



## Promoting women's democratic participation in local governance: The role of community radio in Damongo, Savannah Region, Ghana

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### ABSTRACT

This study explored the role community radio (CR) plays in promoting women's political empowerment for participation in leadership and decision-making processes in the Savannah Region of Ghana. Guided by the Empowerment Theory and the Participatory Communication Theory, it examined how CR fosters agency, amplifies women's voices, and promotes inclusive political engagement. An exploratory case study design was adopted, focusing on Radio for Peace and Development (PAD) in the West Gonja Municipal Area. The target population of the study comprised institutions, experts, and individuals at the national, local, and community levels who were key stakeholders in Radio PAD, community radio, and women's empowerment in Damongo and Ghana. A purposive sampling technique was employed to pick 18 respondents who included community women as the primary participants, as well as key informants such as the queen mother, chief, community radio expert, local political figures, a female political figure from the Savannah Region, and the Municipal Gender Desk Officer (MGDO). Data was collected using a key informant interview guide and a focus group discussion guide. The data was analyzed and organized into themes using thematic content analysis. Both deductive and inductive coding methods were applied. The findings revealed that patriarchal structures, cultural norms, and socio-economic barriers significantly hinder women's political participation. Despite these challenges, radio PAD emerged as a platform for promoting women's participation through targeted programs such as Aboyamilso, Aboyagbon, and Within the Issues, as well as the broadcasts in local dialects to enhance accessibility and participation. The study concludes that in as much as community radio can be a meaningful catalyst in enhancing women's political empowerment, broadcasting alone cannot dismantle deep-rooted barriers. This study recommended that radio stations, including Radio PAD, can implement gender-responsive programming with measurable inclusion targets. Government agencies like the NCA and the NCCE must establish policy guidelines that mandate content to be gender inclusive. District and municipal assemblies can also work alongside radio stations to develop civic educational programs and content that would cater to women in underserved communities.

**Keywords:** Community Radio, Governance, Participation, Political Empowerment, Political Participation, Women.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Women's participation in politics is crucial for development and central to their political empowerment (Sundström et al., 2017). At the governance level, inclusive political processes ensure that women can exercise their rights in decision-making, ultimately leading to better governance and fostering social and economic development (United Nations Women (UNW), 2024). The increasing demand for women's participation in governance stems from global advocacy for gender equality, human rights, and efforts to address the historical underrepresentation of women in leadership (UNW, 2024). Despite making up more than half of the world's population, women's representation in political leadership remains significantly low and has been on the decline (UNW, 2024). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) prioritize women's political participation through Target 5.5. It seeks to "ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life" (UN, 2015). Women's active engagement in politics, particularly at the local level,



is therefore not only a step towards achieving gender equality but also a means of promoting inclusive policy-making and governance (Paucarchuco et al., 2021).

Community Radio (CR) has emerged as a powerful platform for addressing gender disparities in political representation by providing women with access to information and opportunities to engage in governance discourse (Ezra & Joel, 2024; Pareek et al., 2023). The localized nature of CR, including its use of indigenous languages and focus on community issues, enhances its potential to empower women politically (Naaikuur, 2020). Scholars argue that CR stations serve as catalysts for gender equality by amplifying women's voices, challenging socio-cultural barriers, and fostering civic engagement (Ezra & Joel, 2024; Rimmer, 2020). In Ghana, studies have highlighted the role of CR in promoting women's political empowerment and participation in governance (Amadu, 2023). Research has singled out Royals FM in the Bono Region and Radio Progress in the Upper West Region as key players in promoting local governance and increasing accountability (Naaikuur, 2020). This study examines how Radio for Peace and Development (PAD), a CR station in Damongo, Savannah Region, facilitates women's democratic participation in local governance in the area. Special focus is on how the station's programmes are tailored to encourage women to stand to be elected into the District Assembly Elections to represent various electoral areas and whether the electorates are motivated by the station's programmes in voting for female candidates.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite global and national efforts to promote gender equality in governance, women's political participation in Ghana remains significantly low (Awusi et al., 2023). Ghana faces substantial challenges in achieving gender parity within its local governance structures, particularly in the election of assembly members and the appointment of Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Chief Executives (MMDCEs) and is hence performing far below the benchmark of 30% and 40% for the United Nations (UN) and African Union (AU) respectively backs Women in Politics (ActionAid Ghana, 2024). Women form 50.7% of Ghana's population (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021), yet their representation in governance is disproportionately minimal, with only 14.5% in Parliament and a 3.8% in local assemblies (UNDP, 2023; African Elections on the 2023 District Assembly Elections, 2023). This imbalance is even more pronounced in the Savannah Region, where women's representation in district assemblies (1%) is less than the national average (3.8%). Such underrepresentation limits women's ability to influence policy decisions, advocate for their needs, and contribute to inclusive governance (UNDP, 2023). In 2019, the Savannah Region of Ghana, in particular exhibits a striking gender imbalance with 29 women constituting less than 1% of assembly members and only one woman representing the region at the national level (UNDP report, on women's representation in governance in Ghana, 2023). The West Gonja Assembly when it comes to representation in 2019 consists of 20 members, with 12 elected and eight appointed. In terms of gender composition, the Assembly has 3 females accounting for 15% of females and 17 males representing 85% of males (West Gonja District Assembly, 2019). In the 2023 Local Governance Elections, the West Gonja Assembly recorded 0% of women representation.

Ghana's Affirmative Action (Gender Equity) Act, 2024 seeks to address this issue by promoting equitable representation. Media, especially CR, plays a crucial role in shaping public discourse and mobilizing marginalized groups for political engagement. Scholars have established that, CR serves as an agent in addressing gender gaps by highlighting gender disparities with relation to political empowerment and political decision making (Pareek et al., 2023; Ezra & Joel, 2024). The establishment of Radio for Peace and Development (PAD) in Damongo was expected to enhance women's political empowerment through its civic forum mandate and through agenda setting responsibility (Sapna & Rakesh, 2019; Pareek et al., 2023; Ezra & Joel, 2024) Limited empirical research exists on how radio PAD has influenced women's political participation in governance the region. It remains unclear whether its programming has effectively encouraged more women to engage in local governance, aspire for leadership positions, or influence voter perceptions toward female candidates. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the role of radio PAD in facilitating women's political empowerment for participation in local governance in the Damongo Municipal Area. Specifically, it explores how the station's programming encourages women to contest district assembly elections and whether its influence translates into increased electoral support for female aspirants

### 1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To ascertain the experiences of women with regards to their political empowerment for participation in the Savannah Region.
- ii. To examine radio PAD's contributions to women's political empowerment for participation in the Savannah Region.



## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

The Empowerment and Participatory Communication theories served as the foundation for this study. The research was conducted through the lens of these theories and together they provide a conceptual understanding of how CR can create an enabling platform for women's participation.

#### 2.1.1 Empowerment Theory

This study is underpinned by the Empowerment Theory. The theory focuses on the processes through which individuals and communities gain control over their lives and environments (Rappaport, 1987). According to Rappaport, empowerment is not a fixed state but a dynamic process involving the interaction of individual strengths, community resources and social policies (Rappaport, 1987).

Central to the theory are dimensions of empowerment such as personal mastery, social participation and the ability to influence decisions that affect one's life and community (Rappaport, 1987). This study focuses on two key dimensions of the theory, thus social participation and the ability to influence decision-making. These dimensions are directly linked to women's political engagement. Within this framework, CR is examined as a potential vehicle for promoting women's agency, equipping women with the knowledge, voice, and the confidence needed to influence political decisions and participation in governance processes

#### 2.1.2 Participatory Communication Theory

This study is also guided by the Participatory Communication Theory, which emphasizes dialogue, shared understanding, and inclusive engagement in communication processes affect people's lives and development (Tufté & Mefalopulos, 2009). The theory views communication not merely as information exchange, but as a collaborative process through which knowledge is generated, voices are amplified, and empowerment particularly of marginalized groups is facilitated. The theory highlights key dimensions such as dialogue, inclusiveness, and collective decision-making (Tufté & Mefalopulos, 2009). This study focuses on dialogue and inclusiveness, as these dimensions align with its aim of examining how CR promotes women's democratic participation in local governance in Ghana. The theory is particularly relevant as it provides a lens to analyse how CR, as a community-based and community-owned medium, creates spaces for women's voices, encourages interactive political discourse, and supports their meaningful engagement in local governance processes.

### 2.2 Empirical Review

#### 2.2.1 Experiences of Women with Regards to their Political Empowerment for Participation

Traditional norms and patriarchal systems have historically limited women's roles in the public sphere, confining them to domestic responsibilities. Mlambo and Kapingura (2019) note that in many African societies, leadership and decision-making are often seen as the domain of men, which limits women's opportunities for political engagement. The political structures in many African countries also pose challenges to women's empowerment. These limitations undermine social participation as a dimension as highlighted in the empowerment theory. According to Tripp (2023), political parties in Africa are often structured in ways that marginalize women. Leadership positions are predominantly occupied by men making it difficult for them to influence party policies or advocate for gender-sensitive legislation (Tripp, 2023). This challenges the empowerment dimension of decision-making.

In Ghana, political campaigns often pose challenges for women candidates. Campaigns can be costly and require substantial resources for outreach and voter mobilization, which many women may not have access to. As noted by Hamah (2015), women in Ghana face financial constraints that make it difficult for them to compete with their male counterparts, particularly in rural areas where political patronage networks are strong. These financial challenges are compounded by a lack of support from political parties, which tend to prioritize male candidates who are perceived as more likely to win (Hamah, 2015). These financial challenges restrict women's agency and limit their capacity to translate political interest into actual leadership and participation, highlighting the structural limitation of empowerment.

#### 2.2.2 The Contribution of CR to Women's Political Empowerment for Participation

CR has proven to be a critical medium for enhancing political awareness and engagement among marginalized groups, particularly women. Globally, it is recognized as an accessible and cost-effective tool for disseminating information about political processes, civic rights, and opportunities for participation. A study by Heywood (2023) highlights the role of CR in offering women platforms to discuss political issues, engage in debates and learn about electoral processes. The ability of CR to ensue dialogue engagement reflects the principles of the participatory communication theory which centres on inclusive communication as pathway to empowerment. In Africa, CR's broad reach and ability to overcome literacy barriers make it a vital tool for empowering women politically. Fombad and



Jiyane (2019), in their study of rural South Africa, noted that CR increased women's access to political information and facilitated their participation in local governance. Programs often provide women with platforms to amplify their voices on governance issues, thereby enhancing their visibility and influence in decision-making processes brings about agency which aligns with empowerment theory.

In Ghana, CR is seen a key tool for fostering women's political empowerment, especially in rural areas (Diedong & Dzisah, 2023). According to Naaikur et al. (2022), governance-focused programs on CR have significantly increased women's awareness of their political roles. Women in underserved areas often cite radio as their prime source of political information due to its accessibility and relevance during electoral periods. Increased awareness contributes to personal mastery and confidence, strengthening empowerment processes. While the above studies constitute a positive outcome of CR in promoting women's political awareness and participation in governance, such successes are not uniformly evident cross all regions of Ghana. In Savannah region, despite the presence of CR and its initiatives women are still limited to meaningful political participation. This inconsistency suggests that although CR may create the influence of CR may be shaped by contextual factors which remains underexplored in existing literature.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Study Area

The study was conducted in the West Gonja Municipality, located in the Savannah Region, where Radio for Peace and Development (PAD) is based. The Savannah Region, one of Ghana's newest and largest regions. It was carved out of the Northern Region and is made up of seven districts. PAD is the first radio station in the Savannah Region to be established and has been a member of an association of 21 CR stations operating under the umbrella of Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN) in Ghana since its inception in 2011. CR stations operating under GCRN are considered as stations truly practicing the principles and mandate of a CR. Radio PAD's main language for broadcast is Gonja, the native language of the people. However, the radio station also broadcasts in other languages such as Hanga, Kamara, Dagaare, English and Guruni due to the multi ethnic groups settled in the area.

#### 3.2 Research Design

The study employed a case study design. According to Yin (2018), a case study is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident." This approach facilitated comprehensive data collection, and allowed for a detailed examination of radio PAD's role in facilitating women's political empowerment for participation in governance in the Savannah Region.

#### 3.3 Sampling and Sample Size

According to Creswell and Poth (2016), a smaller sample size can be sufficient if participants are purposively selected to provide detailed and rich data. It is recommended that a range of 5 to 30 participants for interviews in qualitative research should provide a saturated data. Corresponding to this guidance, the study collected data from 18 participants in all. 6 community women, 6 Radio PAD programmes producers, 1 former Assembly member, 1 representative from the Municipal Gender Desk Office (MGDO), 1 CR expert, 1 Queen Mother, 1 Chief and 1 female political figure in the Savannah Region.

The study targeted a population that included institutions, experts and individuals at the national, local and individual levels who are key stakeholders of radio PAD, CR and women's empowerment in Damongo and in Ghana. They were selected because of their experiences and knowledge, providing a rich source of data valuable to the investigation. At the local level, it consisted of the Municipal Gender Desk Offer (MGDO), the community women who listen to radio PAD on a daily basis, traditional authorities, and the management and programmes producers of radio PAD. These participants were specifically targeted because they are directly involved in the programming or activities carried out by radio PAD are knowledgeable, experienced or perform functions that ensure women's empowerment. The individual level, participants consisted of a female political figure from the Savannah Region and a CR expert. The above stated participants were selected due to their knowledge on women's issues and CR, as their experiences shone light on the issues under investigation. The study used purposive sampling to select key informants such as the queen mother, chief, CR expert, local political figures, a female political figure from the Savannah Region and the Municipal Gender Desk Officer (MGDO).

#### 3.4 Data Collections

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore views on women's political empowerment and the role of CR. 6 key informants participated, including a queen mother, a chief, a CR expert, a former assembly member, a female political leader, and the MGDO. Interviews lasted 20 to 35 minutes and recorded with consent for transcription



and analysis. Two focus group discussions were held with radio PAD staff and community women listeners. Each group comprised 6 participants and lasted 45 to 75 minutes. Sessions were conducted in English and the Gonja dialect to encourage open participation.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

The data was coded manually. Manual coding is a traditional process employed in qualitative research to analyze data and extract meaningful insights (Sender et al., 2021). Researchers develop coding manuals to provide instructions on how to code statements, ensuring consistency and accuracy in the coding process (Saldaña, 2016). These manuals form the core of translational frameworks for implementation research and evaluation, aiding in the systematic analysis of qualitative data (May & Perry, 2022). For organization and ease of references, the transcriptions from the participants of the study were managed using Microsoft Word and Excel. The data was analyzed and organized into themes using thematic content analysis. Both deductive and inductive coding methods were applied. Deductive codes were used to align the analysis with the study's conceptual framework, while inductive codes emerged naturally during the review of the data. To strengthen the thematic analysis, direct quotes from the transcriptions were incorporated into the results.

The primary data collected through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were analysed using thematic and narrative analysis. These methods enabled the identification of key patterns, themes, and participant experiences related to women's political empowerment and the role of CR in promoting participation. Thematic analysis focused on categories such as barriers to participation and empowerment outcomes, while narrative analysis provided contextual insights into how CR influences women's confidence and leadership. Secondary data complemented the primary findings through a thematic review of key documents and publications. These included policy reports, academic journals, and credible online materials that provided background on women's political participation and the role of CR.

### 3.6 Reliability and Validity

To ensure validity, the study carefully designed research questions that align with the goals of understanding radio PAD's role in encouraging women's political empowerment for participation. Reliability was established by using standardized and validated measurement tools or ensuring consistency in qualitative data coding. Participants were given the opportunity to review and validate the statements they made during the KIIs and FGDs. This approach ensured that the interpretations genuinely reflected the participants' perspectives and lived experiences, thereby strengthening the credibility and authenticity of the findings. Reliability was ensured through the maintenance of a detailed audit trail. All phases of the research process, including data collection procedures, coding methods, and analytic decisions, were systematically documented. This comprehensive documentation provided transparency, enabling others to trace the research process and assess the consistency of the findings.

### 3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Faculty of Integrated Development Studies (FIDS) Ethics Committee and the Simon-Diedong Dombo University of Business and Integrated Development Studies (SDD-UBIDS) Ethics Clearance Board. Introductory letters were secured from the Head of the Department of Communication Studies (DECS) and attached to the data collection tools to assure participants of the research's authenticity. Before selecting participants from the communities within the study area, all entry protocols were strictly followed. At the radio station, permission was obtained from the station manager and informed consent was sought from all participants before administering the data collection tools. The study posed minimal risks to participants. The primary risk involved was the time participants spent responding to the study questions.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Participants were free to decline or withdraw at any stage without facing any consequences. Confidentiality was maintained during the analysis and presentation of data to ensure that no third party could link participants' opinions to their identities. For anonymity, participants' names were not recorded during interviews, and participants in focus group discussions (FGDs) were assigned numbers. The study adhered strictly to standard ethical principles, ensuring the protection of participants' rights and privacy throughout the research process.

## IV. FINDING & DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Findings

#### 4.1.1 Radio PAD's Contributions to Women's Political Empowerment for Participation in the Savannah Region

"Aboyamilso", which means controversial or complex discussions, is a one of PAD FM's flagship political programs showcased every Monday and Tuesday at 4:00pm to 5:30pm, it is dedicated to empowering women in political



discourse. This program is purely in Gonja and reserves extra airtime specifically for female callers, ensuring they have a prominent platform to share their views. In Damongo a patriarchal society, women are structurally constrained in participating in political talk and other activities. The *Aboyamilso* is designed to enable women break such structural barriers to political participation. Extending the allotted time for women callers during this programme, actively works to amplify their voices and create a balanced political conversation. Through this, *Aboyamilso* contributes to breaking down gender barriers in politics, promoting equality and encouraging more women to engage in civic issues. Additionally, *Aboyamilso* provides opportunities for women to participate as panellists, enabling them to engage directly in in-depth discussions on political and social matters. This contributes to breaking down gender barriers in politics, promoting equality and encouraging more women to engage in civic issues and governance. In a FGD, a community woman confirmed that PAD FM has provided a platform for women to contribute to political discourse and giving them a voice. Also, radio programmers indicated that the extending of time of female callers is a way of promoting more women's engagement in civic issues and governance. This was said about Aboyamilso:

*"Through this political programme aired on PAD, women have gained significant exposure. Today, women are able to compete for leadership positions just like men and become leaders. In the past, it was often said that women had no say, but now, they have found their voice"* (Community woman participant 4, FGD 2: 30/05/2024)

"Aboyamilso" in ensuring agency provides a platform for women to express their views and learn from others, building confidence and preparing them for leadership roles. The continuous exposure of women to discussions on governance and leadership encourages women to see themselves as active and potential leaders. The FGD with radio PAD program producers emphasized the importance of encouraging and campaigning for women to participate in politics. They highlighted the need for women to contest political positions such as Member of Parliament, assembly member, returning officer, and unit committee member. Such participation according to them is essential for promoting a healthy and balanced democratic process and ensuring women's political empowerment. They noted that radio PAD has consistently played a crucial role in promoting women's involvement in the electoral process and democracy through *Aboyamilso*. Radio PAD as a member of the GCRN, participated in the project *Anchoring a Civil Society Model Toward Localizing the SDGs in Ghana, Uganda and Zambia*. This initiative, funded by the Danish NGO Crossing Borders, aims to contribute to the achievement of the United Nations' Agenda 2030. As part of the project, radio PAD was responsible for localizing two specific SDGs. Thus Goal 5: *Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls*, and Goal 10: *Reducing inequalities related to income, age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic and other statuses*. To fulfil this mandate, radio PAD actively advocated for women's involvement in local governance. For instance, in the 2023 District Assembly Election, Free time on air was offered to encourage women to contest and promoted gender equality and reduced inequalities

#### 4.1.2 Within the Issues

Within the Issues airs every Wednesday from 4:00 pm to 5:00 pm and Saturday at 9:00 am to 12:00 pm in English. The program is dedicated to addressing a wide range of political topics while actively promoting women's participation in political dialogue. Similar to *Aboyamilso*, this program prioritizes female voices by extending talk time specifically for women callers, encouraging them to share their insights and ensuring that their contributions are an essential part of on-air political discussions. To further amplify women's voices, *Within the Issues* requires that each month, political parties select women representatives to join the show's panel discussions. These women engage alongside male representatives from different political parties, offering diverse perspectives on selected topics.

There is the need for an interchange between women voices, which often resides in the informal private sphere, and dominant voices in the public space. It also exemplifies how radio PAD has deliberately structured its self to promote women's participation in local governance. Its twice-weekly broadcast, including a three-hour weekend slot, creates consistent space for political discourse that is accessible to the broader community. In extending airtime specifically to women callers and mandating the monthly inclusion of female representatives from political parties, the program actively challenges the male-dominated nature of political discussions. This deliberate focus ensures that women are not only heard but are positioned as equal contributors to political dialogue, thus addressing existing gender imbalances in civic participation and decision-making thereby ensuring participatory communication.

*"Because of PAD FM, during polling station executive elections, people outside my electoral area encouraged me to contest. They saw my potential through my contributions on air and came to help me campaign"* (Community Woman, participant 4, FGD 2: 30/05/2024)

#### 4.1.3 Aboyagbon

"Aboyagbon" is a Gonja phrase meaning under-ground discussion stands out as a platform where female callers are encouraged to discuss local policies and governance issues that impact their lives directly. It comes off every Sunday from 3:00 pm to 7:00 pm. In a culturally sensitive approach, PAD FM ensures the show addresses social issues relevant



to women's daily lives and linking them to broader political themes. CR has a role to ensure that women sensitive practical needs such as health, education and family planning are discussed on radio for duty bearers to act upon. The community women shared that *Aboyagbon* makes political issues more relatable and understandable, which has encouraged even the less politically active women to engage and express their viewpoints. The following reflection was illustrated:

*“Programmes like Aboyagbon empower us to constructively criticize our political leaders and hold them accountable, ensuring they act in the best interest of the people”* (Community woman participant 3, FGD 2: 30/05/2024)

*Aboyagbon* plays an important role in promoting women's participation in local governance. The creating of space where women can meaningfully engage in public discourse is a positive step towards democratic participation, participatory communication and political empowerment. Airing every Sunday for four hours, the show provides consistent and extended airtime that is rarely afforded to women in traditional political settings. This format actively encourages the participation of more female callers to discuss governance issues that directly affect their lives. In doing so, *Aboyagbon* challenges the often male-dominated nature of political dialogue in many local communities. The program title itself; meaning “underground discussion” suggests a deliberate effort to create an alternative, safe, and inclusive space for women to express their views on governance.

#### 4.2 Discussion

The finding brings to light a critical awareness-participation gap in the role of CR in promoting women's political empowerment. Although radio PAD reflects and demonstrates the core values of not-for-profit ethos and non-partisan principles of CR by offering free airtime and ensuring inclusive access during the 2023 District Assembly Elections, these efforts did not translate into actual female candidature within the region. This discrepancy between awareness creation and real political participation is consistent with the broader limitations identified in literature. A study by Amadu (2023) of Simli Radio in the Kumbungu District concluded that CR's democratizing potential “cannot be realized through media interventions alone but requires broader social and political changes addressing underlying inequalities” (Amadu, 2023). Tripp (2023), in her comparative analysis of women's mobilisation for legislative representation across Africa, demonstrates that growths in women's political presence have been driven less by exposure or awareness than by organised women's movements pressuring regimes to adopt institutional reforms. Awareness, in other words, is necessary but causally insufficient; the mechanisms that convert awareness into office-holding are collective, organisational, and institutional. The findings of this study corroborate these positions, reinforcing the view that media-driven exposure, while necessary, is not a sufficient condition for political inclusion.

From the standpoint of Empowerment Theory (Rappaport, 1987), empowerment extends beyond access to information and visibility to encompass the ability to influence decisions and exercise agency within political structures. While Radio PAD amplified women's voices and strengthened the dimension of social participation through its programmes, these initiatives did not adequately advance the decision-making dimension of empowerment. The absence of female candidature in the 2023 District Assembly Elections suggests that confidence and awareness, though empowering in themselves, may not automatically translate into political engagement, particularly where structural and patriarchal barriers remain entrenched. This finding aligns with Mlambo and Kapingura (2019), who demonstrated that in many African societies, deep-rooted cultural norms and patriarchal political structures continue to foreclose women's political participation irrespective of their levels of civic awareness. In the Ghanaian context, Hamah (2015) similarly noted that financial constraints and the lack of institutional support from political parties disproportionately disadvantage women who aspire to political office, particularly in rural communities like Damongo, where patronage-based political networks are prevalent.

The Participatory Communication Theory (Tufté & Mefalopulos, 2009) frames inclusiveness and collective engagement as pathways to empowerment. Radio PAD's broadcasting in local languages, its non-partisan stance, and the provision of dedicated airtime for women all reflect these principles and created the enabling environment for women to engage in political discourse. However, the findings suggest that dialogic inclusion alone may not dismantle the structural and patriarchal barriers that limit women's entry into competitive political spaces. This is consistent with the argument advanced by Naaikuur et al. (2021), who found that while governance-focused programming on CR increased women's political awareness in Northern Ghana, such awareness did not automatically translate into sustained political leadership. Similarly, Amadu (2023) found in the context of Simli Radio in the Northern Region that CR was effective in promoting local governance participation, but its impact was moderated by community-level gender norms and the limited institutional support available to women aspiring for leadership. These findings challenge any linear assumption that access to media platforms inevitably produces political representation and underscore the need for CR initiatives to be complemented by broader institutional, policy, and socio-economic interventions.

The stark underrepresentation of women in the Savannah Region including the recording of 0% female representation in the 2023 District Assembly Elections (African Elections, 2023) points to a deeply entrenched systemic



problem that surpasses the reach of media-led empowerment alone. Awusi et al. (2023) argue that achieving gender parity in Ghana's governance structures requires a multi-faceted approach that combines legislative reform, electoral financing support for women, and sustained civic education efforts. The enactment of Ghana's Affirmative Action (Gender Equity) Act, 2024 represents a legislative step in this direction; however, its effective translation into practice at the local governance level remains contingent on deliberate implementation by relevant institutions. Diedong and Dzisah (2023) further emphasized that the transformative potential of CR in Ghana can only be fully realized when radio-led initiatives are embedded within wider policy and institutional frameworks that actively address the structural determinants of women's political exclusion. Taken together, the evidence points to a critical need for Radio PAD and similar CR stations to adopt more strategic and outcomes-oriented approaches to gender programming, working in partnership with state agencies, civil society organizations, and development partners to bridge the gap between political awareness and actual participation in leadership and governance.

## V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

PAD FM demonstrates the core values of CR by prioritizing community needs over profit, particularly in advancing women's political empowerment through its three key programmes; Aboyamilso, Within the Issues, and Aboyagbon. In providing free airtime for women's programmes and maintaining a non-partisan stance, the station offers an inclusive platform where women from different backgrounds can participate in governance discussions without bias. Its use of local languages further enhances access to political content, especially for rural women.

However, despite these initiatives, no woman contested the 2023 District Assembly Elections, highlighting a disconnect between increased awareness and actual political participation. This reveals a critical paradox between the theoretical potential of CR and its limited real-world impact in this specific context. The findings therefore suggest that although CR is an important catalyst for political awareness and engagement, its transformative potential depends on broader social, economic, and institutional conditions. Without addressing these structural barriers, the impact of media-driven empowerment initiatives may remain limited. Strengthening women's political participation in the Savannah Region therefore requires coordinated efforts that extend beyond media platforms to include policy interventions, leadership development initiatives, and socio-cultural transformation.

### 5.2 Recommendations

The study makes the following recommendations for the CR stations, policymakers and development organizations: Radio PAD should expand opportunities for women to participate in political discussions by encouraging them to serve not only as panellists but also as program hosts and moderators, thereby increasing their visibility and influence in public discourse. The station should introduce gender-inclusive broadcasting policies that allocate dedicated airtime for programmes focused on women's political leadership and governance participation. Radio PAD should develop long-term mentorship initiatives that connect female listeners with experienced women leaders in politics, civil society, and public administration. Government agencies and development partners should support collaborative projects between community radio stations and women's rights organizations aimed at promoting women's political leadership. Development partners should fund leadership training programmes and campaign financing support for aspiring female candidates, particularly at the local governance level. Political parties and traditional institutions should be encouraged to implement gender-sensitivity training programs in order to challenge cultural norms that discourage women's participation in politics.

### Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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