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Barriers to the participation of women in community development process in rural Ghana: a regression analysis

Charles Gyan , Maya Malik , and Aisha Siddique

ABSTRACT

Women across the world face a myriad of barriers in every sphere of their socio-economic life, negatively affecting their ability to utilise available societal resources to achieve their full potential. They are often relegated to the background when it comes to participation in community development and decision-making. The present study seeks to examine the relative strength of barriers to women's involvement in the community development processes in rural Ghana. A multistage sampling technique was used to recruit 210 women from three rural communities in Ghana. A questionnaire comprising a series of scales was used to collect the data. The study found that the most critical barriers faced by women in rural Ghana include the patriarchal norms of Ghanaian society, as well as behavioural, and idiosyncratic patterns associated with their socialisation. The study recommends the provision of opportunities to communities to be able to empower and encourage themselves to make the cultural shifts necessary to overcome and address the key barriers women face. Community development processes must incorporate meaningful participatory approaches geared towards greater equality, freedom, and advancement of local community members, especially women.

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Community development; barriers; rural Ghana; women; participation

Introduction

In recent times, gender equality and the empowerment of women have become accepted as vital components of any country's quest to achieve sustainable economic, social, and political development. This is evident in the promulgation and enactment of several international conventions, legislations, and agreements, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (UN 1979) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted in 1995, geared towards the protection and promotion of women's rights.

Despite substantial efforts towards achieving gender equality, gender inequality continues to be a major challenge confronting many countries across the globe (Hooks 2000; Kurz and Johnson-Welch 2000; Sai 1995). Theoretically, women in both developed and developing countries have the legitimate right to the same opportunities as men; however, practically they often do not fully enjoy those rights across virtually all public domains of life (Kabeer et al. 2013; Ridgeway 2011). Women across the world face a myriad of barriers in every sphere of their socio-economic life, restricting them from utilising their full potential to accomplish a better life. Community development and decision-making is one such sphere, alongside education, religion, health, and politics, where women are often relegated to the background when it comes to participation (Kyei 2014; Odame 2010; Offei-Aboagye 2000b). The absence of adequate resources or rights and opportunity for women to improve their lives worsens the situation.

According to the 2010 Population and Housing Census, Ghana has an estimated population of 24,658,823 (Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) 2012). Women make up 51.23% of the adult population

in Ghana, making them the slight majority (GSS 2012). Due to their numeric advantage, it might be expected that they would play a significant role in community development processes. Yet, their numerical strength does not seem to translate into their participation in development decision-making within even rural communities. For instance, Offei-Aboagye (2000a, 2004) and Opere (2005) found that women have limited access to community development opportunities in rural communities in Ghana. In 1994 and 1998, women made up only 3% and 5% of appointed membership assemblies in Ghana (Offei-Aboagye 2000a). Only 6.5% of the District, Municipal, and Metropolitan Chief Executives in the local government structure as of 2012 were women (Abdul-Razak, Prince, and Eliasu 2014). As a result of this limited level of involvement of women, their influence over projects and programmes that affect their well-being may be reduced. In Ghana, even though there have been affirmative action directives (such as ensuring that 50% of government appointees are women), little change has occurred in terms of women's representation over the years. The limited involvement of women in government and local positions of power within the public sector sends a signal that women may be marginalised and have limited or unequal access to development resources, management, and overall power, relative to their male counterparts.

Evidence from the few studies available suggests that, despite the challenges faced by women within the context of community development, their "less valued" roles contribute tremendously to the total development of their communities (Gyan and Baffoe 2014; Offei-Aboagye 2000a, 2004). Although these findings make a positive connection between women's participation and community development in Ghana, a gap exists regarding the generative "mechanisms" behind the discriminations faced by women. The findings also provide evidence to support the need for further investigation into issues relating to women's agency and community development practice in Ghana. Even though there are known barriers to women's participation in the community development process in rural Ghana, the relative strength and importance of these barriers is not well defined by evidence. In fact, only very few studies have examined gender inequalities in the context of community development in rural Ghana (Afenyo and Amuquandoh 2014; Aryeetey 1998; Offei-Aboagye 2000b; Opere 2005), and few have looked beyond government involvement. This paper, therefore, examines the relative strength of barriers to women's involvement in community development processes in rural Ghana. This paper is guided by the following research question: What are the significant barriers to the participation of women in community development activities in rural Ghana?

Literature review

Globally, rural women are among the key vulnerable groups that live in poverty (Kaka 2013). As indicated by Kaka (2013), feminisation of poverty continues to widen the gender gap between men and women and puts women at a disadvantageous and subordinate position in communities. This has further led to their marginalisation in the accessibility, utilisation, and control of community development resources and processes. It can, therefore, be argued that they become caught up in the cycle of underprivilege and vulnerability.

The effects of gender inequality in community development are so profound that the stark reality in Ghana reflects the continued marginalisation of women in development processes. Capitalism and its associated forces continue to perpetuate a vicious circle in which a small minority, most especially men, control the development processes and resources, leaving the majority, mostly women, living in abject poverty with little or no access to development opportunities (Aterido, Beck, and Iacovone 2013; Fairshare 2001; Prah 2013). The greatest challenge of tracing and fully understanding the ways in which women are discriminated against and affected by this is the limited sex-disaggregated indicators and data in key development sectors (Phalane 2004). In areas such as community development, agriculture, employment, and the informal sector, there are few sex-disaggregated data that reflect gender relations and inequalities (Mehta 2001; Phalane 2004). While some scholars and organisations such as the UN are researching into the issue of women in aspects of development, many of their methods and indicators are not gender sensitive (Mehta 2001).

As a matter of fact, experiences of women in development process can be uneven and contradictory, frequently demonstrating the divergence of human thoughts and experiences. To further unpack these processes, the UN (2015) found that there has been progress in the level of female participation in education, decision-making, and work in some countries. However, in developing regions, such as Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia, more than 21 million girls are out of school. In terms of work,

women work longer hours than men – an average of 30 min a day longer in developed countries and 50 min in developing countries ... Only 50 per cent of women of working age are in the labour force, compared to 77 per cent of men ... Women's representation in decision-making is low meaning that the "glass ceiling" remains a reality for the vast majority of the world's women. (UN 2015, pp. XI–XII)

These problems have smashed the sureness in the equitable and equal access to the benefits of development irrespective of sex and demonstrate some of the key deficiencies in the development arena. The gains of community development are not equitably distributed and the gap between men and women is widening.

Very few studies have examined gender inequalities in this context of community development in rural Ghana. Most relevant are Aryeetey's (1998) study in Ghana's Northern Region and Afenyo and Amuquandoh's (2014) mixed-method study on a community-based ecotourism development project in the rural area of Tafi Atome, Ghana. Other works, like Opare (2005) and Offei-Aboagye (2000b), offer discussion of rural Ghanaian women's participation in community-based development but not original empirical contributions. None of these included a regression analysis component, to quantitatively test the presence and strength of different potential barriers to participation. However, they provide the background for what are potential barriers to measure and test for. Evidence from these studies suggests that, despite the challenges faced by women within the context of community development, their "less valued" roles contribute tremendously to the total development of their communities (Offei-Aboagye 2000a, 2004). This also connects to findings from studies on gender inequality (including in rural settings) in other sectors in Ghana, such as local governance (Baah-Ennumh, Owusu, and Korkor 2005; Offei-Aboagye 2000b), politics (Allah-Mensah 2005; Odame 2010), education (Kyei 2014; Lambert, Perrino, and Barreras 2012), health (Atuoye et al. 2015), religion (Fuseini and Kalule-Sabiti 2015), natural resources management and utilisation (Wiafe and Arku 2014), and food security (Braithmah et al. 2014). Other relevant studies on rural women from other parts of Africa include women's participation in community-based organisation in Kenya (Mutongu 2012), the feminisation of poverty and Nigerian women (Ajala 2016), women's participation in adult and non-formal education in Nigeria (Aroge 2016), and the role of women in Nigerian politics (Esidene and Abdul 2013).

The generally identified forces mitigating against women's participation include male resistance, gender discourses and stereotypes, idiosyncratic variables such as lack of confidence, gender roles, the socio-economic status of women, and the challenges associated with balancing family and public life (Abbas 2014; Frankl 2004; Manuh 2014; Panday 2008; Tadros 2014). With support from the literature above, this was operationalised for the context of rural Ghanaian women's participation in community development in terms of seven potential barriers:

- (1) low level of education (Aroge 2016; Offei-Aboagye 2000b);
- (2) motherhood and family responsibilities (Ajala 2016; Offei-Aboagye 2000b);
- (3) low confidence level of women (Esidene and Abdul 2013);
- (4) lack of information (Braithmah et al. 2014);
- (5) unacceptability of women's participation in the community (Ajala 2016; Esidene and Abdul 2013; Mutongu 2012);
- (6) lack of nominations from NGOs;
- (7) males having too much control over the process (Braithmah et al. 2014; Esidene and Abdul 2013; Mutongu 2012; Wiafe and Arku 2014).

Methods

The study was a quantitative method study to test for significance and measure the strength of significant potential barriers to the participation of women in community development processes in rural Ghana. With respect to the selection of the participants for the survey, a multistage sampling technique was used. In the first stage, the regions of Ghana were sampled using a simple random sampling technique. A simple random sampling technique (lottery method) was used to select three regions of Ghana. Each of the regions was written on pieces of paper and kept in three boxes representing the three zones. After shaking, the Northern, Brong-Ahafo, and Greater Accra regions were randomly selected. The research included women in three rural communities – Bolni, Yawhimakrom, and Mayera Faase – in Ghana.

In the second stage, the units sampled were communities in the three selected regions. This was done purposively. The inclusion criteria included being a rural community – a community with a population less than 5000 (GSS 2012) and with people of all social and economic classes. At this stage, Bolni, Yawhimakrom, and Mayera Faase were selected. In the third stage, the units of sampling were the homes/households from which women were sampled for the survey. The homes were selected using a systematic sampling technique. Each house in the selected communities was given a number. A random starting point was selected, and a sampling interval fixed by dividing the total number of homes by 70 (the desired number of women in each community, see below). Based on the random starting point and the fixed sampling interval, 70 homes were selected and in each of the selected homes, a woman was selected and completed a survey. Random sampling technique was used to sample 70 women from each of the communities for the study.

A sample size of 210 was chosen to obtain more comprehensive data from the study population to enhance the generalisability of the findings. The level of expected variability and unpredictability in the population influenced the selection of this sample size (Khan 2012). Testing seven explanatory variables and anticipating a “large” effect size estimate for R^2 of 0.35 (Cohen 1988), at the 0.05 level, having a power of 0.9 requires 42 observations (Cohen et al. 2003). Adjusting for a response rate of as low as 60%, this becomes 70 observations. Across the three regions, then, this totals 210 participants. This sample size facilitated greater extrapolative and predictive power to reduce the probability of a Type II error in the testing of the hypotheses (McCabe and Moore 2003).

Operationalisation of constructs

Community development participation: Dependent variable. The construct “community development participation” is the dependent variable: This refers to the extent to which the participants engaged in the community development process. Regarding the measurement of this construct, I adopted the Community Development Participation Scale (CDPS) developed by Gyan (2021). About the reliability of the CDPS, the attitude subscale had an alpha level of 0.73, and the active participation component with an alpha of 0.79. The CDPS total score had a Cronbach alpha level of 0.80.

Barriers to women’s participation in community development: The key barriers examined by this paper are low level of education, motherhood and family responsibilities, a low confidence level of women, lack of information, unacceptability of women’s participation in the community, lack of nominations from NGOs, and males having too much control over the process on the level of participation of women in the community development process in rural Ghana. These constitute the independent variables.

Data collection and analysis

The instrument for the collection of the data was a questionnaire consisting of a series of scales. The relevant scales are the CDPS and the scale items measuring the seven key barriers (refer to Table 1). The questionnaire was administered through face-to-face interviewing (for those who could neither read nor write) and self-completion of a paper copy (for those who could read and write).

The data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Software, version 23. Multiple linear regression analysis was used to create a model for predicting the effects of low level of education, motherhood and family responsibilities, the low confidence level of women, lack of information, unacceptability of women's participation in the community, lack of nominations from NGOs, and males having too much control over the process on the level of participation of women in the community development process in rural Ghana. Thus, a regression equation that relates the seven barriers to the level of women's participation in community development was given as Equation (1)

$$Y_{cdps} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_1 X_2 + \beta_1 X_3 + \beta_1 X_4 + \beta_1 X_5 + \beta_1 X_6 + \beta_1 X_7 + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

where Y_{cdps} is the community development participation score for the participants; X_1 is the low level of education; X_2 is the motherhood and family responsibilities; X_3 = low confidence level; X_4 is the lack of information; X_5 is the unacceptability of women's participation in the community; X_6 is the lack of nominations from NGOs; X_7 is the males having too much control over the process; β_1 is the coefficient of X_1 or the slope of the regression equation; β_0 is the constant or the intercept of the regression equation and ε is the error term which measures the effects of the factors which influence the level of participation of women in community development process but are not included in the model

The method used in the validation of the hypothesis for the regression model was the *t*-test. Mathematically, the tested hypothesis was represented as $H_0: b = 0$ and $H_1: b \neq 0$. The researchers also did a correlation analysis to find the relationship between the seven barriers and the two key domains of the CDPS (attitude and active participation).

Results

Demographics

The mean age of participants was 39.86 years ($SD = 12.57$, range = 20–70 years). The mean number of years of education was 4.60 ($SD = 5.16$, range = 0–19 years). The mean net monthly income was 137.19 Ghana cedis ($SD = 182.72$, range = 0–1000 Ghana cedis). The participants had a mean household income of 443.58 Ghana cedis ($SD = 469.69$, range = 40–2300 Ghana cedis). Participants stayed in the communities for an average of 20.18 years ($SD = 13.61$, range = 4–70 years). Participants had on average 2.86 children; however, this rate varied widely in the sample ($SD = 2.34$, ranged from 0 to 16 children). Again, the participants reported that the mean number of people in their immediate family was 5.74 with a standard deviation of 3.03 and ranged from 1 to 18 people (refer to Table 2).

Regression results

To help establish the relationships between the barriers to women's level of participation in community development in rural Ghana, it was hypothesised that:

Table 1. Scale relevant to this paper.

	Not at all					To a large extent					
1. Lack of nomination (by NGOs and other organisations)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2. Low level of education	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3. Unacceptability of women's participation in this community	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4. Low confidence level	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5. Male having too much control over the process	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6. Motherhood and family responsibilities	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7. Lack of information	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Notes: Based upon your experience, please indicate on a scale of 0–10 how each one of the following barriers limits your involvement in the community development activities in this community. (0 = not at all, 10 = to a large extent).

Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of participants ($N = 188$).

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Participants' age	20	70	39.86	12.57
Participants' years of education	0	19	4.60	5.16
Participants' personal net monthly income	0	1000	137.19	182.72
Household income raw	40	2300	443.58	469.69
Participants' years of stay in the community	4	70	20.18	13.61
Number of children	0	16	2.86	2.34
Number of people in immediate family	1	18	5.74	3.03

H₀: There are no significant barriers to women's participation in the community development processes in rural Ghana.

H₁: There are significant barriers to women's participation in the community development processes in rural Ghana.

The basic descriptive statistics and regression coefficients are presented in Table 3.

The SPSS model summary for the coefficients shows that the seven-covariate model or regression equation has a strong correlation ($R = 0.66$) and was able to account for 44.3% ($R^2 = 0.44$) of the variance in the level of participation of women in community development ($F(7, 142) = 16.14, p < 0.01$). This indicates that the model is significant and did a good job of explaining the level of participation of women in community development. That is, there is a significant relationship between the explanatory variables and the dependent variable.

From Table 3, five of the seven independent variables were statistically significant: lack of nomination by NGOs and other organisations ($p < 0.01$), low level of education ($p < 0.01$), unacceptability of women's participation ($p < 0.01$), males having too much control over the process ($p < 0.01$) and motherhood and family responsibilities ($p < 0.01$). Low confidence level of women ($p = 0.23$) and lack of information ($p = 0.33$) were not significant. When assessing the relative strengths of the explanatory variables using the standardised (beta) coefficient values, the greatest influence upon or barrier to women's level of participation in community development in rural Ghana is "males having too much control over the process" ($\beta = -1.11$), followed by "unacceptability of women's participation" ($\beta = -0.83$), followed by "motherhood and family responsibilities" ($\beta = 0.79$), then "lack of nomination by NGOs" ($\beta = 0.53$) and "low level of education" ($\beta = 0.46$). According to Acock (2014), the size of the influence of the explanatory variables can be interpreted using the following benchmark: (1) $\beta < 0.2$ is considered a weak, (2) $0.2 < \beta < 0.5$ moderate, and (3) $\beta > 0.5$ strong effect ($p = 0.272$).

Based on Acock's benchmark, "males having too much control over the process", "unacceptability of women's participation", "motherhood and family responsibilities", and "lack of nomination by NGOs" had a strong influence on the outcome variable while "low level of education" had a moderate influence.

Table 3. Coefficients for variables predicting participant's level of participation.

Model	Unstandardised coefficients			Standardised coefficients		<i>t</i> VIF		
	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	Tolerance				
(Constant)		54.61	2.73					
Lack of nomination		0.53	0.15	0.25	3.57	0.00	0.84	1.20
Low education		0.46	0.18	0.17	2.48	0.00	0.86	1.16
Unacceptability of women's participation		-0.83	0.15	-0.36	-5.57	0.00	0.92	1.09
Low confidence level		0.45	0.20	0.17	2.30	0.02	0.76	1.31
Males control		-1.11	0.21	-0.37	-5.41	0.00	0.83	1.20
Motherhood		0.79	0.17	0.33	4.69	0.00	0.81	1.23
Lack of information		-0.16	0.16	-0.07	-0.99	0.33	0.82	1.22

Dependent variable: Community development participation scale.

In the researchers' effort to examine the relationship between the various barriers and the CDPS subscales, Spearman's correlation analysis was conducted (refer to Table 4). The results show that lack of nomination by NGOs and other organisations had no significant relationship with the participants' attitude towards community development activities, but it was however found to be positively associated with the active participation domain of the CDPS with a Spearman's correlation coefficient (r_s) of 0.154, $p = 0.04$. Again, it was evident that the unacceptability of women's participation had an inverse relationship with the participants' attitude with a Spearman's correlation coefficient (r_s) of -0.27 , $p \leq 0.01$. It was, however, found that the unacceptability of women's participation had no significant relationship with the active participation of the participants.

Regarding the relationship between "males having too much control over community development process" and the CDPS domains (attitude and active participation), the results indicated that "males having too much control over community development process" had a negative association with active participation with the Spearman's correlation coefficient (r_s) = -0.208 , $p \leq 0.01$. However, this barrier had no significant relationship with the participants' attitude.

Finally, the results showed that the Spearman's Correlation Coefficient between "motherhood and family responsibilities" and the participants' attitudes was 0.45, $p < 0.01$, which indicated that the relationship was statistically significant. It was nonetheless found that "motherhood and family responsibilities" had no significant association with the active participation of the participants in the community development process.

Discussion

The present study tested seven barriers to women's participation in the community development processes in Ghana, finding that five of them are significant. These barriers include males having too much control over the process, unacceptability of women's participation, motherhood and family responsibilities, lack of nomination by NGOs, and low level of education. Similar findings are reported by Abdul-Fatawu (2014), Braimah et al. (2014), and Offei-Aboagye (2000b).

A major finding of the study is that "males having too much control over the process" serves as the strongest barrier to the involvement of women in community development processes in rural Ghana. In Ghana, especially within the rural communities, cultural narratives position men as virile, strong, intelligent, good for leadership positions, and offering protection and sustenance, intelligence, and wisdom. Women are socialised to believe that males are wiser and more responsible to lead. By this, males amass power (Adatuu, 2017). Men exercise this power by making various decisions throughout the community development process – initiation, designing, implementation, and evaluation. This power wielded by men is neither "an agency nor a structure" (Foucault 1998, 63) but rather it is a "regime of truth" that permeates the Ghanaian society, and which is in relentless fluidity and compromise.

Another barrier is the unacceptability of or lack of value for women's participation. The effects of gender inequality in community development are so profound that the stark reality in Ghana reflects the continued marginalisation of women in development processes. Many gender experts and

Table 4. Spearman's correlation analysis for the CDPS subscales and the barriers to the participant's level of participation ($N = 188$).

	CDPS attitude subscale score	CDPS active participation subscale score
Lack of nomination	-0.04	0.15*
Low education	0.12	0.10
Unacceptability of women's participation	-0.27**	-0.12*
Low confidence	0.10	0.14
Males having control	-0.11	-0.21**
Motherhood and family responsibilities	0.45**	0.009
Lack of information	0.036	-0.069

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

feminists have lamented that discrimination against women in the community development processes continue to widen the disparity between men and women by having male-centric values entrenched in community activity and at the end impede women's action (Mensah-Kutin et al. 2000; Nasong'o and Murunga 2007; Offei-Aboagye 2000a). Likewise, Adatuu and Apusigah (2018) reported intimidation, discrimination, and the general perception that women are not suitable for leadership positions as barriers to women's participation. The main constraints to Ghana's efforts to mainstream gender are "the social constructions of womanhood centered on reproductive roles, whose constructions restrict women's access to productive resources such as credit, land, training and education, and also to decision-making structures and processes" (Anyidoho and Manuh 2010, 268).

It was further found that the high volume of household responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, and taking care of their children and the timing for meetings serve as challenges for women in rural communities. The domestic and care responsibilities threat faced by women continuously results in community development challenges. Hence, it is imperative that in the discussion of community development problems faced by women, their household responsibilities are given the necessary attention. In line with this finding, several studies show that a "motherhood penalty", is often paid by women in most communities (Crittenden 2002; Hewlett 2007; Muhonja 2017; Samman, Presler-Marshall, and Jones 2016; Williams 2000). The most important penalty paid by women is time. They face challenges with regard to navigating between household and family responsibilities and participation in community development activities. This makes "Only women with supportive families run for office, whereas men are more likely to run in spite of discouragement from their families" (Silbermann 2015, 126). Similar to this, Horne et al. (2017), Adatuu and Apusigah (2018), and Adatuu and Gyader (2019) found that women perform more domestic tasks compared to men. They further indicate that this consistent pattern of household responsibilities of women tends to limit their ability to engage in other tasks outside of the home.

Contrary to this finding, Hudson-Weems (1994) argues that, "The African woman has never been restricted to the home and household chores, and her male counterpart had more often than not shared the role as homemaker" (64). This is partly untrue of rural Ghanaian men, who mostly see the kitchen and the performance of household chores such as dish washing and meal preparation as the responsibility of women. Women, however, dictate and control most of the things that happen in the home. Indeed, in addition to doing household chores, women play a maternal role in the lives of their children. Ogunyemi (1996) concludes that African women's household responsibilities and maternal roles both suppress and empower them. With regard to the empowerment aspect of household responsibilities, Lahiri (2003) attributes power to women in domestic roles such as wives and mothers. She argues that the household responsibilities of wives and mothers positively impact their consciousness and their shared bonding, which she considers as their prodigious power. Sanday (2008) concludes that:

Women in their roles as mothers and senior women ensured the performance of practices that authenticated, regenerated, and nurtured the family. Their leadership was therefore not one of subjugation of subjects, but that of responsibility to conjugate – to knit and regenerate social ties in the here and now and in the here-after, through their leadership in upholding tradition. (1)

Even though scholars such as Sanday (2008) and Lahiri (2003) argue that women's roles as mothers empower them, we see these roles to suppress them more than empowering them. For instance, within the context of community development, husbands often capitalise on these household and child-rearing responsibilities and cultural roles to limit the level of women's participation in public life.

Moreover, there is a lack of nomination of women by NGOs and other organisations to take up certain leadership positions. Gender is generally concealed in ostensibly all-encompassing concepts such as "the people", or "the community". Most often, the concept of "community" means "male community" in patriarchal societies. The focus on people's or community participation without considering the gender dimension of participation in the community development process leads to the

poor participation of women (Guijt and Shah 1998). Considering that men are more vocal and educated as compared to women, NGOs prefer to engage with them as community representatives. Gaigher, Van Rensburg, and Bester (1995) highlight that NGOs inability to engage with all stakeholders are the major obstacle to community participation.

Women's lack of education is identified as another major impediment restricting their full participation in community development activities. This finding corroborates with the findings of Abdul-Fatawu (2014), Adatuu and Gyader (2019), and Amoako (2011). In Ghana, the number of women (2.7 million) without formal education is exceedingly high as compared to men (1.4 million) (GSS 2015). This large percentage of women's access to development processes as well as political power is hampered due to lack of formal education and poor English language skills. As stated by Myers-Scotton (1993), men who have had the opportunity to attend school and have good English language skills have developed an "elite closure" – limiting women's access to community development processes and political influence. It can therefore be argued that English linguistic imperialism has become a symbol of power and knowledge. As formal education provides much necessary civic skills, confidence, and knowledge for effective community development participation, therefore, men have more chances to be part of the community development process (Adatuu and Apusigah 2018).

Conclusion

The study confirms the literature that women have been disadvantaged in their participation in community development due to their gender, socio-economic, and cultural context. This study has highlighted multiple barriers impacting women's full participation in community development. Among the identified barriers only one (lack of nomination by NGOs and other organisations) is an external influencer, all others are endemic or internal to the community. The internal barriers faced by the women relate to behavioural and idiosyncratic patterns associated with their socialisation. In addition, the patriarchal norms of Ghanaian society have relegated women in the rural communities to the background, thereby making some women feel incapable of taking up leadership positions within the context of community development. This suggests that women faced inequalities and discrimination which have curtailed them from participating in community development processes. There is, therefore, the need for the communities to be empowered, encouraged, and supported by community development professionals to make the cultural shifts necessary to overcome and address the key barriers women face in their efforts to participate in the development agenda of their communities. There is a need for all stakeholders (the government, NGOs, CBOs, CSOs, community members – males and females) to strive to utilise the potential of every member of the community. This makes efforts (such as research, and gender-sensitive development projects) towards improving the participation of women in development processes a necessity.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Dr. Charles Gyan holds a PhD in Social Work from Wilfrid Laurier University and a Master of Philosophy degree in Social Work from the University of Ghana. He is an Assistant Professor of social work and social policy at the McGill School of Social Work. He is a fellow of several Canadian research centers including the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC), the Tshepo Institute for the Study of Contemporary Africa (TISCA) and the Manulife Centre for Community Health Research. His practice experience has been in the areas of community organizing, social policy analysis, and program development and evaluation. Dr. Gyan blends academic and research interests with his interest and commitment to Social policy change, transnational social work practice and community development.

Maya Malik is a doctoral student at McGill School of Social Work researching how to utilize arts-based Youth-Led Participatory Research (YPAR) methods to work with young Black American girls who have been justice-involved to improve educational intervention programs. Maya is a researcher with the McGill Global Child Research Group for the Participatory Methods Axis and also at Berkman Klein Center for Internet in Society in their Youth and Media core. Maya recently participated in an experimental research sprint at Berkman focusing on education during the time of the covid-19 pandemic and was involved in a round table with the Colombian Government to consult on their recent Youth and AI Ethics Report. Maya is currently working with their partner to apply critical race theory and posthumanist ideas to combat epistemicide of nonwestern knowledge and to contribute to knowledge production around racial equity and well-being for Black Americans and all marginalized communities. Maya also works as a consultant focused on nonprofit program evaluation, qualitative data collection (focus groups and interviews), analysis, and participatory research methods working with youth.

Dr. Aisha Siddique is a researcher at the University of Regina. Her research interests lie in Human Development and Family Studies.

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