's empowerment in the area of politics. At the same time in 2008, the SADC leaders advanced the earlier commitment from 30% to 50% representation for women in decision making positions by 2015 as reflected in the endorsed SADC Protocol on Gender and Development [54]. Invariably, this act of policy formulation, norm development and active monitoring strategy of the SADC has invariably shaped the disposition of member states toward improvement in the political representational level of women in the Southern African sub-region. At least five member states of the organization have adopted legislated quotas, while many political parties have launched voluntary quotas in several states [54]. Unsurprisingly, out of the seven African countries with more than 30% women representation in national parliaments in 2015, five states are from the sub-region [38]. As a matter of fact, that some SADC member states are still battling with high political marginalization of women is not tenet enough to misconstrue the influence of the standards set up by the Community, because it takes gradual process between norm development, norm cascade and norm internalization [33].

This is the area where the response of ECOWAS is lacking and mostly needed. The Community has collective and indispensable responsibility to play on behalf of the half of the West African population, women. As an entity and sub-regional actor, ECOWAS cannot but facilitate a more robust and comprehensive protocol or framework that is proficient to rekindle or re-ignite the domestic policy of member states for adequate women representation. Indeed, SADC is one of the organizations that ECOWAS possibly need to emulate in an attempt to correct the protracted abnormalities in the gender composition of the elective representatives of the member states in order to strengthen democratization and empower the half of the population for a robust regional integration. Among other means, ECOWAS must act as distinct legal actor and institute unique and dynamic protocols centred mainly on norms development for improvement in the trend of women's representation in West Africa, perhaps through affirmative action. This is because, many states of the world, with high level of women representation, have been able to subdue women's political relegation through the development of deliberate policies and laws which are considered by many scholars capable for rising the representative level of women significantly and by implication their political empowerment [2,13,25,55]. Member states of the organization must at the same time be persuaded to ratify such binding framework. In this age of tremendous improvement in women's representation in different states of Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America; ECOWAS must not continue with idleness on women's inclusion in governance, but must chaperon and maintain clearly articulated positions on women in governance by encourage states to institute affirmative action at different levels for women's passable representation. Although there are limits associated to what ECOWAS can do in this respect as member states are sovereign entities that are not subjected to any higher authority; yet voluntary compartment is likely to follow if the organization takes the suggested initial steps. Furthermore, a distinct agency must be created and saddled with the responsibility of convoking annual conferences for reviewing progressive reports towards the actualization of the mandate. Such a

sub-regional framework and move is capable to modulate the behavior and actions of not only the state actors, but also the leaders of each state with respect to policy formulation that will enhance more women's inclusion in national parliaments.

Conclusion

Pervasive cases of women's under-representation in national parliaments across different states of West Africa remain prominent and unabated in the 21st century when the notion of gender equality has become acceptable standard in the international system. The underlying factors responsible for this widespread political marginalization of women are mainly domestic, but common across the region, where the historic and socio-cultural configurations constructed men as the major agents of public policy-making. Consequently, demand for adequate representation of women in national assemblies by women's groups has taking new and unprecedented dimension since the late 20th century. Rationales for such advocacy are necessitated by gargantuan population of women, women's peculiar interests, importance of women's presence in governance to women's empowerment, new wave of democratization, among other factors. Therefore, this article advances the contention that adequate women representation in national parliaments across the West Africa sub-region could be facilitated or influenced through the roles of ECOWAS within the confines of playing the role of normative actor or norms entrepreneur. This could be done, as avers in this short intervention, through norm development and subsequent diffusion which entreats commitments from member states over the exigency need of instituting national legislative measures that will orchestrate certain percentage of seats to women in the gender composition of parliaments. This invariably has the potency to facilitate the comportment of member states in the area of policy formulation, such as quotas and other forms of affirmative action, which will significantly augment women's descriptive representation in governance.

References

1. Jones MP (1996) Increase Women's Representation via Gender Quotas: The Argentine Ley de Cupos. *Women and Politics* 16: 75-98.
2. Dahlerup D, Freidenvall L (2005) Quotas as a 'Fast Track' to Equal Representation for Women. *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 7: 26-48.
3. Ndlovu S, Mutale SB (2013) Emerging Trends in Women's Participation in Politics in Africa. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* 3: 72-79.
4. Tripp AM (2003) Women in Movement: Transformations in African Political Landscapes. *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 5: 233-255.
5. Michel RR (2004) The Integration of West Africa. *Journal of Undergraduate Research* 7: 1-14.
6. Nwogu N (2007) Regional Integration as an Instrument of Human Rights: Reconceptualizing ECOWAS. *Journal of Human Rights* 6: 345-360.
7. Iwilade A, Agbo JU (2012) ECOWAS and the Regulation of Regional Peace and Security in West Africa. *Democracy and Security* 8: 358-373.
8. Ofuately-Kodjoe W (1994) Regional organizations and the resolution of internal conflict: The ECOWAS intervention in Liberia. *International Peacekeeping* 1: 261-302.
9. Adeleke A (1995) The Politics and Diplomacy of Peacekeeping in West Africa: The Ecowas Operation in Liberia. *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 33: 569-593.
10. Arthur P (2010) ECOWAS and Regional Peacekeeping Integration in West Africa: Lessons for the Future. *Africa Today* 57: 2-24.
11. Adepoju A, Boulton A, Levin M (2010) Promoting Integration through Mobility: Free Movement under ECOWAS. *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 29: 121-144.
12. Kufuor KO (2013) When Two Leviathans Clash: Free Movement of Persons in ECOWAS and the Ghana Investment Act of 1994. *African Journal of Legal Studies* 6: 1-16.
13. Krook ML (2009) Quotas for Women in Politics: Gender and Candidate Selection Reform Worldwide. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
14. Tremblay M, Pelletier R (2001) More Women Constituency Party Presidents: A Strategy for Increasing the Number of Women Candidates in Canada? *Party Politics* 7: 157-190.
15. Caul M (1999) Women's Representation in Parliament: The Role of Political Parties. *Party Politics* 5: 79-98.
16. Kittilson MC (2006) Challenging Parties, Changing Parliaments: Women and Elected Office in Contemporary Western Europe. Ohio State University Press, Columbus.
17. Kunovich S, Paxton P (2005) Pathways to Power: The Role of Political Parties in Women's National Political Representation. *American Journal of Sociology* 111: 505-552.
18. Mountjoy S, McNeese T (2008) The Women's Rights Movement: Moving toward Equality. New York: Infobase Publishing.
19. Bunch C (2007) Women and Gender. Oxford University Press, New York.
20. Tripp AM (2003) The Changing Face of Africa's Legislatures: Women and Quotas.
21. United Nations (1995). Human Development Report. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
22. Krook ML (2008) Campaigns for Candidate Gender Quotas: A New Global Women's Movement? Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group), New York.
23. Fallon KM, Swiss L, Viterna J (2012) Resolving the Democracy Paradox: Democratization and Women's Legislative Representation in Developing Nations, 1975-2009. *American Sociological Review* 77: 380-408.
24. Fallon KM (2008) Democracy and the Rise of Women's Movements in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.
25. Schwindt-Bayer LA (2010) Political Power and Women's Representation in Latin America. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
26. Goldstein JS, Pevehouse JC (2014) International Relations. Pearson, New York.
27. United Nations (1994). African Platform for Action. Adopted by the Fifth Regional Conference on Women, held in Dakar from 16th to 23rd Nov.
28. Stockemer D (2011) Women's Parliamentary Representation in Africa: The Impact of Democracy and Corruption on the Number of Female Deputies in National Parliaments. *Political Studies* 59: 693-712.
29. Huntington SP (1991) The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
30. Krook ML (2010) Women's Representation in Parliament: A Qualitative Comparative Analysis. *Political Studies* 58: 886-908.
31. Pearce TO (2000) Gender and Governance in Africa: A Conceptual Framework for Research and Policy Analysis and Monitoring. A Draft Issues Paper to be Presented at the African Knowledge Networks Forum Preparatory Workshop, 17-18 August, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
32. Sunstein CR (1996) Social Norms and Social Roles. *Columbia Law Review* 96: 903-968.
33. Finnemore M, Sikkink K (1998) International Norm Dynamics and Political Change. *International Organization* 52: 887-917.
34. Souaré IK (2014) The African Union as a norm entrepreneur on military coups d'état in Africa (1952-2012): an empirical assessment. *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 52: 69-94.
35. De Nevers R (2007) Imposing International Norms: Great Powers and Norm Enforcement. *International Studies Review* 9: 53-80.
36. Kleibrink A (2011) The EU as a Norm Entrepreneur: the case of Lifelong Learning. *European Journal of Education* 46: 70-84.
37. Krook ML (2006) Reforming Representation: The Diffusion of Candidate Gender Quotas Worldwide. *Politics & Gender* 2: 303-327.

38. Inter-Parliamentary Union (2014) Women in Parliament: 20 Years in Review.
39. Kaimenyi C, Kinya C, Samwel CM (2013) An Analysis of Affirmative Action: The Two-Thirds Gender Rule in Kenya. *International Journal of Business, Humanities and Technology* 3: 91-97.
40. Rai SM (2007) Democratic Institutions, Political Representation and Women's Empowerment: The Quota Debate in India. *Democratization* 6: 84-99.
41. Kang A (2014). How Civil Society Represents Women: Feminists, Catholics, and Mobilization Strategies in Africa.
42. Geisler G (2004) Women and the Remaking of Politics in Southern Africa Negotiating Autonomy, Incorporation and Representation.
43. Soothill JE (2007) Gender, Social Change and Spiritual Power: Charismatic Christianity in Ghana. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV.
44. Olabisi IA, Olayode K (2015) Women, Political Systems and Party Politics in Nigeria. *Democracy and Socio-Economic Issues in Nigeria*. Abuja: Friedrich Eberto Stiftung.
45. Okome MO (2013) Unknown Soldier: Women's Radicalism, Activism, and State Violence in Twentieth-Century Nigeria. *Gender and Power Relations in Nigeria*. Plymouth: Lexington Books.
46. Torto B (2013) Affirmative Action and Women's Empowerment in Ghana: Challenges to a Growing Democracy. *Conflict Trends* 1: 41-49.
47. Inter-Parliamentary Union (2014) Women in Parliament: 20 Years in Review.
48. Ngara CO, Ayabam AT (2013) Women in Politics and Decision-Making in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects. *European Journal of Business and Social Sciences* 2: 47-58.
49. Oni EO (2104) The Dynamics of Women Political Emancipation and Political Participation in Nigeria. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 16: 99-112.
50. Robert R (2004) The Social Dimension of Regional Integration in ECOWAS.
51. ECOWAS Gender Development Centre (2010) The 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women.
52. Hartmann C (2013) Governance Transfer by the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS).
53. Sadie Y (2005) Women in Political Decision-making in the SADC Region. *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 65: 17-31.
54. SADC (2013) SADC Gender Monitor 2013: Women in Politics and Decision-Making Positions.
55. United Nations Development Programme (2002) Human Development Report 2002: Deepening democracy in a fragmented world. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press.