Research Report

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE FORMS AND LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN LOCAL POLITICS AND PEACE BUILDING IN THE LAMBUSSIE AND WEST GONJA DISTRICTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This report examines the forms and levels of women's participation in governance and peacebuilding in Lambussie and West Gonja. It highlights the systemic barriers, opportunities, and challenges that shape women's involvement in leadership and decision-making processes. Women's underrepresentation in formal governance and peacebuilding remains a significant concern, despite their substantial contributions to informal governance and community peacebuilding efforts across the two districts. The report provides actionable strategies to enhance women's participation and address key issues, such as gendered disinformation, economic constraints, and socio-cultural norms.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of women's participation in governance and peacebuilding. The quantitative component involved a survey of 296 respondents from Lambussie and West Gonja, representing a diverse demographic group in terms of gender, age, education, and occupation. This provided a broad statistical foundation for understanding the forms and levels of participation as well as the barriers and opportunities faced by local women in their quest to participate in decision-making and peace-building processes.

A total of 76 qualitative respondents were included. This included eight focus group discussions (four per district) involving 52 participants, drawn from community women's groups and women without groups. Twenty-four semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders were conducted. The FGDs engaged community women and men, including those affiliated with women's groups and those without formal group memberships, providing nuanced insights into grassroots-level experience. Key informant interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders, including district gender desk officers, district assembly members, past female assembly members, women who contested district assembly elections, female leaders of informal associations, political party executives, traditional and opinion leaders, religious leaders, representatives from civil society organisations and development partners, as well as the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection. These qualitative methods enriched the study by capturing in-depth perspectives on the cultural, structural, systemic issues and contemporary political dynamics that impact women's participation.

KEY FINDINGS

1. **Women's Participation in Governance:** Women's participation in governance remains predominantly informal, with no women elected to District Assembly positions in either Lambussie or West Gonja in the 2023 District election. Women's involvement in governance in the two districts primarily occurs through appointments into district assemblies and informal leadership platforms, such as Magazias and women's associations. While 55.6% of respondents in Lambussie and 77.6% in West Gonja indicated that women participate in governance, this participation often lacks institutional recognition and decision-making authority.

2. **Women's Participation in Peace building:** Women are progressively playing some roles in grassroots peace building efforts, often acting as mediators and fostering community cohesion. However, their contributions are informal and minimally represented in recognised peace building structures such as Regional and District Peace Councils. The findings reveal untapped potential to formalise these roles and integrate women into institutional frameworks for conflict resolution. Women's networks and associations have proven effective in addressing localised conflicts, but societal norms continue to limit their leadership in formal peace building initiatives.

3. **Barriers to Participation in Governance:** Cultural norms and financial constraints were identified as the most significant barriers. In Lambussie, 68.6% of respondents cited cultural norms as a primary challenge, whereas in West Gonja, 55.9% of respondents highlighted financial constraints as a key limitation. These barriers include societal stereotypes about women's roles and the high costs associated with political campaigns, even at the local government levels, which deter women from seeking leadership positions.

4. **Barriers to Participation in Peace building:** In peace building, societal perceptions and gender stereotypes often relegated women to supportive rather than leadership roles. This dynamic undermines their ability to contribute meaningfully to formal peace building structures. Traditional norms frequently limit women's visibility in conflict resolution processes, and their roles are often overshadowed by male-dominated institutions. Furthermore, the lack of institutional recognition for women's grassroots peacebuilding efforts prevents their contributions from being scaled or integrated into formal systems.

5. **Gendered Disinformation:** Disinformation targeting women is a pervasive challenge in both governance and peacebuilding. In West Gonja, 41.3% of respondents reported exposure to disinformation campaigns targeting women leaders, predominantly spread through social media. In Lambussie, where Internet penetration is lower, disinformation takes the form of offline rumours passed by word of mouth, although its impact remains substantial.

The data reveals that both men and women are responsible for facilitating gendered disinformation, although men were slightly more frequently identified as the primary perpetrators. For example, 51.6% of respondents in Lambussie and 54.5% in West Gonja indicated that both genders contribute to the spread of disinformation. However, in Lambussie, 22.2% of respondents specifically identified men as primary facilitators, compared to 12.4% who pointed to women. In West Gonja, 30.1% of respondents attributed it to men, while 6.3% cited women as the main drivers. Women leaders reported that these false narratives undermined their confidence and credibility and thus discouraged their participation in governance.

6. **Opportunities for Participation:** Despite the challenges, there is strong community support for women's leadership, with 96.1% of respondents in Lambussie expressing the view that women should be encouraged to take on leadership roles. Existing national frameworks such as the Affirmative Action Act and Ghana National Action Plan 2 (GHANAP2) provide opportunities to increase women's participation, although stronger district-level implementation and monitoring mechanisms are required.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from this study confirm that barriers such as limited education, financial constraints, cultural norms and systemic biases continue to hinder women's participation in governance. However, recent developments, including the election of Ghana's first female Vice President, the marginal increase in female Members of Parliament (Mps), and the passage of the Affirmative Action Bill into law, present significant opportunities to advance gender inclusivity in governance. The ongoing reconstitution of district assemblies and the appointment of new DCEs provide an avenue for deliberate action to increase women's representation at all levels. Addressing these challenges and leveraging emerging opportunities require comprehensive, targeted strategies, including education, financial empowerment, institutional reforms, political commitment, mentorship, and community advocacy.

1. **Education and Capacity Building:** Implement capacity-building programs focused on leadership and advocacy, mentorship initiatives, and education campaigns to equip women with the skills and confidence needed for governance and peace building roles. This should include targeted capacity-building workshops for women already involved in informal governance and peace building efforts, such as Mangazias and grassroots associations.

2. **Leveraging Affirmative Action in Political Appointments:** With the passage of the Affirmative Action Bill into law, the reconstitution of district assemblies and the appointment of new DCEs must reflect a deliberate commitment to gender balance. The President should ensure that at least 30-40% of appointed assembly members and DCEs are women, in line with the spirit of the Affirmative Action Act. Political parties should also restructure their internal

processes to support and nominate more women for leadership roles, ensuring their increased participation in local governance and national policymaking.

3. **Economic Empowerment:** Establish financial support schemes, such as grants and low-interest loans, to address the economic barriers women face when entering governance and leadership positions. Economic empowerment programs should also focus on supporting women-led businesses and entrepreneurial ventures to enhance their financial independence and capacity for leadership roles.

4. **Institutionalising Gender Quotas in Party Leadership and Electoral Processes:** Political parties should adopt and enforce gender quotas to ensure a minimum percentage of women in leadership positions at national and subnational levels. This will help institutionalise gender balance within party structures and ensure women are adequately represented in decision-making bodies.

5. **Financial and Logistical Support for Women Candidates:** As the research highlights financial constraints as a major barrier to women's political participation, political parties should provide targeted financial support to female candidates to enable them to contest elections competitively. This support could be reduced filing fees, campaign funding, and access to party resources for mobilisation.

6. **Policy Localisation and Implementation:** Translate national policies, such as the Affirmative Action Law and the Ghana National Action Plan 2 (GHANAP2), into district-specific strategies that address local challenges. Strengthen district-level coordination and monitoring mechanisms to ensure the effective implementation of gender-inclusive policies and frameworks.

7. **Addressing Gendered Disinformation:** Combat gendered disinformation using community-driven approaches, including the strategic use of community radio and local animation campaigns to counter misinformation and promote accurate narratives about women leaders. Additionally, organize strategic advocacy events at the community level to educate citizens about the harmful effects of disinformation and to foster dialogue around the importance of women's participation in governance and peacebuilding. Focus on empowering local women leaders to address disinformation directly by sharing their personal experiences and success stories during these events.

8. **Strengthening Women's Role in Peace building:** Increase women's representation in formal peace building structures, such as District Peace Councils and community peace committees, by creating clear pathways for their inclusion. Leverage the roles of women's associations and grassroots

networks in mediating conflicts to integrate them into formal frameworks. Organise peace building training sessions tailored to women, equipping them with skills in negotiation, mediation, and conflict resolution. Community-based initiatives, such as storytelling sessions or interactive workshops, should be used to highlight women's contributions to peace building and to inspire others to take on similar roles.

9. **Community Advocacy and Awareness:** Launch sustained advocacy campaigns to challenge cultural norms and stereotypes that hinder women's participation in governance and peace building. Engage key stakeholders, including traditional leaders, faith-based organizations, and youth groups, as allies in promoting gender equality. These campaigns should include community events, such as festivals or town hall meetings, which emphasize the value of women's contributions to governance and peace building, creating platforms for dialogue and collective action.

1. INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The active participation of women in governance and peacebuilding is critical to achieving sustainable development and social cohesion. Globally, international frameworks such as the UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 (Women, Peace, and Security) and 2250 (Youth, Peace, and Security) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) emphasise the need for women's inclusion in decision-making, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding processes.

Ghana has demonstrated its commitment to these goals through constitutional provisions (e.g. Article 17(1) and (2) of the 1992 Constitution guarantees gender equality and freedom of women and men, girls, and boys from discrimination based on social or economic status, among others), the Ghana Gender Policy (2015), and, more recently, the Affirmative Action Bill, passed in July 2024. The landmark Affirmative Action legislation mandates minimum quotas for women in public offices, setting the stage for dismantling systemic barriers and fostering inclusive governance. Despite this progress, translating these commitments into actionable outcomes remains challenging, particularly at the subnational level, where entrenched sociocultural norms and institutional barriers persist.

Ghana's democracy, which is often hailed as a beacon of stability in West Africa, has evolved significantly since the adoption of the Fourth Republic Constitution in 1992. Over the past three decades, the country has successfully conducted nine peaceful presidential and parliamentary election cycles with political power alternating between the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and National Democratic Congress (NDC). These democratic gains were reaffirmed in the most recent general elections held on 7 December 2024, which saw a smooth transition of power and the inauguration of a new government on 7 January 2025, including, for the first time in Ghana's history, the election of a female vice president. Ghana's high ranking in the Freedom House Index and its reputation as a democratic leader in the region underscore its resilience in navigating political challenges. However, despite these achievements, the representation of women in politics remains disproportionately low; undermining the inclusivity and equity fundamentals to democratic governance.

In the newly inaugurated 9th Parliament, 44 women out of 276 Members of Parliament (MPs) were elected, representing only 15.94% of parliamentary seats. While this marks a slight improvement from the previous Parliament (14.6%), it remains far below the 30% benchmark recommended by the United Nations for effective female representation. Women's low

representation in Ghana's Parliament reflects broader structural challenges. These include sociocultural norms that view leadership as a male domain, financial constraints limiting women's ability to campaign, and entrenched political networks that marginalise female aspirants. Historically, women's appointments to public offices in Ghana have been sporadic and symbolic, failing to achieve a substantial shift toward gender parity. While a few women have achieved high-profile roles, such as Attorney General, Chief Justices, Supreme Court Judges, Chairpersons of the Electoral Commission, and Speakers of Parliament, their presence remains an exception rather than the norm. For example, during President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo's first term (2017–2021), nine women were appointed as ministers, but in 2021, during his second term, the number decreased to only eight women out of forty-six (46) Ministers and Regional Ministers, further highlighting the persistent underrepresentation of women in executive leadership in Ghana. However, one institution that has made notable strides in promoting gender equity is the judiciary, where three of the last four Chief Justices have been women: Justices Georgina Wood, Sophia Akufo, and the current Chief Justice, Gertrude Torkornoo. In 2024, President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo swore in 21 new justices to the High Court, comprising 12 men and 9 women. At the appellate level, 20 nominees were submitted for appointment to the Court of Appeal, including six highly accomplished women recommended for the bench. These developments reflect a positive trend toward increased female representation in Ghana's judiciary, particularly within the High Court and Court of Appeal. This progress demonstrates the potential for inclusivity in public leadership, even though broader systemic barriers limit women's participation across other key sectors.

At the subnational level, the situation is even dire. Ghana's appointment of District Chief Executives (DCEs) in 2024 revealed a stark gender disparity: 223 (85.4%) were men while only 38 (14.6%) were women. Even though DCEs are appointed—a process that could potentially advance gender equity—women remain grossly underrepresented in key governance roles. Regional disparities further highlight the challenges. While the Greater Accra Region in the nation's capital had the highest proportion of female DCEs (27.6%) at the end of 2024, remotely located and largely underdeveloped regions such as Ahafo and Western North had no female representation. The Savannah Region had seven District Chief Executives (DCEs), five men and two women—representing 28.6% female representation. Meanwhile, in the Upper West Region, eight of the eleven DCEs were men, leaving just three women in these roles (27.3% female representation).

An analysis of the 2023 district assembly elections revealed that only 4.1% of elected assembly members were women, a significant drop from 10.1% in 2006. While appointments could potentially address this imbalance, most assemblies remain dominated by men, with women's inclusion often reliant on government appointments, rather than elections.

In districts such as West Gonja and Lambussie, women's participation is predominantly through appointments, as only a few women are elected. These statistics underscore the persistent barriers women face in achieving electoral success while also revealing an overreliance on appointments—rather than elected office—as a pathway to political inclusion.

The underrepresentation of women is not confined to the areas of governance, but extends to peacebuilding processes. Women are significantly underrepresented across Ghana's Regional Peace Councils, which are instrumental in conflict prevention, social cohesion and sustainable peace. A study commissioned by the UNDP in 2024 revealed that women in the Northern, Upper East, and Upper West Regions constituted just 1 out of 13 members of each Regional Peace Council, highlighting their underrepresentation in formal peacebuilding structures. Similarly, at the community level, male-dominated structures often exclude women from informal peacebuilding processes. For instance, the Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee, a critical body for resolving local conflicts, includes only two women out of 20 members.

Additionally, ad hoc community peace committees established with NGO support (e.g., UNDP, StarGhana) have made some efforts to include women and youth. In the Upper West Region, these committees consist of 7-8 members, with one or two women included as part of efforts to ensure balanced representation. Despite these efforts, women's participation remains limited. These disparities highlight systemic barriers rooted in patriarchy and traditional norms, which marginalise women from formal and informal conflict-resolution mechanisms (Diabah & Agyepong, 2022; Asekere, 2020). The underrepresentation of women in decision-making processes not only undermines democratic governance but also weakens peacebuilding efforts. Women bring unique perspectives on conflict resolution, often focusing on reconciliation, social cohesion, and community welfare. Ghana's northern regions, particularly Lambussie (Upper West Region) and West Gonja (Savannah Region), have been affected by conflicts over land, chieftaincy, and ethnicity. In these areas, peacebuilding efforts are typically led by male-dominated traditional authority structures, which often exclude women and youth from formal decision making. This exclusion perpetuates the marginalisation of women in peace processes and undermines the sustainability of peace initiatives.

Further compounding these challenges is the growing prevalence of gendered disinformation, both on and offline (Gadjanova et al., 2022). Gendered disinformation refers to false or misleading information specifically designed to undermine women's roles in public life, often attacking their credibility, questioning their competence, or perpetuating harmful stereotypes. Such disinformation campaigns target women in politics and peacebuilding, undermining their credibility. Social media platforms have amplified these campaigns' reach. Simultaneously, offline narratives spread through communal spaces such as markets, places of worship, and public gatherings, further entrenching the negative perceptions of women leaders. During the recent 2024 elections, reports indicated a surge in false narratives aimed at female candidates, eroding public trust, and dissuading women

from pursuing leadership roles. Despite its significance, limited data exists on the impact of gendered disinformation, particularly in Northern Ghana, where sociocultural norms and digital exclusion pose additional barriers to women's political engagement. Little is known about the extent and forms of gendered disinformation in many parts of Ghana, including the Lambussie and West Gonja districts of Northern Ghana.

Against this backdrop, this study focused on the Lambussie and West Gonja districts, seeks to understand the forms and levels of women's participation in local governance and peacebuilding. It also investigates the prevalence and impact of gendered disinformation on women's participation in the decision-making and peacebuilding processes. By integrating survey findings, qualitative mapping, and existing data, this study provides actionable policy recommendations aimed at: enhancing women's representation, addressing systemic barriers, and promoting inclusive governance and peacebuilding, particularly at the subnational level.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This report presents the findings of a study conducted to examine women's participation in local governance and peace building processes in the Lambussie and West Gonja districts. The objectives of this study are to:

1. **Assess the current forms and levels of women's participation in local governance and peace building processes,** this study examined the roles, representation, and participation of women in decision-making structures at the subnational level, utilising a combination of survey data and qualitative mapping to provide a comprehensive understanding.

2. **Investigate the prevalence and role of gendered disinformation in undermining women's participation in governance and peace building,** this study explored the impact of both online and offline disinformation campaigns on women's participation, analysing how these dynamics affect their visibility, credibility, and engagement in public life.

3. **Contextualize survey and qualitative mapping results with broader datasets:** This research compared findings from the survey and qualitative mapping with existing UNDP data and other public datasets on women's participation in local governance and politics to offer a comprehensive and contextualised analysis.

4. **Provide concrete policy recommendations for enhancing women's participation and addressing gendered disinformation,** the report outlines actionable strategies and key policy interventions to address the systemic barriers limiting women's participation while offering targeted solutions to counter the effects of gendered disinformation.

3. SCOPE AND STRUCTURE OF REPORT

This study focuses on the forms and levels of women's participation in governance and peacebuilding with particular emphasis on sub-national (district and community) levels. The research was conducted in Lambussie district in the Upper West Region and West Gonja District in the Savannah Region. These districts were purposefully selected because of their unique sociocultural dynamics and the pressing need for gender inclusivity in decision-making and conflict resolution. This study examined historical and contemporary factors shaping women's participation, while also investigating the prevalence and impact of gendered disinformation, both on and offline.

Although the focus is on the subnational level, the report incorporates insights from key national stakeholders and national policy documents to contextualise the findings within broader policy frameworks.

The remainder of this report is organised as follows. Following the objectives of the study outlined earlier, this section provides the scope and overarching structure of the report. The methodology section details the research design, data collection, and analytical techniques employed. The findings section is organised into thematic areas, including forms and levels of women's participation in governance, barriers and challenges, as well as opportunities for enhancing women's inclusion in governance and peacebuilding. The report concludes with Policy Recommendations, which offer actionable strategies to address the systemic barriers identified and foster inclusive governance at both national and sub-national levels.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of women's participation in political and peacebuilding processes. The mixed-methods approach enabled the collection and analysis of both numerical data and rich narratives. This offered a holistic perspective on the levels and forms of women's participation, the barriers they encounter, and their exposure to gendered disinformation.

By employing this design, the study captured trends and patterns across the targeted districts while also delving into contextual insights about women's lived experiences, perceptions, and roles in subnational politics and peacebuilding. This dual approach facilitated a nuanced analysis that went beyond surface-level statistics to highlight the sociocultural, institutional, and systemic factors shaping women's participation. The mixed-methods framework also allowed for triangulation of data, ensuring robust and credible findings that reflect both quantitative trends and qualitative complexities.

4.2 Sampling Strategy and Respondents

This study employed a combination of convenience, quota, and purposive sampling techniques to recruit respondents, ensuring balanced representation and alignment with the research objectives.

Convenience and quota sampling techniques were utilised for the quantitative component.

Quota sampling ensured representation across diverse demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, employment status, and educational level. This approach captured the varying forms and levels of women's participation in governance and peacebuilding processes. Convenience sampling facilitated the selection of readily available respondents, making the data-collection process efficient.

The study was conducted in two districts: West Gonja Municipal in the Savannah Region and Lambussie District in the Upper West Region. Table 1 provides background information on the two districts.

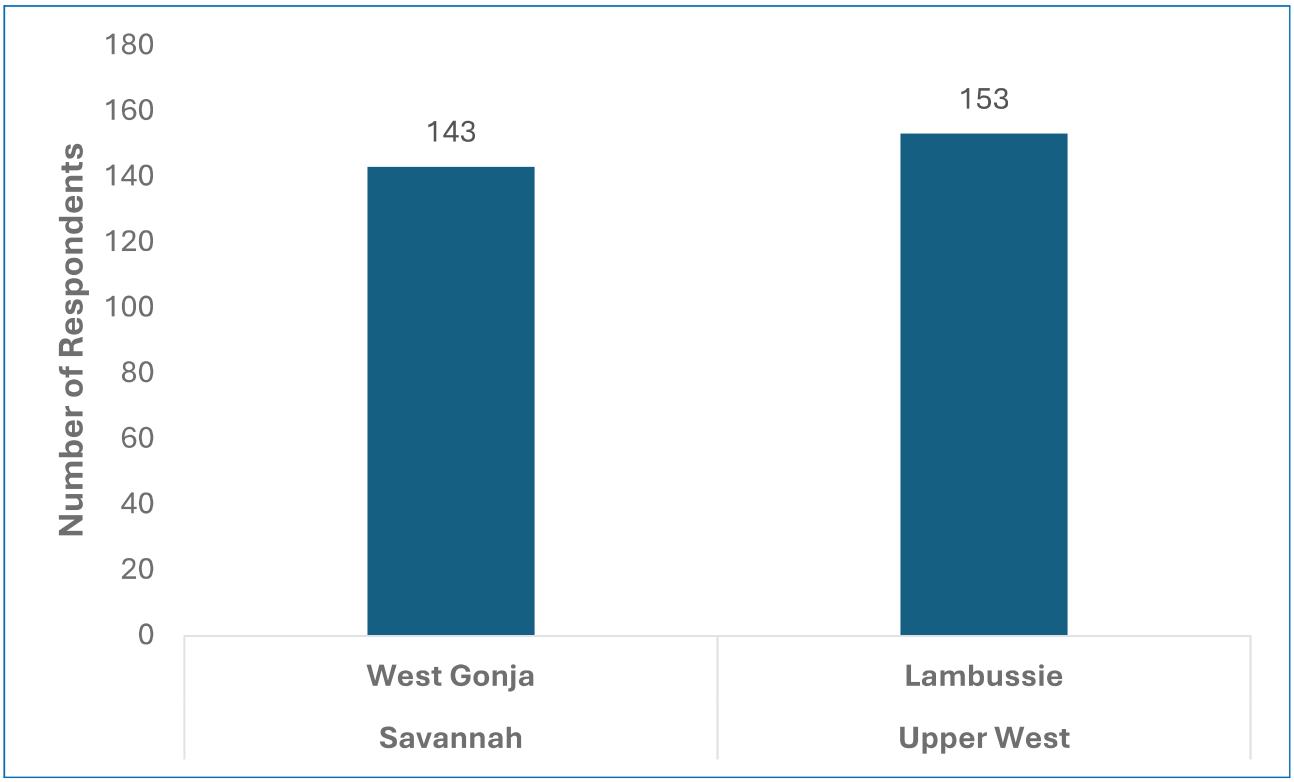
Table 1: Comparative Background of West Gonja and Lambussie Districts

Dimension	Lambussie District (Upper West Region)	West Gonja Municipal (Savannah Region)
Location	Upper West Region, sharing a border with Burkina Faso.	Savannah Region, covering 8,353 km^2 (about 12% of the region's total landmass).
Administrative Capital	Lambussie	Damongo serves as the administrative capital and economic hub.
Population	51,118 (2021 Census), with 51% women.	142,762 (2021 Census), with an almost equal gender distribution.
Land Area (km^2)	1,356	4,700
Political Context	Lambussie is a predominantly rural district with weak political structures supporting women's participation. Governance is heavily influenced by traditional leadership, which limits women's formal engagement in decision-making. No woman has been elected to the District Assembly since its inception in 2007.	West Gonja is home to the regional capital, Damongo, making it an important political hub. The district benefits from political attention but remains male-dominated in governance. No woman has been elected to the Assembly for more than a decade.
Economic Activities	Primarily agrarian economy producing food crops such as maize, groundnut, cowpea, soya beans, millet, sorghum; cross-border trade with Burkina Faso. Traditional and Financial constraints are a major barrier to women's political participation.	More diverse economic opportunities, including agriculture, tourism, and commerce. Traditional and Financial constraints are a major barrier to women's political participation.
Education and Literacy Levels	Literacy levels are lower, especially among women. Many girls drop out of school early due to financial constraints, early marriage, and cultural expectations. This affects their ability to engage in governance and leadership. The literacy rate is 55%.	The literacy rate is higher compared to Lambussie, with more schools and access to secondary education in the district capital, Damongo. However, women and girls still face educational barriers. The literacy rate is 60%.

Sources: Population and Housing Census, Ghana Statistical Service, 2021; District Analytical Reports, Ghana Statistical Service; Ghana Districts: A repository of all Local Assemblies in Ghana.

Six communities were selected from each district for the survey, and 296 respondents participated. This approach ensured adequate geographic coverage while capturing diverse perspectives for analysis. The distribution of the sample by Region and District is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Surveyed respondents by district



Source: Fieldwork, Dec 2024-Jan 2025

For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was employed to select participants with relevant knowledge and experience of governance and peace building. A total of 76 qualitative respondents were included. This included eight focus group discussions (four per district) involving 52 participants including women from community groups, unaffiliated women, and male community members. Additionally, 24 semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders such as staff of District Assemblies, assembly members (both current and past), women who contested and won or lost district assembly elections, political party executives at the district level, Regional Peace Councils, the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection, the Electoral Commission, women's associations, traditional and opinion leaders, religious leaders, representatives from Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs), and media outlets. The inclusion of diverse perspectives through focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews ensured a comprehensive understanding of the systemic barriers, opportunities, and dynamics influencing women's participation in local governance and peacebuilding processes.

4.3 Data Collection

Primary data for this study were collected using three main tools: **questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs)**. Each tool served a specific purpose of ensuring comprehensive and triangulated insights into the research objectives. The data collection process was designed to engage relevant stakeholders at both the national and sub-national levels.

Surveys (Questionnaire)

The questionnaire was the primary tool used to gather quantitative data from the public. The surveys were specifically designed to collect data on the levels and forms of women's participation in local governance and peace building processes; barriers to women's participation, including sociocultural, economic, and institutional constraints; and exposure to gendered disinformation. The survey was administered using the Kobo Toolbox platform to facilitate efficient and cost-effective data collection in the selected districts. Data was collected digitally via smartphones or tablets, allowing both online and offline access. Field assistants conducted face-to-face interviews with respondents in the communities, capturing data in real time. This approach ensured real-time monitoring and enhanced quality control through remote supervision. The digital method expedited data processing by providing immediate access to survey data upon completion and reduced costs associated with printing and transporting paper-based questionnaires.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews complemented the survey data and provided qualitative insight. Interviews delved into participants' experiences, perceptions, and barriers to women's participation in governance and peace building. Discussions have also assessed the impact of sociocultural norms, institutional challenges, and gendered disinformation. These interviews were conducted with a wide range of stakeholders, such as staff of district Assemblies, assembly members (both current and past), women who contested and won or lost district assembly elections, political party executives at the district level, traditional and opinion leaders, religious leaders, and representatives of Community-Based Organisations (CBOs).

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Focus group discussions provided a platform for collective dialogue to capture diverse community perspectives. FGDs were particularly valuable for exploring community-level dynamics, barriers to women's participation, and potential solutions. Six FGDs were conducted (three in each district). Each FGD included 8 to 10 participants, ensuring a manageable size for effective discussion. Sessions were facilitated using a structured guide and lasted approximately 1 to 2 hours.

4.4 Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected through the questionnaires were analysed using SPSS software, applying descriptive statistical methods to identify trends and patterns in women's participation in the governance and peace building processes. This analysis provided numerical insights into the levels and forms of women's participation, barriers to engagement, and prevalence of gendered disinformation across the two districts. The qualitative data gathered from the interviews and focus group discussions were analysed using a thematic and narrative approach. This method involves systematically identifying recurring themes, patterns, and narratives within the dataset. Integrating the quantitative and qualitative analyses was essential for achieving a holistic understanding of the research findings. This complementary approach allowed for nuanced interpretations, where qualitative data were contextualised, and real-life examples were provided to illustrate statistical trends.

5. FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of this study. It comprehensively analyses the forms and levels of women's participation in local governance and peacebuilding, specifically focusing on the Lambussie District and West Gonja Municipality. Drawing on quantitative and qualitative data, the findings explored the multifaceted barriers hindering women's participation, opportunities to enhance their roles, and the pervasive issue of gendered disinformation. The analysis integrates survey data, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews to fully understand the socio-political dynamics that affect women's involvement in governance and peace processes. The section begins with a profile of the surveyed respondents, setting the demographic context for interpreting subsequent findings, and then delves into the core themes of governance, peacebuilding, and the impacts of gendered disinformation.

5.1 Profile of the surveyed respondents

Table 2 presents the demographic data of the surveyed respondents, providing a strong contextual basis for interpreting their responses to governance and peacebuilding.

The survey reflects a predominantly female sample, with 73.6% of the respondents identifying as women, while men accounted for 26.4%. This aligns with the focus of this study on women's participation, ensuring that their perspectives are adequately captured. Respondents were relatively evenly distributed across the age groups, with the highest representation from the 25-34 years (29%) and 35-44 years (29.4%) age brackets. Only 9.5% of respondents were aged 55 years or older. The data indicates that 87.5% of respondents had lived in their communities for more than six years, indicating a strong sense of community integration and local knowledge. This long-term residency supports the validity of their perspectives on the governance and peacebuilding processes within their communities. Education levels varied widely, with 42.2% of respondents reporting no formal education, a significant insight reflecting the potential barriers to participation posed by educational disparities. The data showed modest educational attainment: only 19.3% of participants had finished secondary education, and just 17.6% had obtained tertiary qualifications. Only 1.4% had postgraduate qualifications, revealing an educational gap that could influence awareness and engagement in governance and peacebuilding.

The largest occupational group was self-employed, accounting for 41.6% of the respondents, underscoring the economic independence of a significant portion of the

sample. The unemployed (19.6%) and homemakers (11.5%) also represented substantial portions of the sample, reflecting economic vulnerability and traditional gender roles in the community. Government employees made up 11.8% of the sample, a group likely to have better access to governance processes. More than half (51.3%) of the respondents were self-employed, reinforcing the entrepreneurial nature of many community members. Public sector employees accounted for 10.9%, while 23.5% were privately employed. The unemployed category, at 14.3%, aligns with the occupation data, highlighting economic vulnerabilities in the sample. The majority (68.6%) of the respondents were married, a factor that could influence their roles and responsibilities within the community and their ability to participate in governance. Single respondents made up 23.6% of the sample, while widows (5.7%) and divorced individuals (2%) were less represented. This marital distribution suggests that household dynamics and social norms can play a role in shaping women's participation in governance and peace building.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of survey respondents

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	218	73.6
Male	78	26.4
Age Group		
18-24 years old	34	11.5
25-34 years old	86	29
35-44 years old	87	29.4
45-54 years old	61	20.6
55 years old or above	28	9.5
Length of Residence in Community		
1-3 years	10	3.4
4-6 years	27	9.1
More than 6 years	259	87.5
Education		
No formal education	125	42.2
Primary	34	11.5
Secondary	57	19.3

Vocational training	24	8.1
Tertiary (e.g. Diploma, Bachelor's degree)	52	17.6
Postgraduate (e.g. masters, PhD)	4	1.4
Occupation		
Government employee	35	11.8
Homemaker	34	11.5
Private sector employee	5	1.7
Self-employed	123	41.6
Student	38	12.8
Unemployed	58	19.6
Other	3	1
Employment Status		
Employed (private)	318	23.5
Employed (Public)	147	10.9
Self-employed	694	51.3
Unemployed	194	14.3
Marital status		
Divorced	6	2
Married	203	68.6
Single	70	23.6
Widowed	17	5.7

Source: Fieldwork, Dec 2024-Jan 2025

5.2 Women's Participation in Governance

This section delves into the various forms and levels of women's involvement in governance, highlighting their roles and contributions, barriers they encounter, and opportunities available to enhance their representation.

5.2.1 Forms and Levels of Participation

Participation in governance in the study area encompasses both traditional and formal

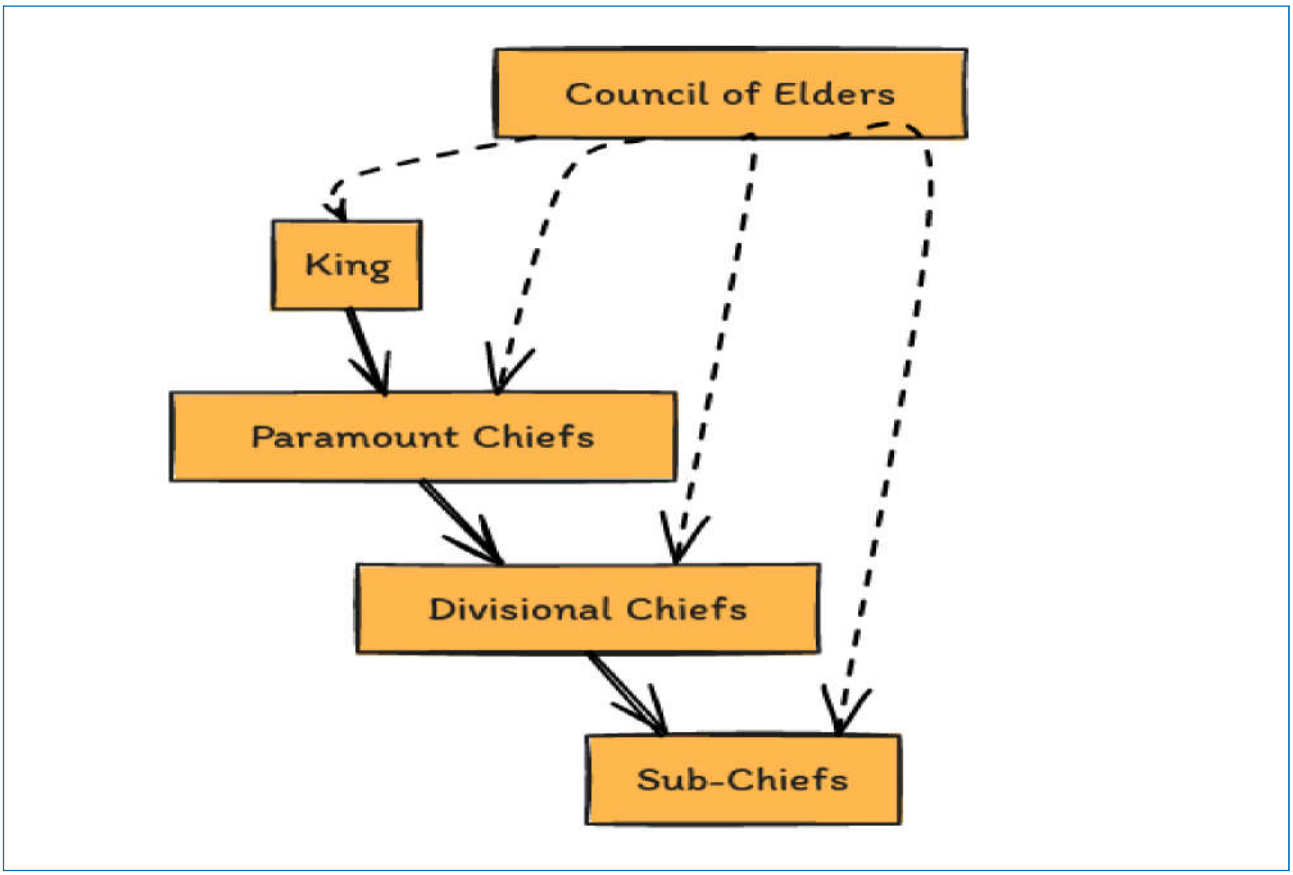
structures, which coexist and influence local decision-making processes. Traditional governance, which is deeply rooted in cultural and customary systems, plays a critical role in shaping community-level decision-making. Positions such as chiefs, queen mothers, and councils of elders remain central to this structure, although women's roles within these systems are often minimal and confined to gendered domains. However, this study focuses primarily on women's participation in formal governance structures, particularly within the realm of politics, as exemplified by decentralised systems such as Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs). While this discussion emphasises women in politics and formal governance, it is important to note that governance in the study areas cannot be completely divorced from traditional structures that continue to shape societal norms and influence formal political systems. Understanding the interplay between these two governance frameworks provides a more comprehensive picture of the barriers and opportunities that women face in decision-making.

Figures 2 and 3 depict Ghana's traditional and formal decentralisation structures. Traditional structures are based on tribe or ethnicity. At the apex, the King holds the highest authority within the ethnic group. Supporting the King are the Paramount Chiefs, who manage regional affairs and coordinate activities across various divisions. Below the Paramount Chiefs are the Divisional Chiefs responsible for overseeing divisions within the regions. Further decentralisation of the governance structure includes sub-chiefs, including town and village chiefs, who directly participate in local governance. The Council of Elders is crucial for advising and overseeing traditional governance frameworks, ensuring balance, and providing counselling at all levels. It is important to note that some traditional communities are evolving towards more sophisticated governance frameworks. These advanced structures aim to enhance the participation of underrepresented groups, particularly women and youth, in the decision-making processes.

The traditional governance system, which is deeply rooted in patriarchal norms, offers limited space for women to lead or influence decisions. In Lambussie, the selection of queen mothers, which is a relatively new concept in Northern Ghana, is gradually being incorporated. Of the 14 divisional chiefs in Lambussie, only seven have queen mothers and their roles are often restricted to women-specific issues. Traditional governance remains predominantly male dominated, with women often excluded from discussions and decisions involving land disputes, chieftaincy conflicts, and other critical matters. However, there are instances in which women are consulted, particularly in family level or community-specific matters that directly affect them. For example, women leaders such as mangazias[1] are sometimes invited to participate in resolving disputes involving women. Despite these limited roles, the presence of women in traditional governance structures is symbolic of a slow but steady shift towards inclusivity.

[1]Mangazia refers to respected female leaders or influential female figures in Muslim communities who usually champion issues of women.

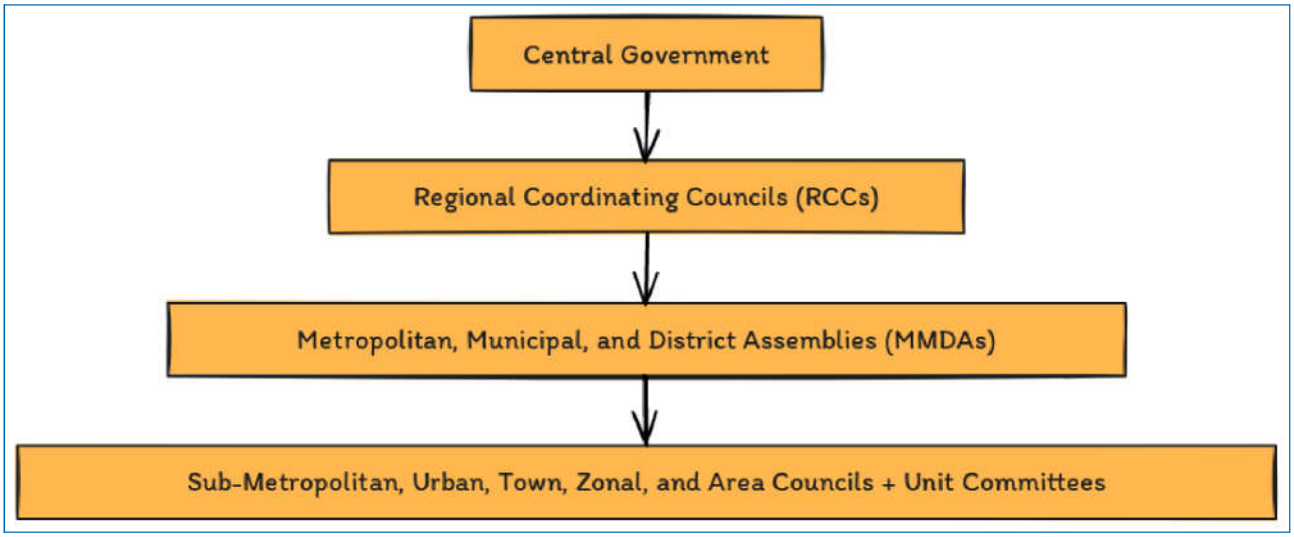
Figure 2. A typical traditional governance structure of an ethnic group



Source: Author

The formal decentralisation structure aims to strengthen local governance by transferring authority from the central government to local entities called Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs), as shown in Figure 3. This framework aims to promote citizen engagement, including the participation of women. At the top of this structure is the central government, with Regional Coordinating Councils (RCCs) below it overseeing district assemblies and ensuring compliance with national policies. Each RCC is headed by a Regional Minister, appointed by the President. Directly below the RCCs are MMDAs, which are core units of the local government system. MMDAs have both executive and legislative powers and play a crucial role in district development. Each assembly is led by a Chief Executive, nominated by the president, and confirmed by assembly members. Supporting the MMDAs are the Sub-Metropolitan, Urban, Town, Zonal, and Area Councils along with Unit Committees. These substructures are essential for bringing governance closer to citizens, mobilising community development efforts, and providing platforms for local discussions. Unit Committees, the smallest political and administrative units in electoral areas, play a vital role in promoting direct citizen participation and implementing community-level projects.

Figure 3. Formal decentralization structure in Ghana



Source: Author

These formal systems are intended to promote inclusive decision-making, yet they remain characterised by significant gender disparities, with women's involvement often limited to appointed roles rather than elected positions. In formal governance structures, women's participation is primarily visible through appointed and elected roles within district assemblies, community peace committees, and leaders of various associations. Figures 4 and 5 illustrate trends in gender representation among elected and appointed assembly members in the West Gonja and Lambussie districts from 2006 to 2023, respectively. A notable observation is the sharp decline in female representation in elected positions in West Gonja, but with an important outlier in 2006. According to a 2007 UNDP Human Development Report of the West Gonja district, the eight women elected in West Gonja in 2006 represented the highest number of elected female assembly members in any district in Ghana at the time. This remarkable achievement was primarily attributed to strong support from NGOs on women's participation in district-level elections and the proactive role of the then District Chief Executive (DCE), a woman. However, this support was sustained, dramatically dropping elected women in the subsequent election cycle. By 2010, only one woman was elected, and from 2015 onwards, no women secured electoral positions. Meanwhile, the number of elected male representatives remained stable at 12 members, reinforcing persistent male dominance in electoral outcomes.

A similar pattern is observed in Lambussie, where female representation in elected positions was almost non-existent. In 2006, only one woman was elected, and from 2010 onwards, no women secured electoral positions. The total number of elected assembly members in Lambussie increased from 14 in 2006 to 25 in 2010 due to re-demarcation. Yet, this expansion exclusively benefited male candidates, highlighting the structural barriers hindering women's participation in electoral politics. Unlike electoral representation, appointed positions have provided stability for women, though progress has been slow and

limited. In West Gonja, the number of appointed female members has remained stagnant at 2 from 2006 to 2023, suggesting that appointing authorities have maintained a small but consistent quota for women. In Lambussie, however, there has been slight progress, with the number of appointed female members increasing from 2 in 2006 to 4 in 2023. This overreliance on government appointments as the primary avenue for women's inclusion underscores the systemic barriers women face in contesting and winning elections at the local level. These challenges are compounded by political affiliations influencing appointments, which often prioritise loyalty over competency, as evidenced by the claims of appointees being selected based on political patronage. Participation at the unit committee level. For example, only one woman in West Gonja was identified as a unit committee member. This low engagement is attributed to sociocultural norms, lack of interest, and a limited understanding of governance structures among women.

Overall, the data reveals that despite Ghana's commitment to gender-inclusive governance, women in these districts continue to struggle for representation in elected offices. The West Gonja case in 2006 demonstrates that deliberate interventions, such as strong NGO support and leadership advocacy, can yield significant improvements. However, the fact that this progress was not sustained highlights the need for institutional mechanisms rather than temporary interventions.

Figure 4. Gender Representation in West Gonja District Assembly (2006-2023): Trends in Elected and Appointed Members

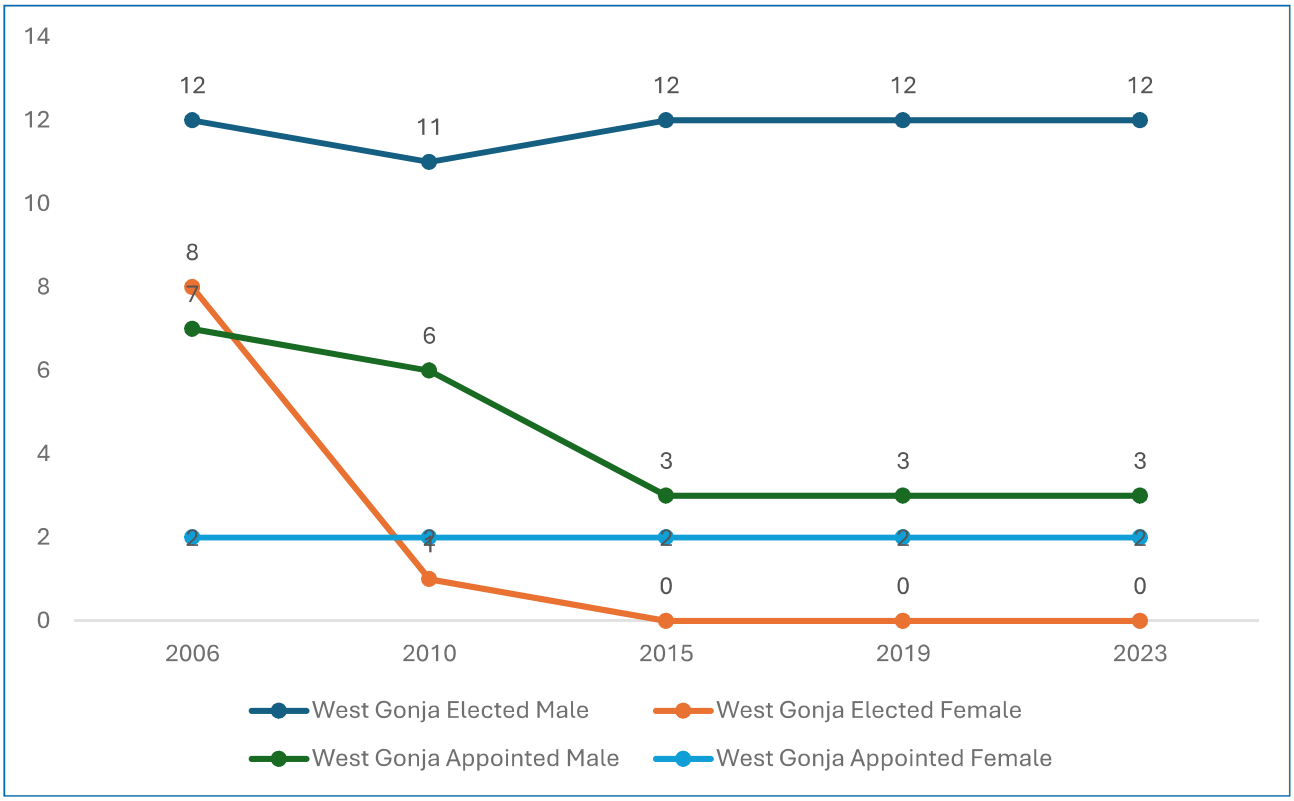


Figure 5. Gender Representation in Lambussie District Assembly (2006-2023): Trends in Elected and Appointed Members

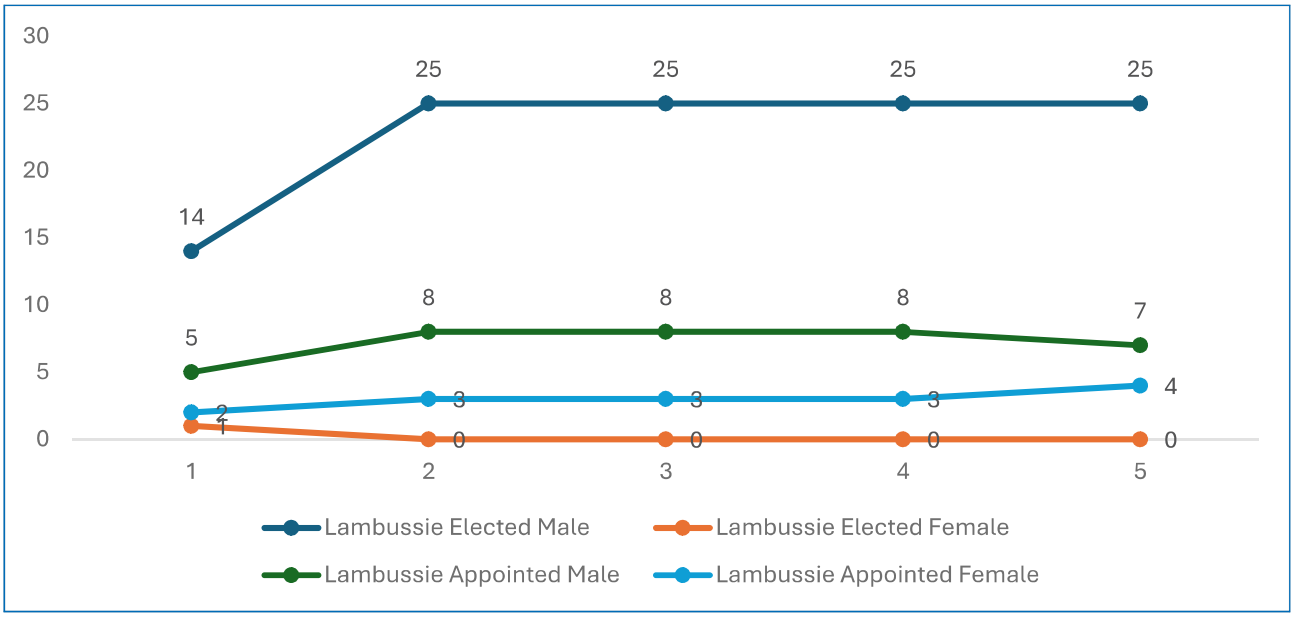
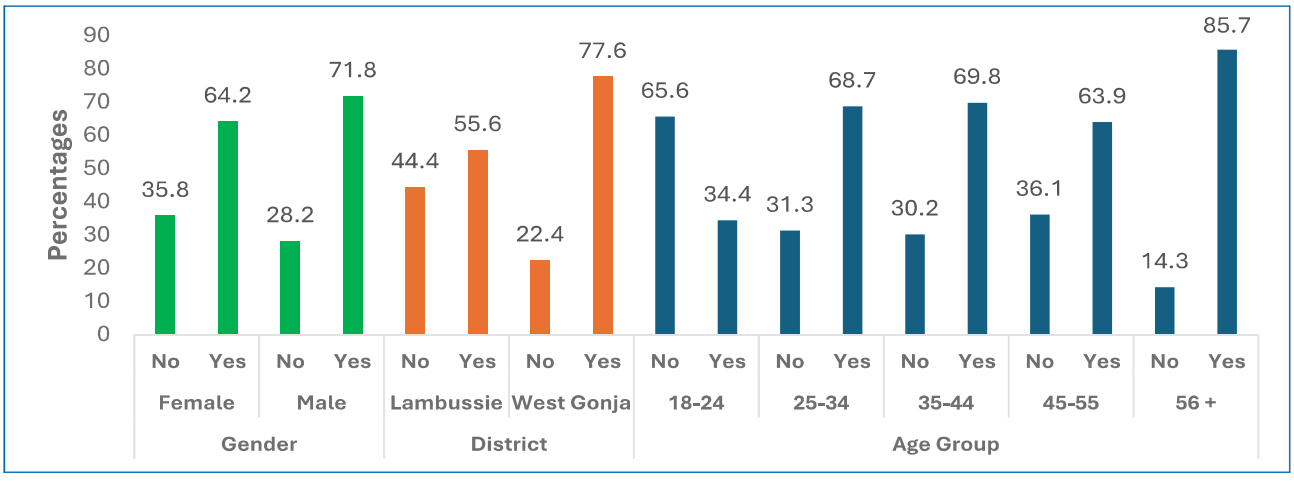


Figure 6 provides insights into community participation in governance and decision-making processes disaggregated by gender, district, and age groups. Approximately 64% of females reported participating in governance or decision-making processes, compared to 35.8% who did not. Men exhibited slightly higher participation levels, with 71.8% reporting involvement compared to 28.2% who did not. This suggests that men are traditionally more involved in governance, potentially reflecting societal norms and structural advantages.

Figure 6: Have you participated in any governance or decision-making processes in your community?



Source: Fieldwork, Dec 2024-Jan 2025

In Lambussie, participation rates in governance were relatively low, with 55.6% of respondents reporting involvement and 44.4% indicating no participation. This highlights more pronounced barriers to engagement, likely stemming from sociocultural or institutional factors. Conversely, participation was notably higher in West Gonja, where 77.6% of respondents reported involvement compared to 22.4% who did not. This difference suggests that West Gonja may offer more inclusive governance structures or better opportunities for participation. The higher participation in West Gonja could also be attributed to its more urbanized nature, with the regional capital located within the district, potentially facilitating greater access to governance processes.

In terms of age, the 18-24 age group has the lowest participation rate, with only 34.4% involved in governance processes. This highlights the potential disengagement or exclusion of younger individuals and gerontology plays critical roles in access in rural communities and or lack of interest by young people in political processes. The 25-34 and 35-44 age groups showed similar levels of engagement, with 68.7% and 69.8% reporting participation, respectively. These middle-aged groups are typically more active, likely reflecting their role as community leaders or economically active citizens. Respondents aged 56 years and above showed the highest participation rate (85.7%).These findings show that young people (18-24 years) are less involved, highlighting the need for targeted initiatives to encourage youth participation in governance while systematically engaging traditional and religious leaders on social and cultural barriers to women and particularly young women's participation in governance and decision making. In contrast, older age groups showed stronger engagement, potentially due to cultural respect for elder wisdom or traditional roles.

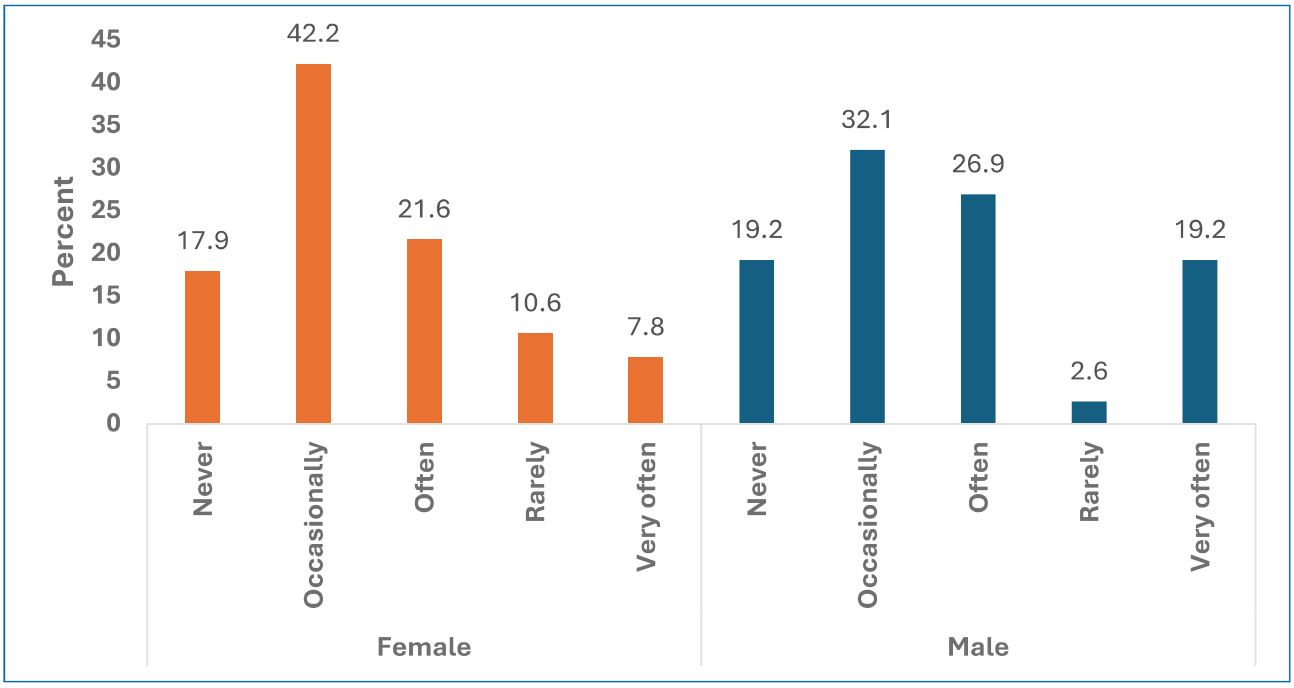
The analysis revealed a range of governance and decision-making processes in which the respondents participated, highlighting diverse forms of engagement. The most frequently mentioned form of participation was attending community meetings or discussions as reported by 102 respondents. This underscores the importance of community forums as accessible platforms for decision-making and governance at the grassroots level. Membership in women's or other local associations followed closely, with 90 respondents identifying this as their avenue of participation, reflecting the critical role that organised groups play in mobilising and representing women's voices. Additionally, 85 respondents reported participating as assembly members or taking on leadership roles as traditional or religious leaders, indicating that while these roles offer significant influence, they are less commonly accessed by women than community-based mechanisms. Volunteerism in community initiatives, cited by 71 respondents, highlights the growing willingness to contribute to collective goals, even in informal capacities. Finally, participation in community peace committees was noted by 39 respondents, demonstrating that while such committees exist, they remain less frequently utilised as avenues for broader engagement.

These findings suggest that, while women's participation is evident in various forms, it is more pronounced in informal and collective platforms than in formal leadership roles,

which remain less accessible. Strengthening support for women's entry into formal governance structures could help to bridge this gap.

Occasional participation dominated women's engagement (42.2% vs men's 32.1%), suggesting gendered patterns in governance involvement (see Figure 7). This suggests that women's involvement tends to be sporadic and event-driven, rather than consistent. Men showed higher levels of frequent participation, with 26.9% participating often and 19.2% participating very often compared to 21.6% and 7.8% of women, respectively. Rare participation is more common among women (10.6%) than among men (2.6%), indicating that more women face challenges that limit their engagement. Non-participation rates were similar between genders (men: 19.2%; women: 17.9%) . This reflects the systemic barriers to governance involvement that affect both genders, although women may face unique sociocultural constraints. Not surprisingly, more than half of the respondents indicated that they were not satisfied with their current level of participation in local governance as well as the inclusiveness of the processes.

Figure 7: Frequency of participation in local governance activities



Source: Fieldwork, Dec 2024-Jan 2025

Box 1 presents a bird's eye overview of the different pathways women participate in local governance.

Box 1: Spotlight on Women's Roles: Diverse Pathways to Local Governance

In the Lambussie and West Gonja districts, women's participation in local governance manifests in various forms, reflecting both formal and informal avenues of engagement.

Formal Governance Roles: Women occupy positions as assembly members, unit committee representatives, political party executives, and members of zonal councils and subcommittees of the assemblies. However, their representation remains significantly constrained by systemic barriers. In the most recent district assembly elections (2023), no women were elected in Lambussie, where all 25 elected assembly members were male. Similarly, in West Gonja, no female assembly members have been elected since 2016, reinforcing a pattern of male dominance in local governance. At the appointed level, only four out of 11 appointees in Lambussie and two out of five in West Gonja are women in 2023. A critical issue is not just election outcomes but also the absence or minimal participation of female candidates in election. In most electoral areas, no women contested both districts in 2023 and previous years, reflecting deep-rooted socio-cultural barriers, financial constraints, and limited political party support. In cases where women did contest, they were often outnumbered and out-resourced by male competitors, reducing their chances of winning. At the unit committee level, the situation is similar, with very few women contesting, despite the grassroots nature of these roles. The zonal councils and subcommittees of the assemblies, which play a crucial role in local governance and decision-making, also have low female representation as their memberships are drawn from assembly and unit committee members, further limiting women's influence in policy discussions and development planning.

Community-Based Engagement: Beyond formal roles, women play pivotal roles in informal governance structures. Women associations, community women leaders such as Mangazia and Queen mother offer platforms for organizing and influencing community decision-making. As one Mangazia highlighted, "I resolve conflicts among women and sometimes represent them at the chief's palace when issues escalate."

Volunteerism and Advocacy: Women also contribute to governance through volunteering in community initiatives, such as healthcare campaigns, education drives, and peacebuilding activities. Their participation fosters grassroots development, though often unrecognized in formal governance statistics.

Traditional Leadership Contributions: While predominantly male-dominated, traditional governance systems occasionally include women's perspectives, particularly on matters concerning women and children. However, their influence is often

circumscribed. A chief from Lambussie noted, "Women's input is sought mainly on women-specific issues, not broader governance matters."

Women's participation in local governance demonstrates a blend of resilience and systemic challenges. By amplifying their voices in both formal and informal structures, communities can leverage the full potential of women's contributions to local development.

5.2.2 Barriers to Participation

Despite gradual progress in fostering women's participation in governance, significant barriers impede their full inclusion in local governance, politics, and decision-making processes in the Lambussie and West Gonja districts. These barriers are multifaceted and deeply rooted in sociocultural norms, economic inequalities, institutional frameworks, and prevalence of gendered disinformation. While this section explores the structural, cultural, and institutional barriers to women's participation, the issue of gendered disinformation—both online and offline— is addressed in detail in a separate section of this report. Understanding these barriers is essential for developing targeted strategies to bridge the gender gap in governance and empower women to meaningfully contribute to local governance. This section draws on qualitative insights and quantitative data to comprehensively analyse the key challenges identified.

Figure 8 highlights the various barriers women face when participating in governance activities in Lambussie and West Gonja. Cultural norms remain the most significant barrier for women in both districts, with 68.6% of respondents in Lambussie and 65% in West Gonja citing them as challenges. This finding underscores the pervasive influence of societal expectations and traditions that restrict women's roles in governance and decision making. Lambussie had a slightly higher prevalence, indicating more rigid cultural practices. Qualitative data revealed that cultural norms are often rooted in patriarchal traditions, as one participant in, Lambussie District, noted:"Most men believe that the place of women is to remain home and take care of household chores and responsibilities". This sentiment encapsulates the widespread perception that leadership is inherently male, leaving little room for women to assume a decision-making role.

Economic limitations also pose a substantial barrier to women's participation in governance, with 44.4% in Lambussie and 55.9% in West Gonja citing financial constraints as a key factor. These figures highlight the economic disparities that hinder women's ability to engage in governance, including the costs related to campaigns, mobility, and participation in decision-making platforms. The higher percentage in West Gonja suggests that economic barriers may be more severe in this district, limiting women's ability to engage in governance-related activities. A key factor contributing to this challenge is the monetisation of politics at the local level, where financial resources often determine

electoral success. As one woman shared during a FGD in the West Gonja Municipal: “If you don’t have money, you cannot contest the district assembly election”. An assembly member in the district lamented: “I spent over 40,000 Ghana cedis to become an assembly member, and it is not a joke” . This financial burden is particularly significant because many women are not actively engaged in income-generating activities, limiting their capacity to fund political campaigns independently. In rural areas, women’s economic opportunities are often tied to informal and subsistence-level activities, which do not generate the financial resources necessary for contesting elections. Moreover, women’s economic capacities are frequently linked to their husbands’ financial standing and social influence. In many cases, without their husbands' express support, their ability to engage in political activities is significantly constrained or even non-existent. This dependency further discourages women from stepping forward, as contesting elections may be perceived as conflicting with traditional gender norms and household financial priorities.

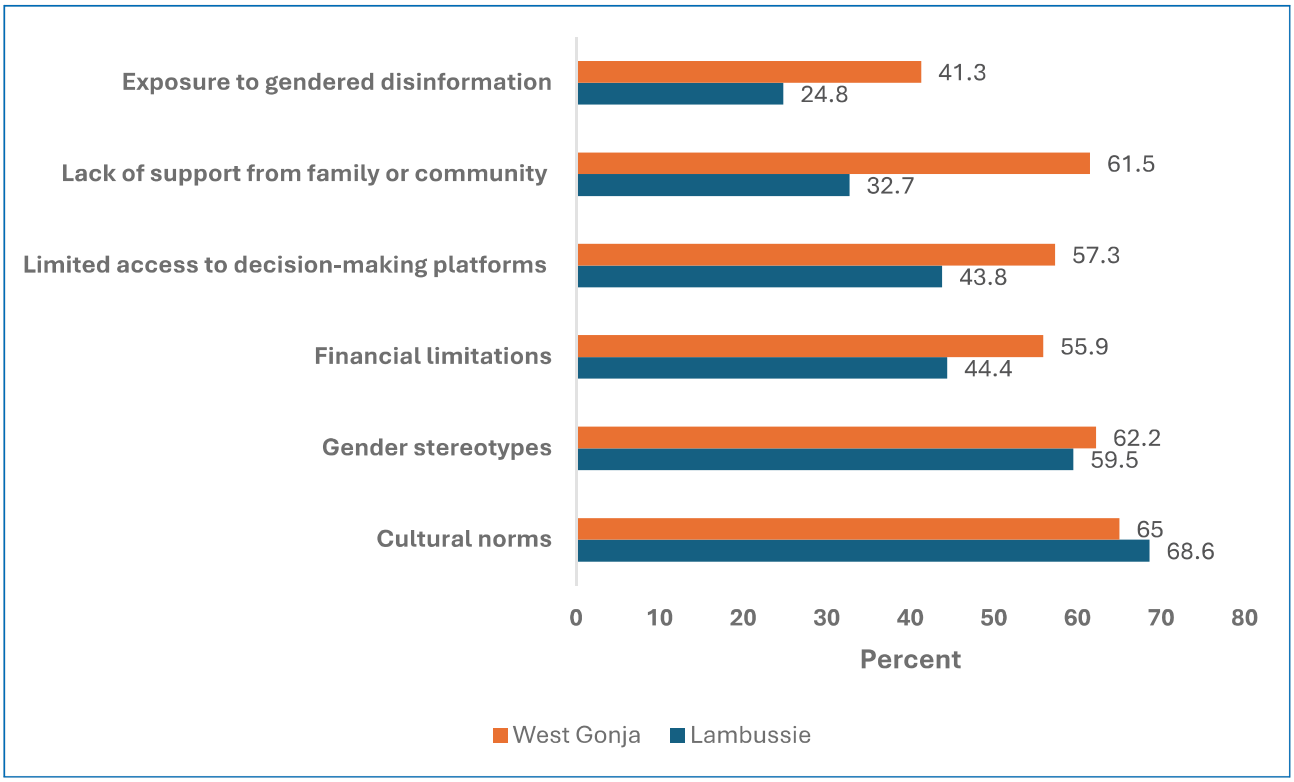
Access to decision-making platforms remains a challenge for 57.3% of respondents in West Gonja compared to 43.8% in Lambussie. This disparity suggests that structural barriers such as limited representation in assemblies or committees are more pronounced in West Gonja. Women often feel excluded from traditional and formal governance structures, with one government-appointed assembly woman in the Lambussie district lamenting: “To the extent that you are a woman, you are out. I am an assembly member but have never been invited to participate in decision-making at the chief’s palace. If I were a man, I’m sure I would always be invited”.

Additionally, the pervasive influence of gendered stereotypes cannot be overlooked, as reported by 59.5% of the respondents in Lambussie and 62.2% in West Gonja. Women who step into leadership roles are often subjected to derogatory labels such as “prostitutes” or accused of having “spiritual powers”. One woman who contested the 2023 district election but lost explained, “During my campaign, I was constantly called a prostitute because I was not married. It worked against me and my political ambitions.” These stereotypes erode women’s confidence and reinforce societal biases toward female leadership.

Exposure to gendered disinformation was reported by 41.3% of respondents in West Gonja and 24.8% in Lambussie. The higher percentage in West Gonja underscores the prevalence of online and offline misinformation campaigns targeting women in public life, further discouraging their participation. Similarly, family and community support also significantly influences women's ability to participate in governance. In West Gonja, 61.5% of respondents highlighted a lack of support from the family or community as a barrier, compared to 32.7% in Lambussie. Societal expectations and spousal restrictions for married women compound this challenge. One participant in the Gonja West District shared, “My husband allows me to go out during the daytime, but if we have a party activity that requires us to spend the night travelling, he will not agree.” Further, the phenomenon of labelling women as “strangers” in some communities in the Lambussie district due to intermarriages alienates them from leadership opportunities. A chief from the Lambussie district explained, “In our communities, women who marry into the community are seen as outsiders and

cannot be trusted to lead." This sentiment underscores the systemic exclusion of women based on marital status or place of origin.

Figure 8: Challenges face when participating in governance activities



Source: Fieldwork, Dec 2024-Jan 2025

Qualitative data analysis revealed several interconnected barriers that hinder women's participation in governance and decision-making processes. Table 3 highlights these barriers and provides descriptions and direct quotations from participants to illustrate women's lived experiences in navigating these challenges. These insights underscore the multifaceted nature of the obstacles, ranging from sociocultural norms and gender stereotypes to financial and institutional constraints. These findings highlight critical areas for targeted policy interventions.

Table 3. Barriers to women's participation: themes and evidence from qualitative data

Barrier	Description	Example Quote
Cultural Norms and Patriarchy	Deeply entrenched cultural beliefs and patriarchal systems continue to marginalize women, often restricting them to subordinate roles in society and governance.	*"The men always feel that they are the rightful leaders, and women must follow".*

Gender Stereotypes	Women are perceived as emotional or incapable of leading, which undermines their contributions in governance and decision-making forums.	*"When women speak at community meetings, some men dismiss their contributions as unnecessary or emotional".*
Financial Limitations	The high costs associated with political campaigns and governance activities disproportionately affect women, who often have limited access to resources.	*"Running for a political office requires money—many of us women simply cannot afford it".*
Limited Access to Decision-making	Decision-making platforms are often dominated by men, and women either lack access or struggle to have their voices heard when present.	*"Most of the key decisions are made in spaces where women are either not invited or not heard".*
Lack of Support from Family/Community	Women frequently lack encouragement from family members or the community, discouraging their participation in governance and leadership.	*"Sometimes, even our husbands or brothers discourage us, saying politics is not a woman's place".*
Exposure to Gendered Disinformation	False and misleading information targeting women erodes their credibility and deters them from participating in governance activities.	*"People spread false stories about women candidates, questioning their morality just to tarnish their reputation".*
Timidity and Lack of Confidence	Women are perceived as lacking the self-confidence needed to assume leadership roles or actively participate in governance processes.	*"Most women are timid and unable to lead. They are also not vocal and may need lobbying and advocacy skills".*
Restricted Time and Movement	Cultural expectations limit the ability of women to participate in governance activities that occur during evenings or involve overnight travel.	*"My husband allows me to go out during the daytime. But if we have a party activity that requires us to spend the night travelling overnight, he will not agree".*
Risk Aversion	Women are reluctant to invest time, energy, or resources in governance due to fear of losing or not being supported.	*"Women are risk-averse. That is, they don't want to invest their resources into politics or leadership ".*
Early Marriage	Early marriages limit educational and leadership opportunities for women, particularly in rural areas.	*"Women here marry too early. Some marry as early as 15 years".*
Lack of Female Role Models	The absence of visible, successful women leaders discourages younger women from aspiring to leadership positions.	*"There are not role models in our communities to look up to".*
Fear of Stigmatization	Women in leadership are often stigmatized, labelled, or ridiculed, which discourages them from pursuing governance roles.	*"As gender desk officer, I hear statements such as, don't spoil our wives for us; you are Margaret Thatcher; you are a witch, etc".*

5.2.3 Opportunities for Participation

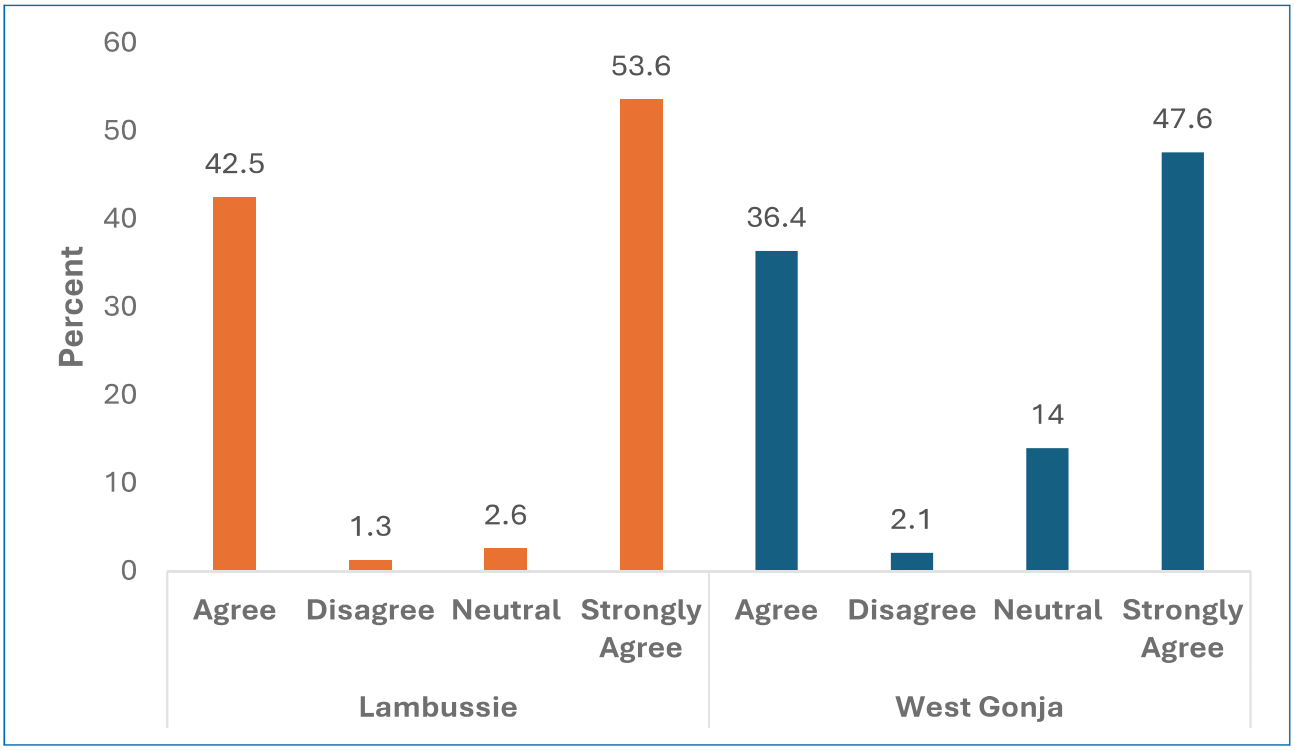
Despite the significant barriers women face in governance and decision-making, various opportunities exist to enhance their participation and empower them to meaningfully contribute to local and national governance structures. These opportunities stem from institutional reforms, community-level initiatives, and growing recognition of the importance of gender equality in governance. The key among these opportunities are capacity-building programs, affirmative action policies, and supportive networks such as women's associations and civil society organisations. Furthermore, international frameworks and Ghana's recent legislative advancements such as the Affirmative Action Act provide a robust foundation for addressing systemic challenges and promoting inclusivity. The section below explores these opportunities and integrates the quantitative and qualitative data.

The survey data revealed an overwhelming endorsement of women's leadership and capabilities in governance within both Lambussie and West Gonja districts (see Figures 9 and 10). In Lambussie, 96.1% of the respondents either agreed (42.5%) or strongly agreed (53.6%) that women should be given leadership roles in governance, showcasing a robust belief in gender-inclusive leadership. Similarly, 94.1% of the respondents in Lambussie either agreed (42.5%) or strongly agreed (51.6%) that women are as capable as men in leadership roles. Neutral responses were minimal at 4.6%, and only 1.4% expressed disagreement, split equally between "disagree" and "strongly disagree."

While support remains strong in West Gonja, it is less pronounced than in Lambussie. A total of 84% of the respondents either agreed (36.4%) or strongly agreed (47.6%) that women should be given leadership roles, and 74.2% either agreed (32.2%) or strongly agreed (42%) that women are as capable as men in leadership roles. However, the level of neutrality was higher in West Gonja, with 14% neutral on leadership roles and 18.2% neutral on leadership capabilities. Disagreement was also slightly higher, with 2.1% disagreeing with women's leadership roles and 7.7% disagreeing with women's capabilities. The higher percentage of neutrality and disagreement in West Gonja compared to Lambussie suggests that, while overall support for women's leadership is strong, there remains a segment of respondents in West Gonja who may be hesitant or unconvinced about fully endorsing women in governance roles. This indicates an opportunity for targeted advocacy and sensitisation efforts to address lingering reservations and to promote gender equity in governance.

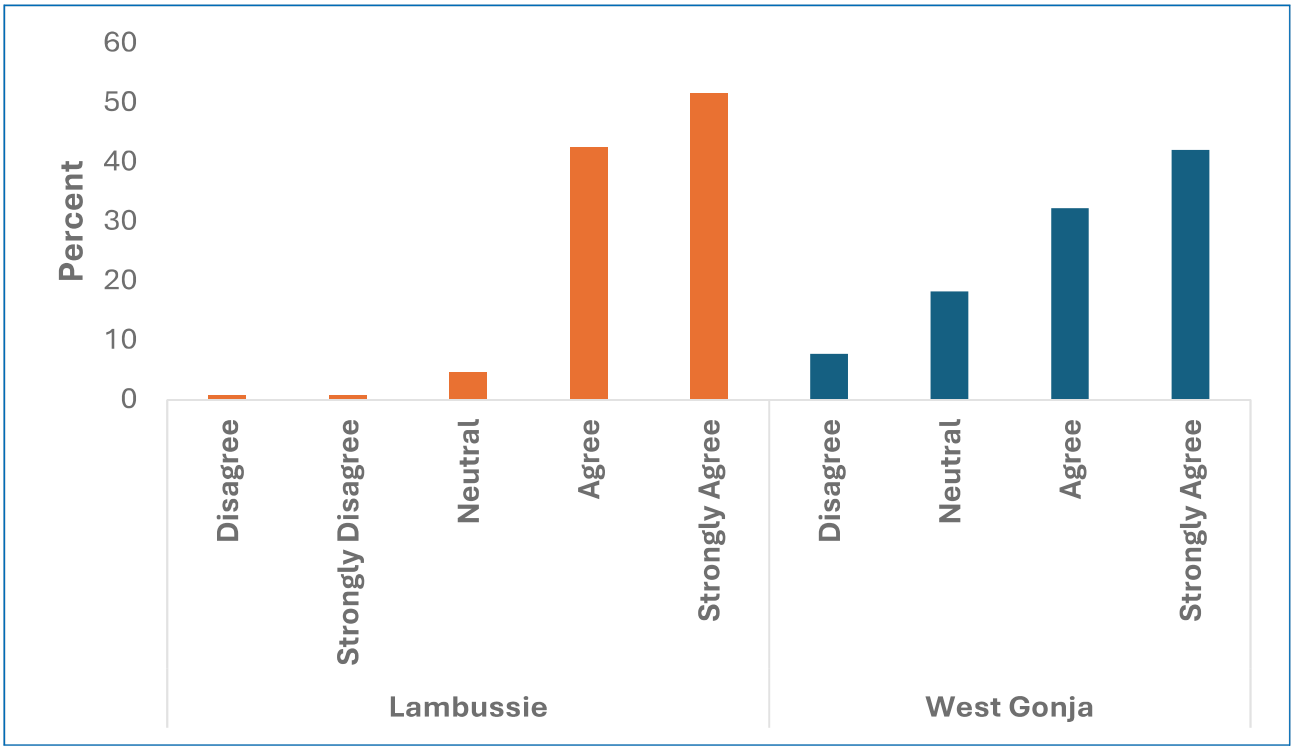
These findings reflect a positive cultural shift in attitudes toward women's leadership in both districts. Robust support in Lambussie, coupled with the potential to address neutrality and dissent in West Gonja, creates a favourable foundation for initiatives aimed at increasing women's representation in decision-making processes and fostering gender-inclusive governance.

Figure 9: Do you believe that women should be given leadership roles in governance?



Source: Fieldwork, Dec 2024-Jan 2025

Figure 10: Do you believe that women are as capable as men in leadership roles?

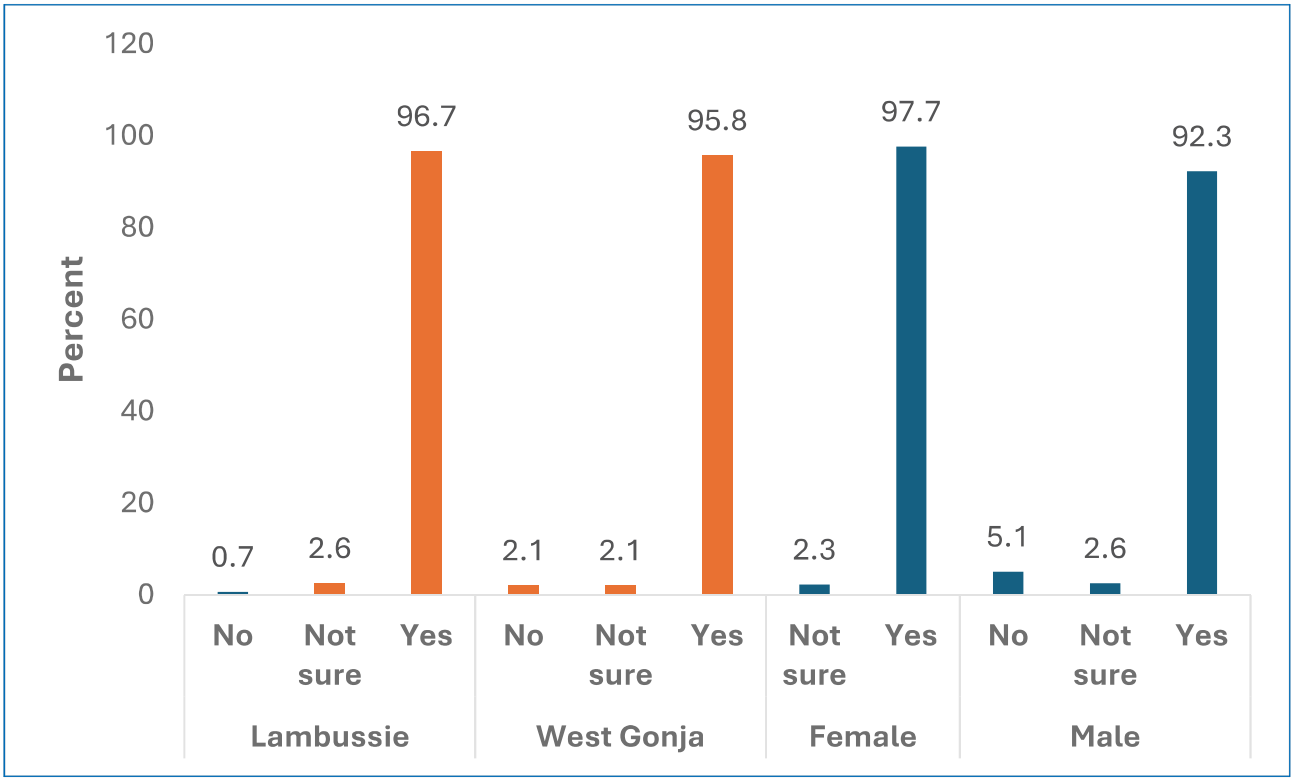


Source: Fieldwork, Dec 2024-Jan 2025

Figure 11 further reveals overwhelming support for encouraging women to contest elected positions in local governance across both genders. Among the female respondents, 97.7% answered "Yes", expressing a strong belief in the need to promote women's participation in local governance. Only 2.3% of the female respondents were "Not sure", and none outrightly opposed the idea. Male respondents similarly demonstrated robust support, with 92.3% answering "Yes". However, a small proportion of male respondents expressed reservations, with 5.1% opposing the idea and 2.6% indicating they were "Not sure". These figures underscore a near-universal acknowledgement of the importance of women's participation in local governance, with marginal dissent primarily observed among male respondents.

The data reflect strong cultural and societal recognition of the need to create an enabling environment for women's leadership in local governance. However, small pockets of opposition or uncertainty, particularly among men, point to the need for sustained advocacy and community engagement to address lingering doubts and reinforce the importance of inclusive governance.

Figure 11: Respondents attitudes towards female candidates in local elections



Source: Fieldwork, Dec 2024-Jan 2025

The above findings supporting women's participation might seem contradictory to the barriers identified earlier, such as cultural norms, gender stereotypes, and limited access to decision-making platforms. However, the complex interplay between cultural attitudes and structural barriers can explain this contradiction. While respondents may express strong ideological support for women's leadership, practical barriers deeply embedded in societal structures continue to hinder their participation. For instance, cultural norms that prioritise men as primary decision makers may coexist with a general acknowledgement of women's capabilities and the need for their involvement. This duality reflects a society in transition, where attitudes are beginning to shift toward inclusivity, yet systemic barriers and traditional practices persist. This contradiction underscores the difference between theoretical and actionable changes. Many respondents may conceptually agree that women should participate in governance, but remain constrained by sociocultural expectations and the lack of enabling structures to support women's ambitions. Addressing this gap requires advocacy and tangible reforms in institutional frameworks, community practices, and capacity-building initiatives to bridge the gap between attitudes and outcomes.

Several themes about opportunities for women's participation in governance and decision-making also emerged from the qualitative data. These themes were identified and are listed in Table 4. These opportunities highlight the potential to address barriers and foster inclusive governance by leveraging the existing resources, systems, and community structures.

Table 4. Opportunities for women's participation in governance: insights from qualitative data

Opportunity	Description	Supporting Quotations
Leveraging Queen Mothers	Queen mothers are increasingly being included in traditional governance structures, offering a platform for women to influence decisions.	*"I don't understand why we can have queen mothers in all towns and villages to participate in governance".*
Building on Mangazia Leadership Models	Mangazias (women's leaders) in Zongo and other communities represent a replicable model for fostering women's leadership roles.	*"I am the leader of all the women in my community and we meet to address issues that are important for women".*
Participation in Unit Committees	Unit committees serve as an accessible entry point for women into local governance, though representation is currently minimal.	*"Participating in Unit Committee election can be the starting points for most women to participate in politics".*
Role Models and Mentorship	Women leaders can mentor and inspire others to participate in governance, especially young women and first-time participants.	*"Women leaders at the district, regional and national levels should serve as mentors and role models".*
Women Associations as Platforms	Women's associations provide spaces to educate and encourage participation in governance activities.	*"The need to use existing women groups and invite their leaders to be part of governance processes".*

Education and Sensitization Campaigns	Targeted campaigns can raise awareness among women about their rights and capacities to lead, especially in rural areas.	*"Many women are ignorant of their right to participate in governance and must be educated".*
Engaging Husbands and Families	Support from husbands and families plays a critical role in enabling women's participation in governance activities.	*"To be successful in politics or leadership as a woman, you first need the support of your husband".*
Economic Empowerment Initiatives	Providing financial support to women candidates or leaders can help overcome economic barriers to participation.	*"Women with leadership potential should be identified and supported by financial support and mentoring".*
PTAs and School Committees	School management committees and PTAs offer entry points for women to engage in decision-making processes at the community level.	*"PTAs and school management committees serve as important platforms to encourage women's participation".*
Non-Formal Education	Programs to enhance literacy and leadership skills among women can	*"The introduction of non-formal education, especially in rural areas,*
	improve their ability to engage effectively in governance.	*will empower women to lead and participate in governance".*

The above-mentioned opportunities in Table 3 suggest a strong foundation for improving women's participation in local governance. By leveraging structures such as queen mothers, mangazias, and women's associations, women can be encouraged to take more active roles in decision-making. Addressing cultural and economic barriers through mentorship, education, and economic empowerment initiatives can significantly enhance women's representation.

5.3 Women's Participation in Peace building

Women's participation in peace building processes is critical for fostering inclusive and sustainable conflict-resolution strategies. In communities where disputes over land, chieftaincy, and ethnicity are common, particularly in the Lambussie and West Gonja districts, women's roles in formal and informal peace building mechanisms remain undervalued and underutilised. Peace building efforts in these areas often focus on male-dominated traditional authority structures, leaving women with limited opportunities to influence decision making. However, women bring unique perspectives and skills to peace building, particularly in fostering reconciliation, promoting social cohesion, and addressing the socio-emotional needs of the affected communities. This section explores the forms and levels of women's participation in peace building, examines the barriers hindering their engagement, and highlights opportunities to amplify their contributions to creating peaceful and resilient communities.

5.3.1 Forms and Levels of Participation

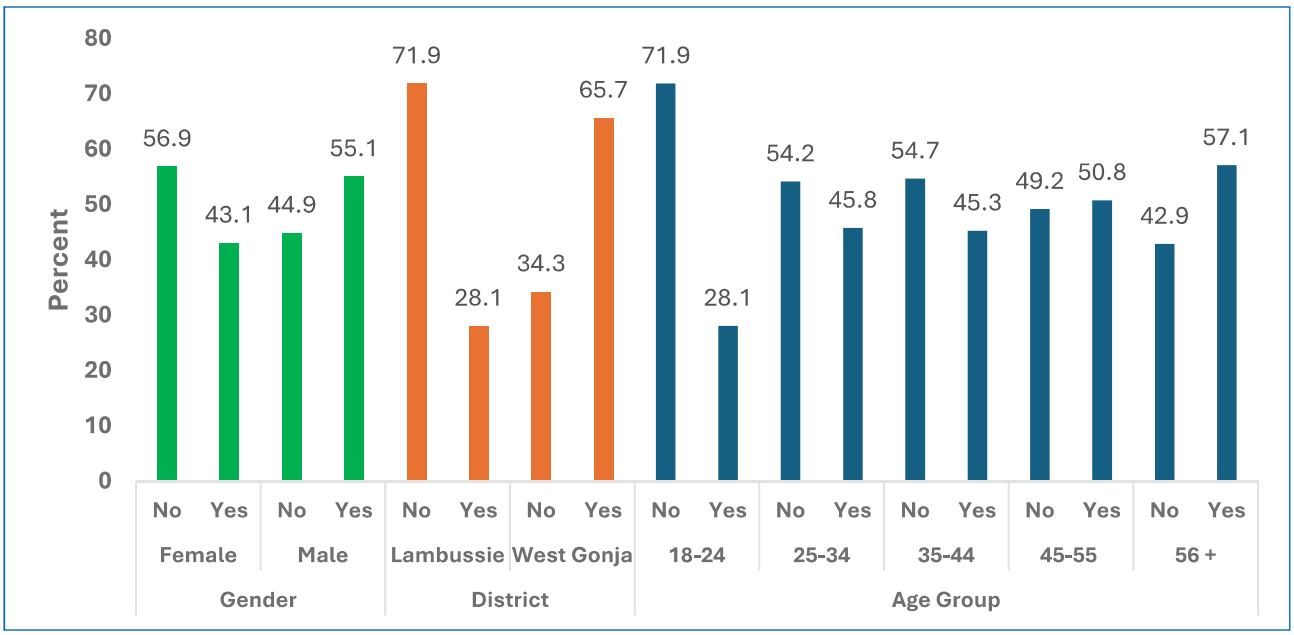
Peace building activities across various contexts in Ghana involve multifaceted contributions, ranging from mediating disputes and organising community initiatives to participating in formal peace councils. Traditional norms, community structures, and institutional frameworks shape women's participation in peace building. This section explores the diverse forms and levels of women's involvement in peace building, drawing insights from both the quantitative data and qualitative narratives collected during the study.

Figure 12 highlights the significant variations in participation in peace building activities across gender, districts, and age groups. Overall, it is evident that while some demographic groups are actively engaged, others remain underrepresented. Participation in peace building activities varied considerably between men and women. Among the female respondents, only 43.1% reported participating in peace building initiatives, while the majority (56.9%) indicated non-participation. By contrast, male respondents reported a higher level of involvement, with 55.1% participating and 44.9% not engaging in such activities. These figures suggest that women face more barriers to participation in peace building than men do, likely due to sociocultural constraints and limited opportunities tailored for female engagement.

A stark contrast emerges between the two districts. In Lambussie, peace building participation was notably low, with only 28.1% of respondents reporting involvement, leaving 71.9% not participating. This low level of engagement could reflect structural and systemic barriers or a lack of awareness and opportunities for community members. On the other hand, West Gonja showed a more positive trend, with 65.7% of respondents actively participating in peace building initiatives, compared to 34.3% who did not. This higher participation rate may indicate better-established peace building mechanisms or more inclusive practices within a district.

Age also plays a critical role in determining participation in peace building. Younger respondents, particularly those aged 18–24, exhibited the lowest level of involvement, with only 28.1% indicating participation and 71.9% reporting nonparticipation. As age increased, participation rates improved, with 45.8% of those aged 25–34 and 45.3% of those aged 35–44 engaged in peace building. The trend continued to rise among older age groups, peaking at 57.1% for respondents aged 56 years and above. This suggests that older community members often drive peace building efforts, possibly because of their established roles and influence within their community. Low participation among younger age groups points to the necessity of creating more youth-inclusive peace building mechanisms to harness their potential as agents of change.

Figure 12. Respondents participation in peace building activities

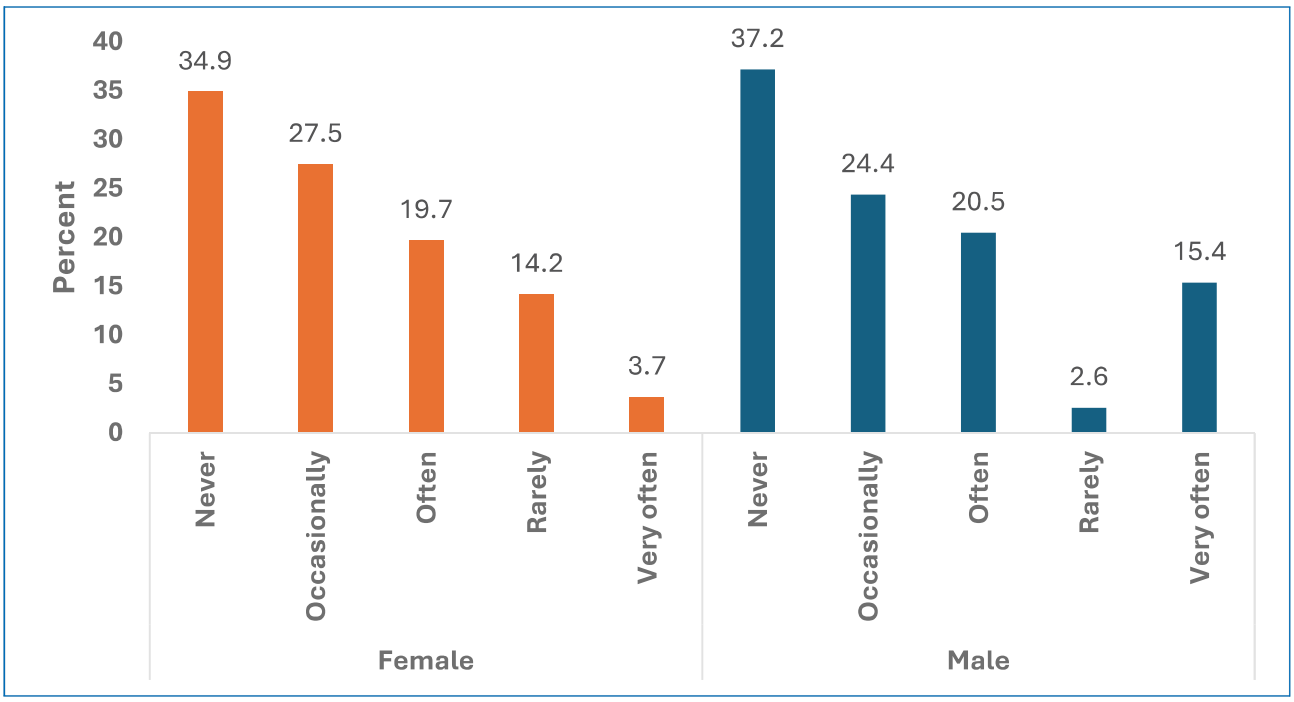


Source: Fieldwork, Dec 2024-Jan 2025

Among those who participated in peacebuilding activities, the respondents identified various capacities in which they contributed to these processes. The most frequently reported roles included acting as community leaders (68 respondents) and participating in dialogue sessions aimed at resolving conflicts (69 respondents). Additionally, 53 respondents reported being members of a peacebuilding committee or association, 48 indicated that they served as organisers or volunteers in peacebuilding events, and 15 respondents acted as mediators of community conflicts. These diverse roles underscore the multifaceted ways in which individuals contribute to fostering peace in their communities, with leadership and dialogue facilitation emerging as prominent avenues of involvement.

Furthermore, Figure 13 depicts notable differences in the frequency of participation in peacebuilding activities between males and females. Among females, only a small proportion (3.7 %) reported participating in peacebuilding activities very often, while 14.2% rarely participated. However, 34.9% of females reported never engaging in peacebuilding activities. For males, the frequency of participation appears slightly higher in the “very often” category, with 15.4% of male respondents indicating active and frequent participation. However, similar to their female counterparts, a considerable proportion of males (37.2 %) reported never participating in peacebuilding activities.

Figure 13: Frequency of participation in peacebuilding



Source: Fieldwork, Dec 2024-Jan 2025

Similar to participation in governance, more than half of the respondents indicated that they were not satisfied with their current level of participation as well as the inclusiveness of the building processes.

Women's participation in peacebuilding processes, while limited, encompasses various roles and capacities. Cultural norms and institutional frameworks shape their involvement, and can be observed at the national, regional, and district levels in both informal community settings and formal structures. Table 5 highlights the key forms of women's participation in the peacebuilding processes, which are discussed in detail below.

Table 5. Forms of participation in peacebuilding: qualitative insights

Form of Participation	Description	Supporting Quotation
Community Leadership	Women participate in initiatives related to family disputes and resource management.	*"Women lead di scussi ons on conflicts related to water i ssues because they understand them better" .*
Conflict Mediation	Women mediate disputes, particularly in family and resource-related conflicts.	*" In some homes w omen are seen as neutral and fair, so they are often called to mediate".*

Membership in Peace Committees	Women belong to peacebuilding committees but in smaller numbers compared to men.	*"I am on the peace committee, but my suggestions are rarely taken seriously".*
Dialogue Sessions	Participation in NGO-led discussions to address local conflicts.	*"During the community dialogue we encouraged to speak, but the men dominate the discussions".*
Organisation of Peace Events	Women mobilize communities and organise events aimed at peacebuilding.	*"There was a time a group of women threaten to walk naked if the men continue to fight".*
Role in Formal Peace Structures	Participation in National, Regional, and District Peace Councils, often in administrative roles.	*"We have women representatives in the Peace councils but they are underrepresented.".* *"The district peace council has never intervened in any conflict here".*

Women serve as community leaders and mediators in localised conflicts, particularly those concerning resources or family disputes. For example, in West Gonja, a participant noted: "Women are always called upon to mediate disputes involving families because they bring neutrality and compassion to the discussion." Their leadership roles, however, often remain confined to issues traditionally seen within the "women's domain", such as water and sanitation management. Women also participated in community peacebuilding committees and associations. NGOs and government agencies often support these groups and focus on fostering dialogue and mediation. However, the representation of women on these committees tends to be lower than that of men. For example, a woman from Lambussie observed: "Women are invited to join these committees, but it's often because they want to meet a quota, not because they value our input". These platforms allow women to share their perspectives on conflict resolution, although male dominance in these sessions often limits their ability to express their views fully. "NGOs encourage us to speak during dialogue, but sometimes it feels like no one is really listening", remarked a participant from West Gonja.

At the formal level, peace councils exist to institutionalise peacebuilding efforts across Ghana. However, these structures reveal significant gaps in women's representation and operational functionality. The National Peace Council (NPC) and its regional offices are mandated to lead conflict prevention and resolution efforts. Despite their importance, women remain severely underrepresented. For instance, the Upper West Regional Peace Council has only two female members out of 13. While district-level peace councils are designed to replicate the work of regional councils on a local scale, they primarily exist only

on paper. Interviews revealed that district peace councils in both Lambussie and West Gonja are nonfunctional, leaving communities to rely on informal mechanisms or NGO-led initiatives for peacebuilding. A community leader in Lambussie remarked, “We hear about the district peace council, but they have never come to our aid during conflicts.”

This analysis demonstrates that, while women contribute to peacebuilding in various capacities, significant gaps persist in their representation and recognition, particularly within formal structures.

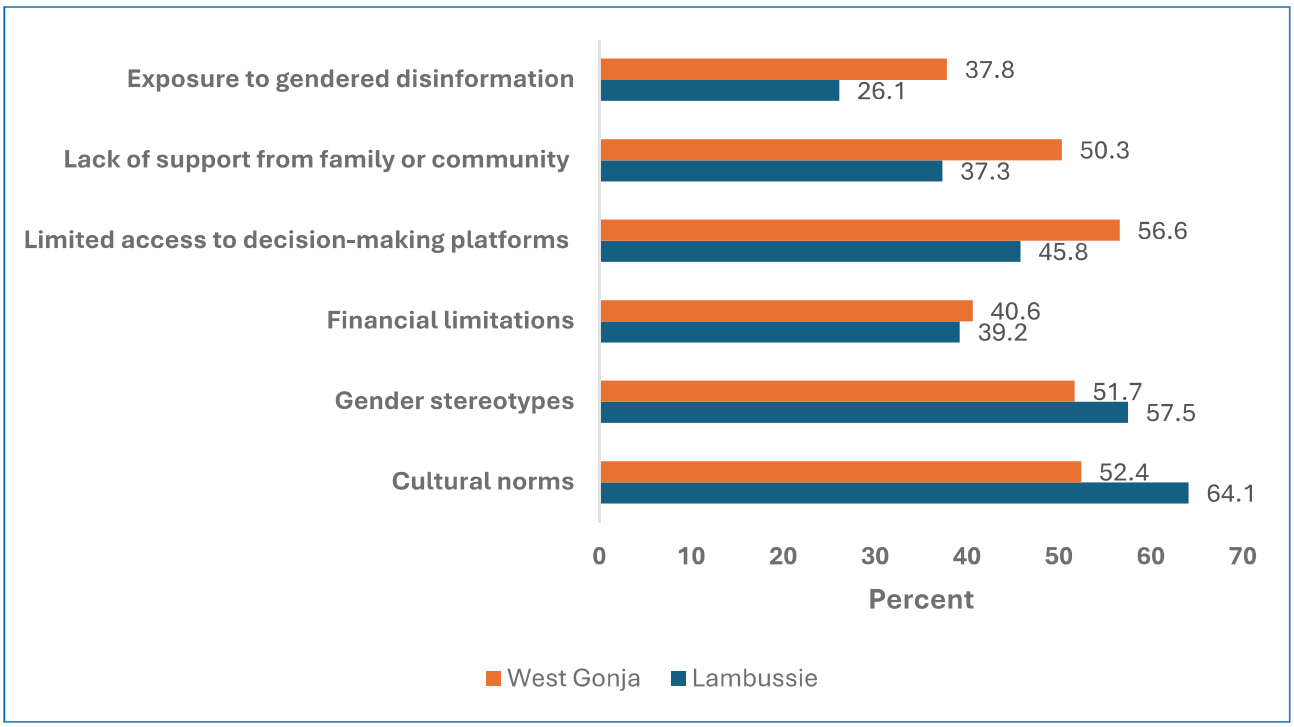
5.3.2 Barriers to Participation in peacebuilding processes

Women face significant barriers that limit their participation in peacebuilding processes despite their potential to play transformative roles in conflict resolution and social cohesion. These barriers stem from deeply entrenched sociocultural norms, institutional challenges, and resource limitations, which disproportionately affect women. In many cases, the patriarchal nature of traditional and formal peacebuilding structures further marginalises women, limiting their access to decision-making platforms and reinforcing stereotypes regarding their roles in peace processes. Additionally, the lack of effective mechanisms to address these systemic barriers perpetuates the exclusion of women from key peacebuilding activities, thereby diminishing the inclusivity and sustainability of such efforts. This section explores the barriers identified in the study, drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis.

Figure 14 shows respondents' views on barriers to women’s participation in peacebuilding activities across the Lambussie and West Gonja districts. While varying in intensity between the two districts, the findings underscore the systemic and sociocultural factors limiting women's active engagement in peacebuilding.

In Lambussie, cultural norms emerged as the most significant barrier, indicated by 64.1% of respondents. Gender stereotypes closely followed, affecting 57.5% of respondents, while 39.2% highlighted financial limitations. Limited access to decision-making platforms also features prominently, affecting 45.8% of respondents, along with a lack of support from the family or community (37.3%). Exposure to gendered disinformation was less frequently mentioned but still affected 26.1% of respondents. In West Gonja, the leading barrier is limited access to decision-making platforms, identified by 56.6% of the respondents. This was followed by a lack of support from family or community, affecting 50.3%, and cultural norms, which were a challenge for 52.4% of respondents. Gender stereotypes (51.7%) and financial limitations (40.6%) also posed substantial challenges. Notably, 37.8% of respondents reported exposure to gendered disinformation, indicating a higher prevalence in this district compared to Lambussie. The data reveal district-specific trends. For instance, cultural norms and gender stereotypes are slightly more pronounced in Lambussie, whereas West Gonja sees higher barriers related to decision-making access and community support. These disparities may reflect differences in the sociocultural contexts and governance structures between the two districts.

Figure 14: Challenges faced in participating in peacebuilding activities



Source: Fieldwork, Dec 2024-Jan 2025

Building on the quantitative findings, the qualitative data offer an in-depth understanding of the barriers limiting women's participation in peacebuilding. It is important to note that many of the barriers identified under women's participation in governance, such as cultural norms, gender stereotypes, and lack of support from family or community, are equally applicable to peacebuilding processes. These systemic challenges cut across both domains, perpetuating the exclusion of women from both formal and informal decision-making platforms. The types and nature of conflicts in the study areas, ranging from chieftaincy disputes to land-related conflicts, significantly influenced women's roles in peacebuilding. These conflicts are deeply embedded in sociocultural and institutional frameworks that often marginalise women, perpetuating the narrative that conflict resolution is a domain reserved for men.

Deeply ingrained cultural norms restrict women's roles in peacebuilding and confine them to traditional roles. A respondent noted: "Women have no role in resolving chieftaincy disputes because the chiefs and elders are all men, and they see it as their duty to settle these matters". The hierarchical nature of traditional authority leaves little room for women to meaningfully contribute, even in advisory capacities.

Land disputes, which frequently arise because of ownership claims, inheritance rights, and access to natural resources, also limit women's roles in peacebuilding. In many communities, women are excluded from discussions involving land ownership because of the traditional belief that the land is a male inheritance. A participant highlighted: "Women

are not landowners, so they are excluded from discussions about land disputes, even when they have valuable insights to offer". Another respondent during an FGD, remarked: "The men keep saying that women are not landowners, so they should not be involved in the peacebuilding process related to land". This view excludes women from the peacebuilding processes related to land ownership.

Ethnic tensions and conflicts between neighbouring communities are often rooted in historical grievances and resource competition. These conflicts are frequently mediated by traditional authorities or male-dominated peace councils, leaving women on their sidelines. Women's exclusion is compounded by the perception that such conflicts require physical presence and assertiveness, qualities often stereotypically associated with men. Similarly, political disputes, usually fuelled by partisan divisions or electoral disagreements, tend to be highly polarised and dominated by male actors. Women are rarely involved in political mediation or dialogue, as these spaces are perceived to require authority and influence.. A respondent commented, "political conflicts are very aggressive, and women are not seen as strong enough to handle them".

Limited education hinders women from effectively engaging in peacebuilding initiatives. One participant shared: "The Fulbe communities have lower levels of education, and their women feel that they are not suitable for participating in peace mediation processes".
Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that includes redefining societal perceptions of conflict-resolution roles as well as creating formal mechanisms to integrate women's contributions into peacebuilding processes.

5.3.3 Opportunities for Participation in peacebuilding processes

Despite barriers to women's participation in peacebuilding, several opportunities exist to enhance their involvement and amplify their contributions to sustainable peace efforts. Both formal and informal frameworks coupled with evolving societal attitudes and policy advancements present pathways for increased female engagement in peacebuilding activities. Initiatives such as gender-sensitive policies, capacity-building programs, and recognising women's unique roles in fostering social cohesion can create a conducive environment for women to participate actively in conflict resolution and community rebuilding efforts. Additionally, international frameworks such as the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, coupled with national policies such as the Ghana Gender Policy and the Affirmative Action Act, have emphasised the inclusion of women in peace processes. These efforts align with the growing acknowledgement of women's indispensable role in promoting dialogue, reconciliation, and long-term stability.

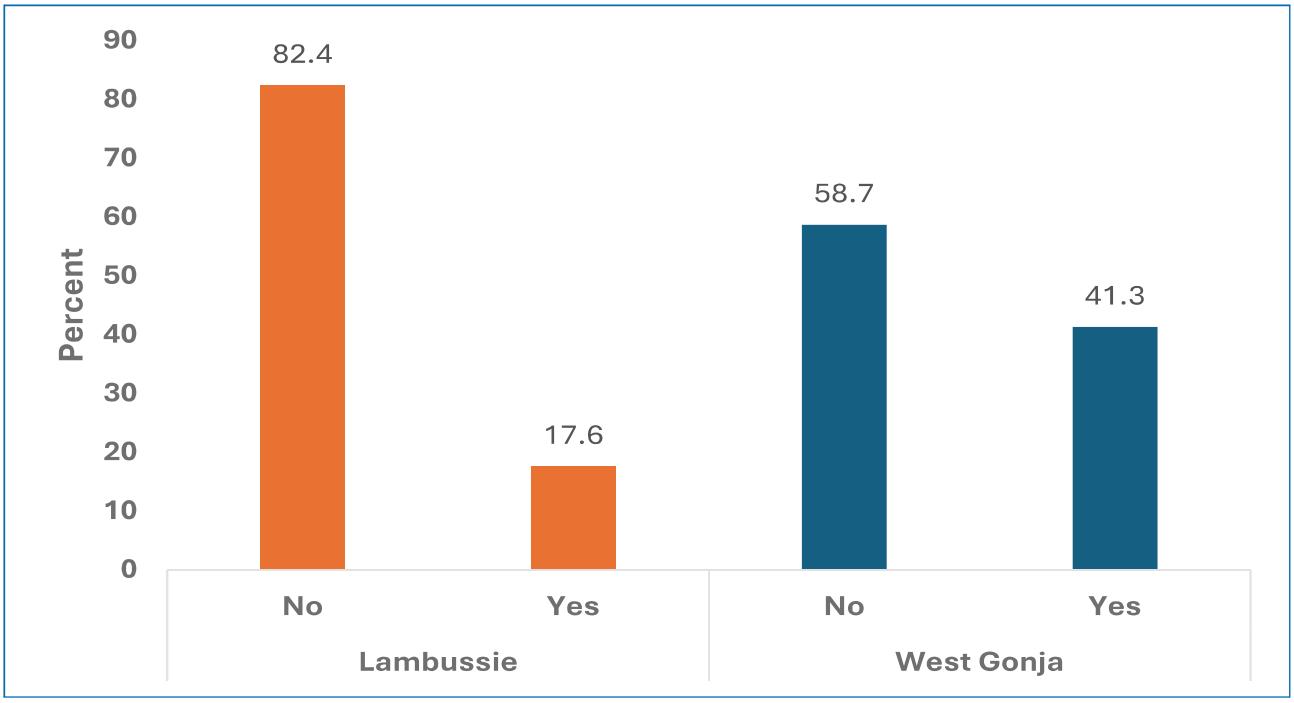
Opportunities for women's active participation in peacebuilding processes are abundant when the right support structures are implemented. Qualitative data revealed a range of actionable strategies to enhance women's roles in peacebuilding. Among these, training and education emerged as cornerstones, with respondents emphasising the need for leadership training, conflict management education, and workshops tailored to equip

women with the skills and confidence required for effective participation. For instance, one participant noted, "Training workshops for women on peacebuilding programs are essential to build their capacity and allow them to take leadership roles in resolving conflicts." The data also highlighted the importance of community engagement and sensitisation in addressing cultural and societal barriers. Regular sensitisation campaigns can promote awareness of women's roles in peacebuilding and challenge stereotypes that limit their involvement. As another respondent suggested, "Organizing community sensitization programs to encourage women to participate in peacebuilding activities is critical for breaking societal barriers."

Partnerships with traditional and opinion leaders were recurring themes. Such collaborations could amplify women's voices and legitimise their contributions in communities dominated by traditional norms. One participant suggested, "Engaging traditional leaders to advocate for women's involvement in peacebuilding activities can pave the way for greater acceptance and inclusion."

The quantitative data enriches the discussion on opportunities for women's participation in peacebuilding processes by shedding light on existing support networks and programs within communities that promote women's participation in governance and peacebuilding. In Lambussie, only 17.6% of the respondents were aware of such programs or networks, compared to 41.3% in West Gonja, underscoring a notable disparity in community awareness (see Figure 15). This finding suggests the need for targeted interventions to enhance the awareness and accessibility of these programs in Lambussie.

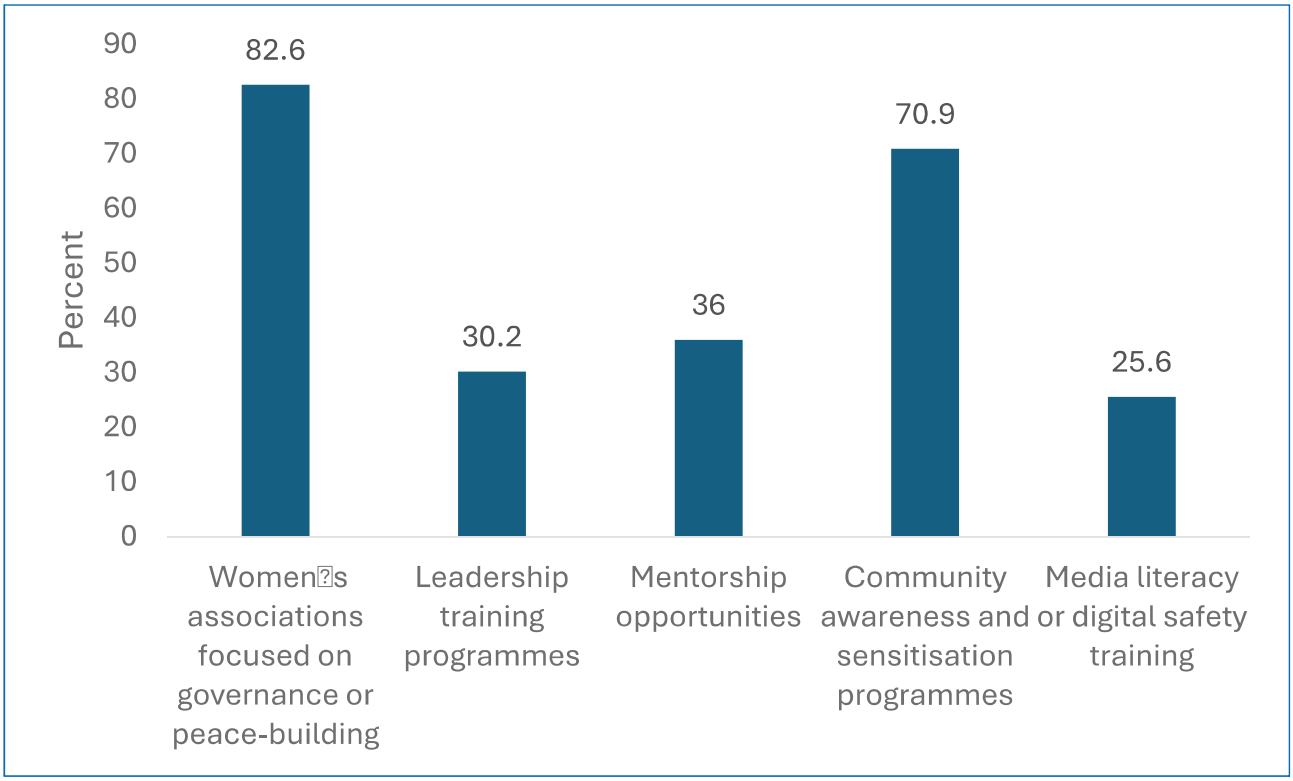
Figure 15: Respondents awareness of support programs/networks



Source: Fieldwork, Dec 2024-Jan 2025

As shown in Figure 16, among the identified support types, women's associations focusing on governance or peacebuilding were the most prominent, recognised by 82.6% of the respondents. These associations serve as key platforms for advocacy, capacity building, and networking for women. Community awareness and sensitisation programmes were also widely acknowledged (70.9%), indicating their critical role in fostering inclusive peacebuilding practices. Leadership training programs (30.2%) and mentorship opportunities (36%) further emphasised the significance of skill development and guidance in empowering women. However, the relatively lower acknowledgement of media literacy or digital safety training (25.6%) highlights an area that requires more attention given the increasing role of digital platforms in modern peacebuilding efforts. Organisations like WANEP the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) have been instrumental in building women's capacity for conflict resolution and providing platforms for women to engage in peace dialogues in the study areas. Churches and mosques have also been mentioned as engaging in community peacebuilding initiatives incorporating women, leveraging their influence in fostering peaceful coexistence.

Figure 16: Types of programmes or networks are available



Source: Fieldwork, Dec 2024-Jan 2025

In conclusion, opportunities for women to participate in peacebuilding are steady. These opportunities, ranging from capacity-building initiatives, leadership training, and mentorship programs to support provided by religious institutions and NGOs, reflect the growing recognition of women's potential as peacebuilders. To maximise these

opportunities, it is essential to scale up efforts, bridge gaps in accessibility, and strengthen collaboration among stakeholders, ensuring that women from all social strata are empowered to meaningfully contribute to peacebuilding efforts in their communities.

5.4 Gendered Disinformation

Gendered disinformation has emerged as a significant barrier to women's participation in the governance and peacebuilding processes. It involves deliberate dissemination of false or misleading information explicitly targeted at women, often with the intent of undermining their credibility, questioning their competence, or perpetuating harmful stereotypes. This phenomenon operates online through social media platforms (mainly Facebook and WhatsApp) and offline within community interactions and cultural narratives. In the context of the Lambussie and West Gonja districts, gendered disinformation manifests in various forms, from rumours and defamatory remarks to organised campaigns aimed at discrediting women in leadership roles or those aspiring to be leaders. The persistence of such disinformation not only discourages women from participating in public life, but also reinforces systemic gender inequalities and undermines efforts to create inclusive governance and sustainable peace. This section examines the prevalence, forms, and impacts of gendered disinformation, shedding light on its role in obstructing women's contributions to the decision-making and peacebuilding processes.

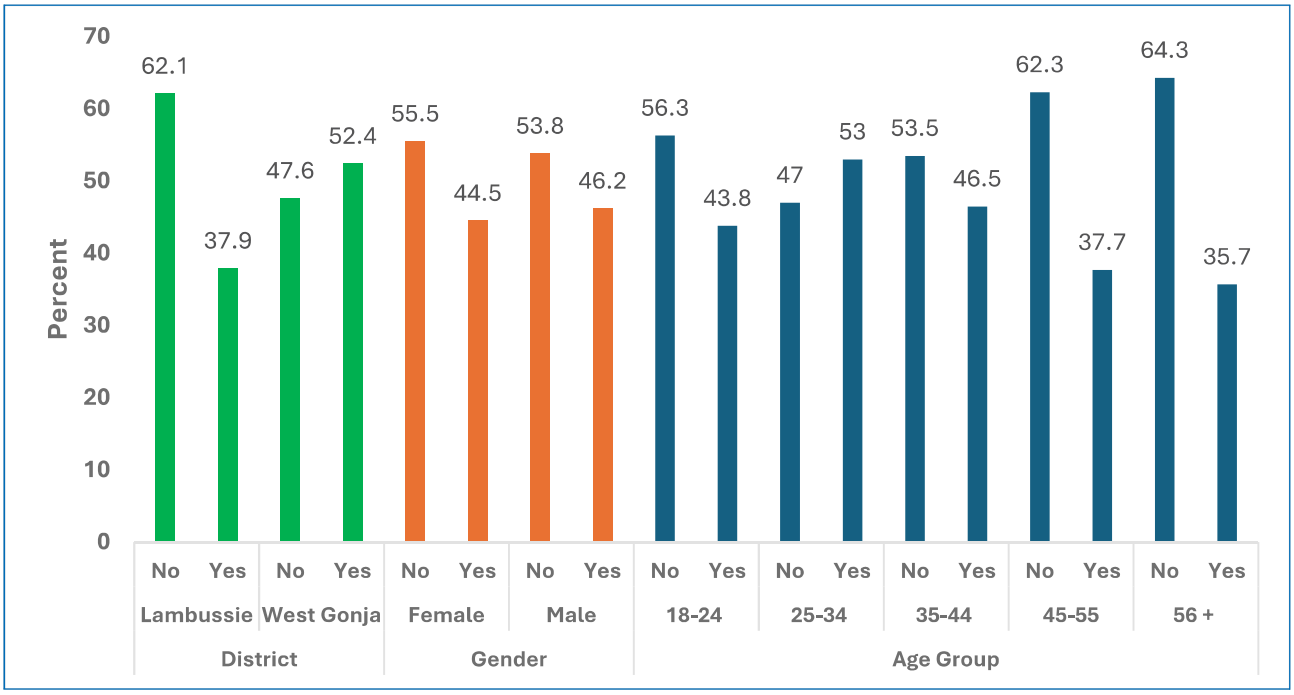
5.4.1 Nature and Prevalence

Gendered disinformation takes various forms, including false narratives, targeted smear campaigns, and the deliberate use of stereotypes, to undermine women's participation in governance and peacebuilding. These campaigns often exploit societal biases and are amplified by digital platforms, traditional media, and community networks. The nature of gendered disinformation can range from overt personal attacks on women leaders to subtler narratives that question their capabilities or integrity. In Lambussie and West Gonja districts, this phenomenon is increasingly prevalent, with many women reporting exposure to both online and offline disinformation campaigns. This section discusses the specific forms and rates of gendered disinformation in the study areas, examining the survey data and qualitative findings to uncover patterns and trends.

Figure 17 shows the prevalence of gendered disinformation in governance across demographics and districts. In Lambussie, the majority of respondents (62.1%) reported not having experienced such disinformation, while 37.9% indicated that they had. In contrast, West Gonja showed a higher prevalence of gendered disinformation, with 52.4% of respondents acknowledging its occurrence compared to 47.6% who did not. These figures suggest district-level variation in the prevalence of gendered disinformation, with West Gonja being more affected than Lambussie. From the gender perspective, the responses were relatively balanced. Among females, 44.5% reported experiencing disinformation, while 55.5% indicated that they had not. Male respondents reflected similar trends, with 46.2% reporting experiences of disinformation compared with 53.8% who did not. These

results demonstrate that both genders perceive the existence of gendered disinformation, although there is a slight edge in acknowledgement among males. When disaggregated by age, the data showed interesting variation. Younger age groups, particularly those aged 25-34, reported the highest prevalence, with 53% of respondents indicating experience of disinformation. This contrasts with older age groups, such as those aged 56 years and above, where only 35.7% reported similar experiences, whereas 64.3% did not. The data suggest that younger generations may be more aware of, or exposed to, gendered disinformation than older generations.

Figure 17 Experience of disinformation or rumours intended to discredit the involvement of women in governance



Source: Fieldwork, Dec 2024-Jan 2025

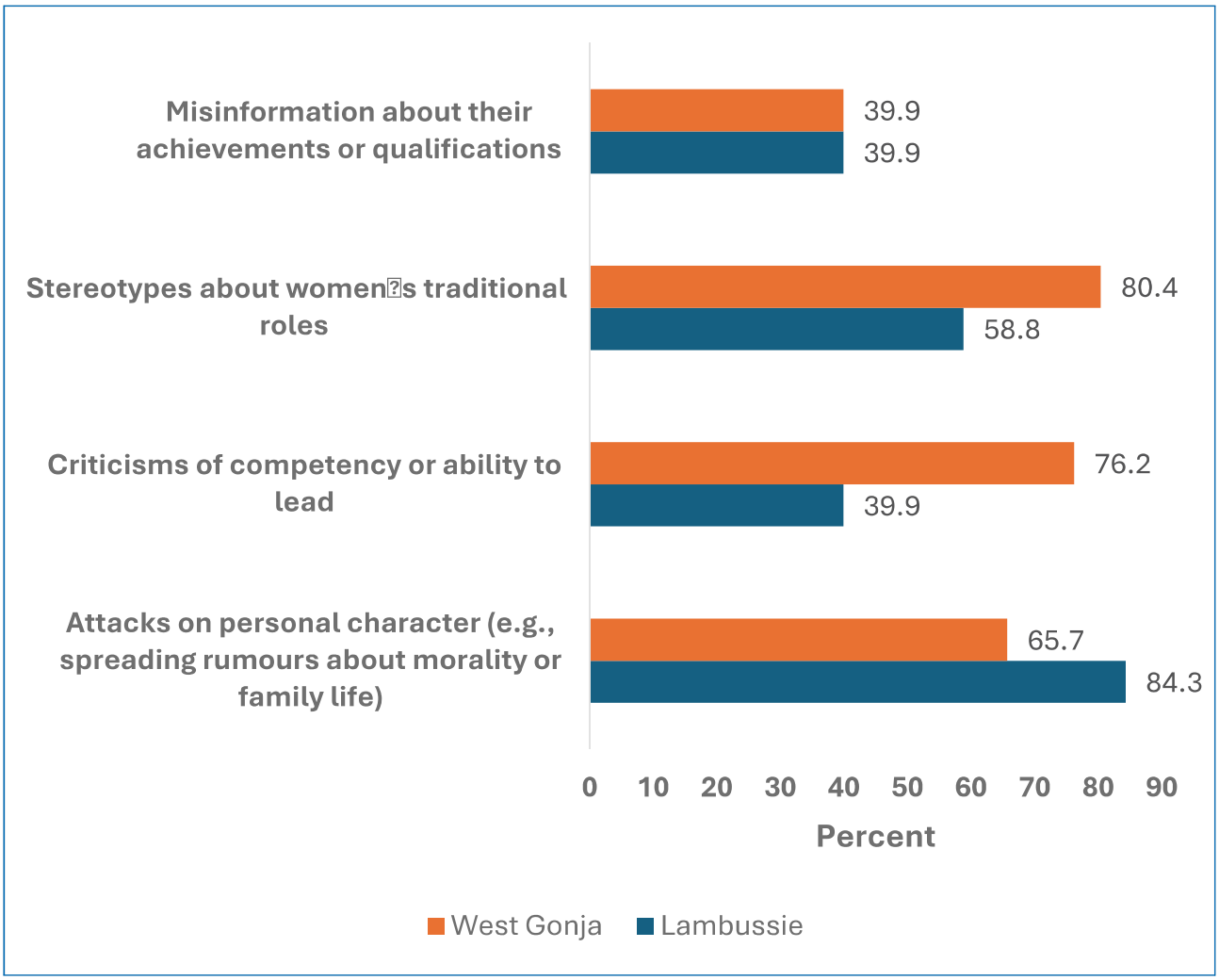
Concerning peacebuilding, most respondents (77.1%) in Lambussie indicated that they had not experienced such disinformation, whereas 22.9% reported having faced these challenges. In West Gonja, the prevalence of disinformation appears higher, with 39.9% of respondents indicating that they had attempted to discredit women's involvement in peacebuilding compared to 60.1% who had not.

This study explored the specific forms of gendered disinformation that took place among women in governance and peacebuilding. Figure 15 presents the types of gendered information that women experience. In Lambussie, attacks on personal characters were the most frequently reported form of disinformation, affecting 84.3% of respondents. These attacks often included rumours about morality or family life, designed to undermine the credibility and social standing of women's leaders. Comparatively, in West Gonja, such attacks were reported by 65.7% of respondents, indicating that, while prevalent, they were

less dominant than in Lambussie. Criticisms of competency or ability to lead emerged as a significant issue in West Gonja, reported by 76.2% of respondents, far exceeding the 39.9% reported by Lambussie. This finding highlights the heightened scrutiny and questioning of women's leadership abilities in West Gonja compared with Lambussie, where this form of disinformation appears less pervasive.

Stereotypes regarding women's traditional roles were also widely encountered, particularly in West Gonja, where 80.4% of respondents noted this issue. This was notably higher than the 58.8% reported in Lambussie, suggesting stronger adherence to traditional gender norms in West Gonja, which perpetuates barriers to women's participation in governance. Lastly, misinformation about women's achievements or qualifications was reported at equal rates in both districts, with 39.9% of respondents from Lambussie and West Gonja highlighting this issue. This parity suggests that the misrepresentation of women's accomplishments and credentials is a widespread challenge across both districts.

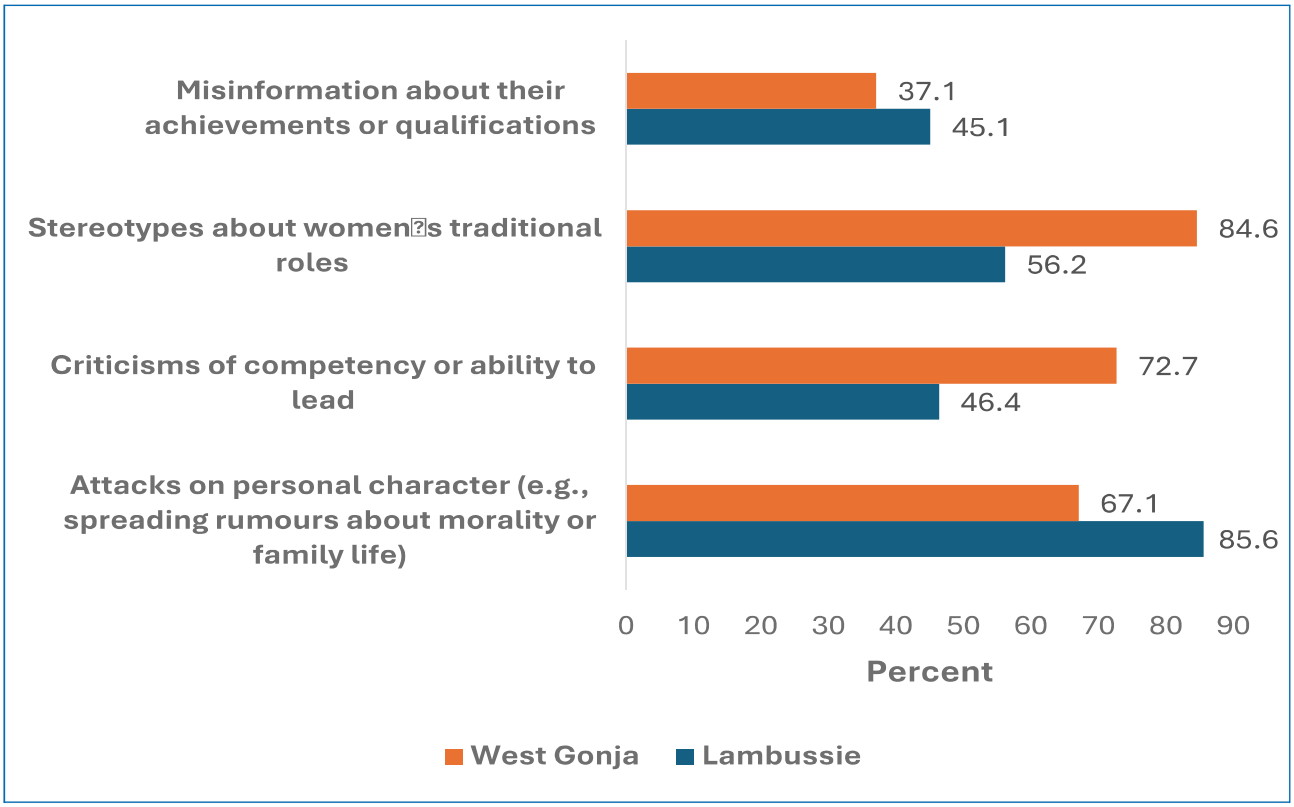
Figure 18: Types of disinformation that women in governance have encountered



Source: Fieldwork, Dec 2024-Jan 2025

Similarly, Figure 19 depicts various disinformation forms that undermine women's roles in peacebuilding. In Lambussie, the most common type of disinformation encountered was attacks on personal characters, reported by 85.6% of the respondents. These attacks typically involved spreading rumours about women's morality or family life, which served to delegitimise their contributions to peacebuilding efforts. Similarly, in West Gonja, personal attacks were also prevalent, although slightly less frequent, with 67.1% of respondents reporting such experiences. Criticisms of competency or ability to lead were particularly pronounced in West Gonja, where 72.7% of the respondents cited this as a form of disinformation targeting women in peacebuilding. This figure starkly contrasts with Lambussie, where 46.4% of the respondents reported facing such criticism. This indicates that in West Gonja, women engaged in peacebuilding activities are subjected to higher levels of scrutiny regarding their abilities than Lambussie. Stereotypes regarding women's traditional roles are another pervasive form of disinformation. These stereotypes were most prevalent in West Gonja, with 84.6% of respondents highlighting them as barriers, compared to 56.2% in Lambussie. This disparity suggests a stronger adherence to traditional gender norms in West Gonja, which reinforces the marginalisation of women from peacebuilding processes. Finally, misinformation about women's achievements or qualifications was more frequently reported in Lambussie (45.1%) than in West Gonja (37.1%). This indicates a higher prevalence of false narratives designed to diminish women's credibility in peacebuilding within Lambussie.

Figure 19: Types of disinformation women in peacebuilding have encountered



Source: Fieldwork, Dec 2024-Jan 2025

The qualitative data also showed that gendered disinformation is prevalent in the study areas regarding the participation of women in governance and peacebuilding. Table 6 captures the various tactics used in gendered disinformation and provides concrete examples of how they deter women's participation in the governance and peacebuilding processes.

Table 6. Forms and nature of gendered disinformation

Form of Disinformation	Description	Quotes from Respondents
Personal Attacks and Character Assassination	Women's morality, marital status, or personal lives are attacked to undermine their credibility.	*"When I contested as an Assembly member, they said I was married in a different electoral area, and some even tagged me as a prostitute".*
Stereotypes and Stigma	Stereotypes perpetuate the idea that women misuse power or become disrespectful in leadership positions.	"*Women in leadership positions don't respect men".* *"Women will control their husbands when they have power".*
Competence Questioned	Questioning women's abilities to lead or resolve conflicts, often based on unfounded assumptions.	*"Women are not capable of leading because they lack the courage".* *"How can women lead men? It is not even acceptable in our culture".* *"Women are weak to lead".* *"Women lack leadership personalities".*
Misinformation about Achievements	False claims designed to undermine women's successes or question their legitimacy in leadership roles.	*"They said I exchanged sex to get favoured with appointments".* *"People always say women misuse leadership roles and power".*
Systemic Undermining in Specific Contexts	Specific barriers constructed in education and community	*"At the school level, females are seen as not qualified to be prefects*
	leadership to suppress women's participation.	*or SRC leaders, so everything is done to prevent females".*
Cultural and Traditional Norms	Using cultural beliefs and norms to justify the exclusion of women from peacebuilding and leadership.	*"Women should not be involved in peacebuilding; it is a role reserved for men".* *"According to tradition, women are not supposed to take decisions in the family".*
Lack of Trust	Women are deemed untrustworthy in handling critical or confidential matters, further marginalizing their role in peacebuilding efforts.	*"Women cannot handle sensitive information".* *-"Sensitive information cannot be kept by women".*

Women in leadership or public roles are often targeted by personal attacks that question their morality and family lives. For instance, some narratives accuse women of being unsuitable for leadership because they are not married or labelled as prostitutes. These attacks aim to delegitimise their authority by exploiting cultural biases against women's independence and marital status. In addition, women's abilities to lead or resolve conflicts are frequently undermined by disinformation campaigns. Narratives such as "women are not competent to lead" or "women cannot handle sensitive information" attempt to discredit women's qualifications and contributions in professional and public spheres.

Misinformation is used to diminish women's successes or achievements. Examples include false claims about their qualifications or insinuations that their accomplishments result from favouritism or inappropriate relationships rather than merit. In educational settings and in community leadership roles, narratives are crafted to suppress women's participation. For example, women contesting for local governance positions are often accused of being ill-equipped or unworthy because of their educational background or other factors unrelated to their competencies.

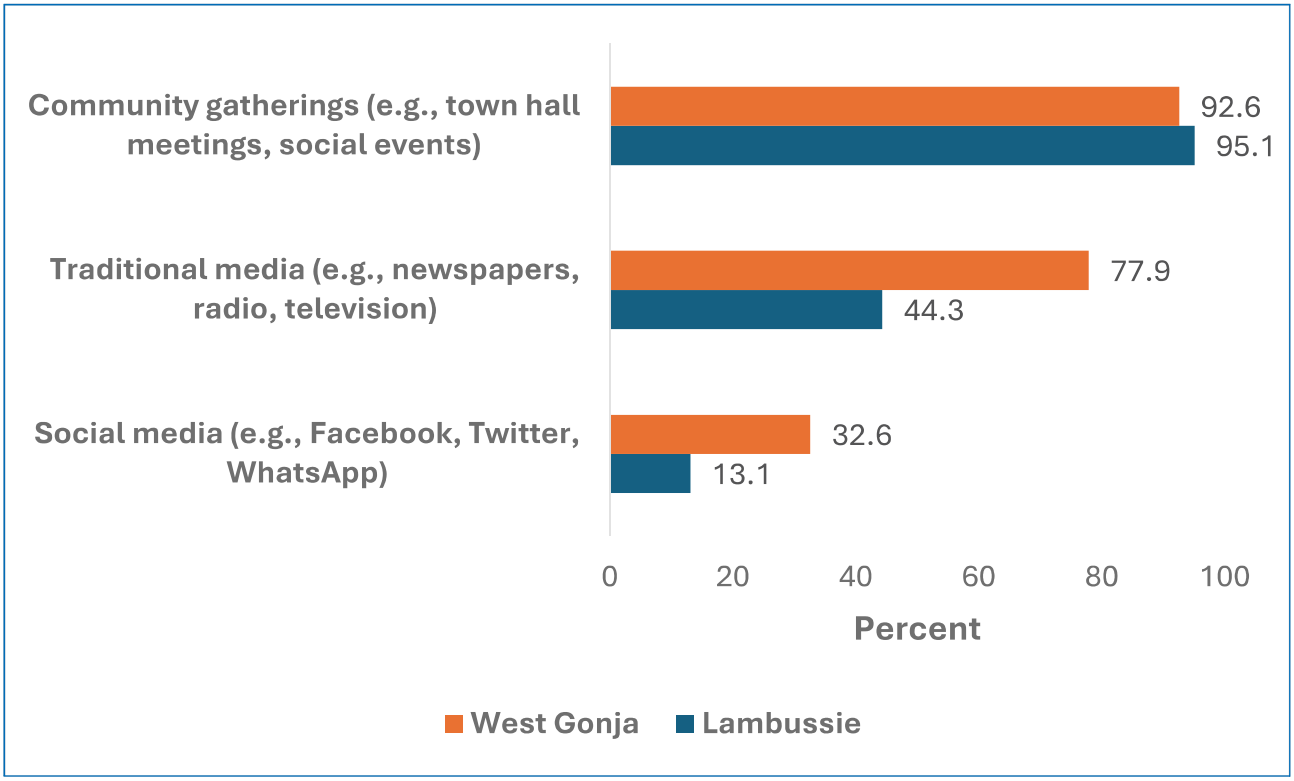
These forms of disinformation are not merely abstract issues but actively discourage women's participation and erode their confidence. The underlying nature of these tactics is to sustain existing power imbalances by creating an environment hostile to women's voices and leadership. This emphasises the need for targeted interventions to counter these narratives and to support women's roles in peacebuilding and governance.

These tactics not only discourage women from seeking leadership roles but also reinforce societal biases that frame women as inherently unsuited for governance or peacebuilding. Addressing these issues requires targeted strategies such as community sensitisation and more vigorous enforcement of policies against misinformation.

Figure 20 presents the key platforms in which gendered disinformation is encountered. Community gatherings, traditional media, and social media are the primary avenues for disseminating harmful narratives that target women in the governance and peacebuilding processes. In Lambussie, community gatherings were overwhelmingly cited as the most significant platform for encountering gendered disinformation, with 95.1% of respondents identifying these spaces. Traditional media, such as newspapers, radio, and television, were reported by 44.3% of the respondents, while social media accounted for a much smaller percentage (13.1%). These findings suggest that face-to-face interaction and traditional broadcasting dominate the spread of harmful narratives in Lambussie. In West Gonja, the trends differed slightly. While community gatherings remained prominent at 92.6%, traditional media played an even larger role, with 77.9% of the respondents identifying it as a significant source. At 32.6%, social media was more influential in West Gonja than in Lambussie, highlighting the district's increasing reliance on digital communication channels. Qualitative data underscores the pervasive nature of gendered disinformation across all platforms. Across both districts, community gatherings stood out as the dominant platform for disinformation. These spaces are informal yet powerful and

influence public perceptions and attitudes toward women. Social media platforms, though less dominant in Lambussie, are increasingly used in West Gonja to spread disinformation rapidly, mainly targeting younger women through memes, doctored images, and defamatory posts. Although still secondary to traditional platforms, social media is becoming a growing concern in West Gonja. This trend indicates a need for targeted digital literacy and online safety campaigns to combat disinformation.

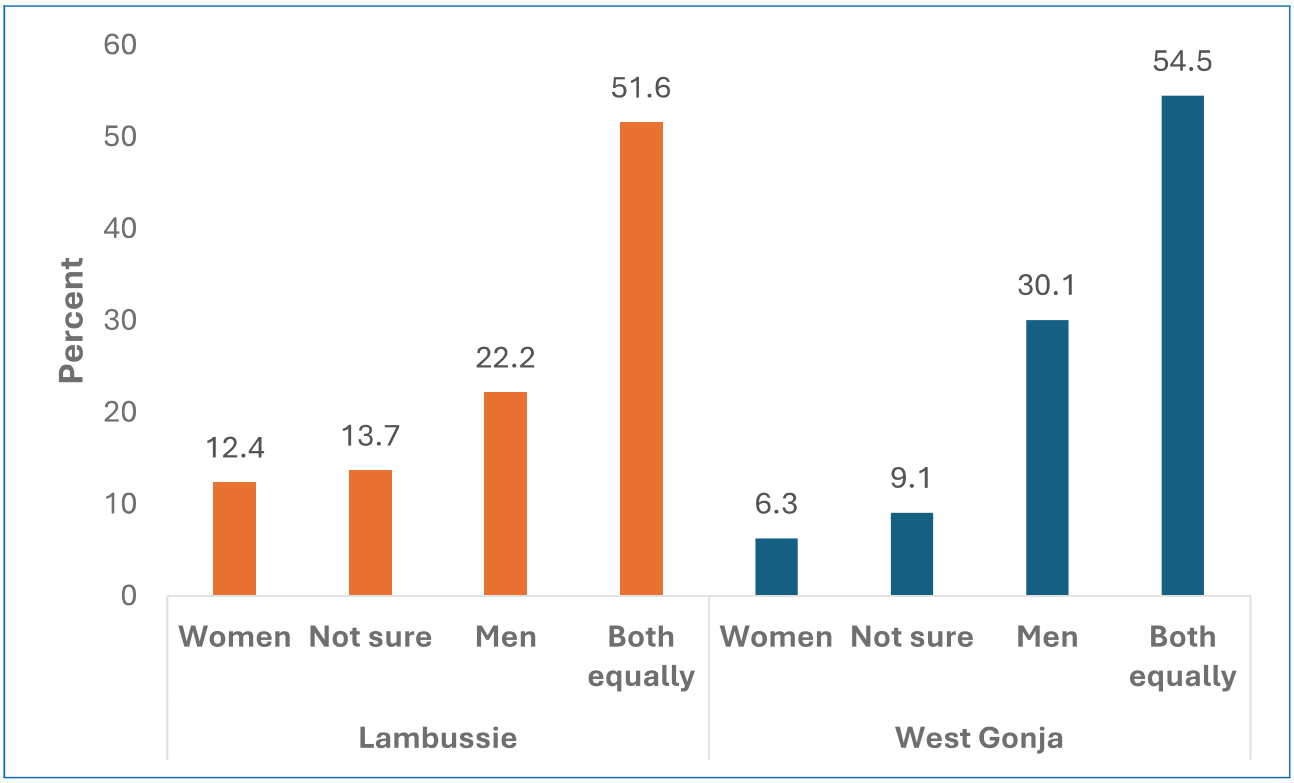
Figure 20: Platforms of disinformation



Source: Fieldwork, Dec 2024-Jan 2025

Respondents were asked to identify who they believed drove the gendered disinformation in their communities. As shown in Figure 21, in Lambussie, 51.6% of respondents thought that both men and women were equally responsible, followed by men (22.2%) and women (12.4%). Similarly, in West Gonja, 54.5% of respondents attributed disinformation to both genders equally, with men being the sole drivers (30.1%) and women (6.3 %). This distribution suggests a shared societal role in propagating gendered disinformation, although men are perceived as slightly more culpable than women.

Figure 21 Gender most likely to engage in disinformation



Source: Fieldwork, Dec 2024-Jan 2025

In conclusion, the nature and prevalence of gendered disinformation are deeply rooted in the cultural and societal dynamics. These dynamics exploit traditional and digital platforms to perpetuate harmful narratives against women in governance and peacebuilding. The data demonstrates that while community gatherings and traditional media remain the dominant avenues for spreading disinformation in both Lambussie and West Gonja, the growing role of social media, particularly in West Gonja, signifies a shifting landscape. This disinformation is not only pervasive, but also takes various forms of damage, such as personal attacks, criticisms of competency, and entrenched gender stereotypes. These narratives undermine women's credibility, reinforce harmful biases, and discourage their participation in leadership and peacebuilding. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive multi-platform strategy that includes community sensitisation, media advocacy, and digital literacy to combat the spread of disinformation and effectively support women's empowerment.

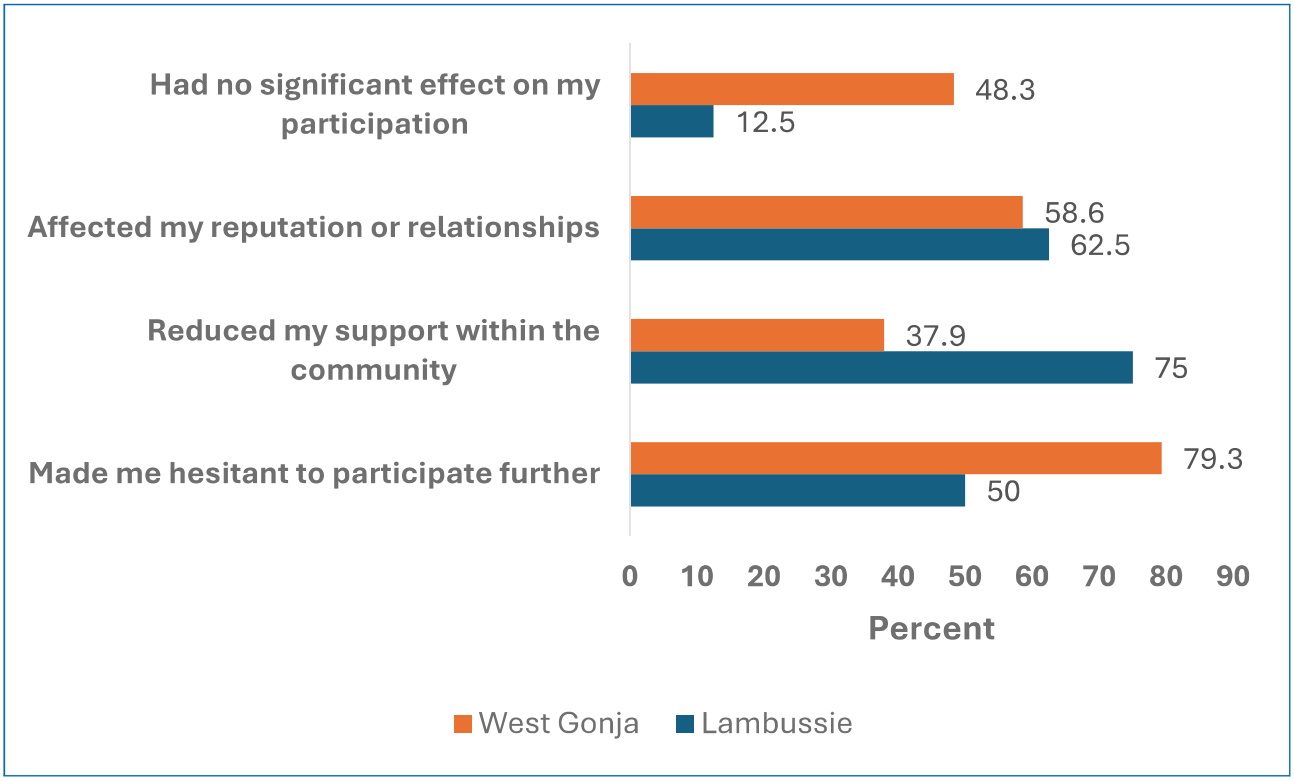
5.4.2 Impact

Gendered disinformation has far-reaching implications that extend beyond immediate targets and affect entire communities and governance structures. By perpetuating false narratives, harmful stereotypes, and personal attacks, this form of disinformation undermines women's credibility, confidence, and willingness to participate in the leadership and peacebuilding processes. The impact is particularly significant in

communities where entrenched sociocultural norms present barriers to women's active involvement. Gendered disinformation not only deters women from seeking leadership roles but also weakens public trust in their abilities, thereby reinforcing systemic gender inequality. Moreover, the ripple effects of these campaigns hinder efforts to build inclusive governance and sustainable peace, as the exclusion of women's voices limits the diversity of perspectives necessary for effective decision making and conflict resolution.

Quantitative data shed light on the substantial impact of gendered disinformation on both women's participation and community perceptions of women in governance and peacebuilding. As shown in Figure 22, a significant proportion (75%) of Lambussie respondents reported that disinformation reduced their support within the community. Additionally, 62.5% indicated that it affected their reputation or relationships, and half of the respondents (50%) said it made them hesitant to participate further. Only 12.5% of the participants stated that disinformation had no significant effect. In contrast, respondents in West Gonja experienced different disinformation. A large majority (79.3%) stated that it made them hesitant to participate further, while 58.6% reported an adverse impact on their reputations or relationships. However, fewer respondents (37.9%) noted a reduction in community support compared to Lambussie. Notably, 48.3% of the respondents in West Gonja claimed that disinformation had no significant effect, which is substantially higher than that of Lambussie.

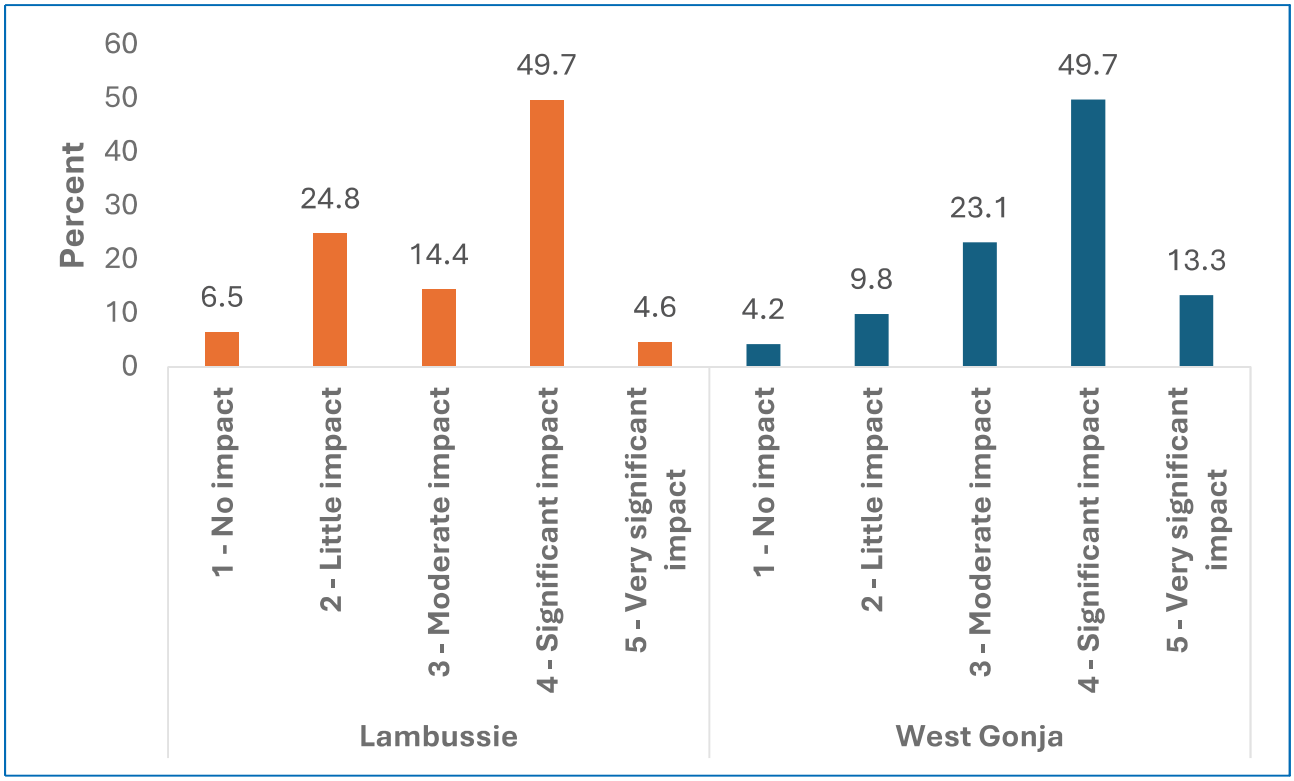
Figure 22: Effects of disinformation on participation



Source: Fieldwork, Dec 2024- Jan 2025

When asked to rate the impact of gendered disinformation on the community's perception of women in governance and peacebuilding, the responses highlighted considerable concern (Figure 23). In both districts, almost half of the respondents (49.7%) rated the impact as "Significant". However, West Gonja had a higher proportion (13.3%) rating the impact as "Very significant", compared to only 4.6% in Lambussie. Lambussie, on the other hand, saw more respondents (24.8%) perceiving "Little impact", compared to 9.8% in West Gonja.

Figure 23: Effects of gendered disinformation community's perception of women in governance and peacebuilding



Source: Fieldwork, Dec 2024-Jan 2025

The above quantitative analyses align with the qualitative narratives, which reveal the emotional and social tolls of such disinformation. The stark reality is that gendered disinformation does not merely affect individual women; it also entrenches societal biases that hinder broader progress in achieving gender equality in governance and peacebuilding. Box 2 summarises qualitative insights into the impact of gendered disinformation.

Box 2: Silencing Leadership: The Personal Cost of Gendered Disinformation

Gendered disinformation has a profound and far-reaching impact on women's participation in governance and peacebuilding. For instance, a woman who contested for the position of Assembly Member shared: "When I was contesting for Assembly Member in 2015, there were rumours that I was married to a man from a different electoral area, so I was not suitable for the role. Others tagged me as a prostitute. Such deeply personal attacks not only tarnish the reputation of capable women but also perpetuate a culture of fear and discouragement".

Another respondent highlighted the emotional toll of these negative narratives: "They said women in governance are disrespectful to their husbands and misuse power. These harmful stereotypes erode public trust and undermine the credibility of women in leadership roles, deterring them from participating actively in decision-making processes".

The ripple effects extend beyond individuals, as communities begin to internalize these biases. A participant observed: "Women are often labelled as weak and incapable of handling serious conflicts, which makes it difficult for them to be included in peacebuilding activities. Such narratives diminish women's contributions and stifle efforts toward inclusive governance".

Countering these harmful dynamics requires collective action to amplify the voices of women and foster supportive environments that value their contributions.

The data and narratives reveal that such disinformation not only affects individual women, but also perpetuates broader societal biases that hinder progress toward gender equity. Women are forced to navigate an environment in which their capabilities are doubted, their achievements are questioned, and their personal lives are unfairly scrutinised. Despite this, many women continue to demonstrate resilience, pushing against these barriers and making meaningful contributions.

Addressing the impact of gendered disinformation requires a multifaceted approach that combines community education, institutional reforms, and support mechanisms to foster a more inclusive and equitable environment that women can lead without fear of prejudice or discredit.

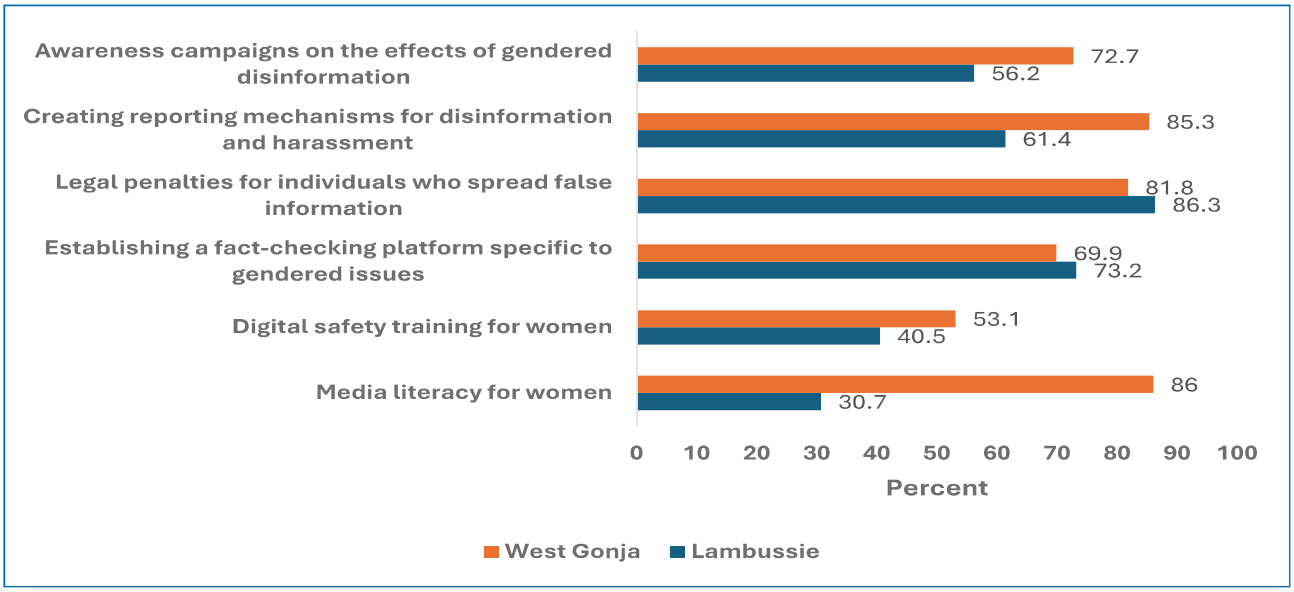
5.4.3 Addressing Gendered Disinformation

Addressing gendered disinformation is essential for fostering inclusive governance and peacebuilding. The widespread prevalence of this issue, along with its detrimental impact on women's participation and reputation, highlights the urgent need for targeted and strategic intervention. To explore potential solutions, respondents in the survey and qualitative interviews shared their perspectives on tackling the challenges of gendered disinformation.

The quantitative data revealed diverse perspectives on effective actions to address gendered disinformation within communities (see Figure 23). In Lambussie, community awareness programs were identified as the most impactful solution, with 87.6% of the respondents endorsing this approach. Similarly, West Gonja provided strong support for community-based efforts (87.4 %). This indicates a shared belief in the transformative power of localised interventions to educate and sensitise people to the damaging effects of gendered disinformation.

Legal measures also garnered significant support, with 73.2% in Lambussie and 74.1% in West Gonja agreeing that stronger laws against the spread of disinformation could be a deterrent. This reflects the growing recognition of the importance of institutional mechanisms in addressing disinformation. Additionally, the data highlighted the importance of support networks for women in leadership roles. In West Gonja, 88.1% of respondents emphasised the necessity for stronger support systems, while Lambussie recorded 66.7% agreement. These findings underline the critical role of community solidarity and organisational backing in empowering women leaders to counteract disinformation.

Figure 24: Program approaches to address gendered disinformation about women in governance



Source: Fieldwork, Dec 2024-Jan 2025

The role of media literacy and digital safety training was more pronounced in West Gonja, with 88.1% of respondents advocating for increased training compared to 43.8% in Lambussie. This disparity suggests that West Gonja may experience higher exposure to digital platforms where gendered disinformation often proliferates. Fact-checking and verification resources were the least prioritised solutions in Lambussie (12.4%), in contrast to West Gonja (49 %). This gap could reflect varying levels of trust in, or access to, information verification mechanisms.

Qualitative data complement quantitative findings by illustrating nuanced approaches to addressing gendered disinformation. Participants highlighted the importance of engaging traditional leaders and community influencers in championing women's participation and counteracting harmful narratives. For instance, one participant noted: "Community leaders have the power to shape opinions and must be at the forefront of dismantling stereotypes about women". Educational campaigns have also emerged as recurring themes. The respondents emphasised the need for sustained sensitisation efforts targeting both men and women. These campaigns should demystify disinformation and promote women's role in governance and peacebuilding. As one interviewee stated: "People need to see that women's involvement strengthens communities, not weakens them". Legal enforcement was another priority for the qualitative data. Many participants advocated punitive measures to hold individuals accountable for the spread of harmful narratives. As one respondent mentioned: "Without consequences, people will continue to tarnish the reputations of women with false information". Finally, building women's resilience through capacity-building programs was emphasised. Training women in digital literacy and equipping them with tools to counteract disinformation were seen as pivotal. One participant noted: "Women need to be equipped with skills to navigate the online space and challenge the lies told about them".

Effectively addressing gendered disinformation is pivotal to enhancing women's participation in governance and peace building. The multifaceted nature of disinformation requires an equally multifaceted response, one that integrates public awareness campaigns, digital literacy initiatives, and robust policy frameworks. Leveraging partnerships with civil society organisations, technology platforms, and local leaders can amplify the reach of interventions, while empowering women with tools to combat disinformation fosters resilience and agency.

6. SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

6.1 Comparative Analysis: Insights from Lambussie and West Gonja

The findings revealed notable variations in the forms and levels of women's participation in governance and peacebuilding across Lambussie and West Gonja. While both districts face significant barriers to women's participation, cultural norms appear to exert a stronger influence on Lambussie, where traditional practices are more deeply entrenched. For instance, the absence of queen mothers in some divisional chieftaincies in Lambussie underscores the limited incorporation of women into traditional leadership roles, unlike West Gonja, where grassroots efforts such as community peace committees have somewhat enhanced women's involvement. However, both districts share common challenges including economic limitations, gendered stereotypes, and restricted access to decision-making platforms, which hinder the full inclusion of women in governance structures.

In terms of peacebuilding, women in West Gonja are slightly more engaged in formal mechanisms such as community peace committees, whereas Lambussie sees greater reliance on informal networks and women-led grassroots initiatives such as Mangazias and women's associations. Despite these differences, both districts highlight the resilience and adaptability of women's groups, which have emerged as critical enablers of participation in the governance and peace processes.

> *Barriers to participation, although consistent across both districts, vary in intensity. In Lambussie, cultural norms were identified as the most significant barrier, with deeply rooted patriarchal systems limiting women's roles in traditional gendered domains.*

For example, women leaders in Lambussie noted that their contributions were often confined to women-specific issues with minimal involvement in broader governance matters. West Gonja, while also affected by cultural norms, faced additional challenges stemming from financial constraints, which were cited more frequently by respondents. Women aspiring to leadership positions in West Gonja noted the high costs of campaigning and limited access to resources as significant hurdles.

Gendered disinformation further compounds these barriers, with notable differences in the prevalence and impact across districts.

> *In West Gonja, gendered disinformation is more pervasive, with women leaders frequently targeted through social media campaigns that spread false narratives to undermine credibility. Conversely, in Lambussie, offline rumours and communal gossip were the primary forms of disinformation, reflecting the district's limited digital infrastructure.*

Both forms of disinformation erode women's confidence and deter them from pursuing their leadership roles. As one respondent from West Gonja remarked: "False accusations on social media damaged my reputation and discouraged others from supporting me". Lambussie echoed similar sentiments, with women leaders citing the spread of damaging rumours within communities as a significant obstacle to their participation.

Despite these challenges, both districts demonstrated opportunities to enhance women's roles in governance and peace building. Informal governance structures such as mangazias and community associations continue to serve as vital platforms for women's engagement. Moreover, grassroots-level efforts in West Gonja and the resilience of traditional women's networks in Lambussie highlight the potential of scaling up gender-inclusive initiatives to bridge the participation gap.

6.2 Broader Implications for Governance and Peace building

Lambussie and West Gonja's findings provide critical insights into the broader implications of women's participation in governance and peace building in Ghana. Despite the existence of progressive policies such as the **National Gender Policy (2015), Affirmative Action Act (2024), and Ghana National Action Plan 2 (GHANAP2) 2020–2025**, systemic challenges persist, undermining the effectiveness of these frameworks. At the national level, these policies align with international commitments such as **SDG 5** on gender equality and the **Women, Peace, and Security Agenda (UNSCR, 1325)**. However, implementation at the district level remains inconsistent, as evidenced by the barriers highlighted by Lambussie and West Gonja.

The **National Gender Policy (2015)** advocates mainstreaming gender equality in governance processes by addressing sociocultural norms and economic disparities. However, its practical impact is limited by entrenched cultural norms, which remain a significant barrier, particularly in Lambussie, where 68.6% of the respondents cited cultural norms as the primary challenge to women's participation. These norms continue to marginalise women, restricting their roles to informal governance structures or traditional gendered domains, such as those occupied by Mangazias or women's associations. Although the policy provides a strategic framework, the findings suggest that its implementation is hampered by inadequate resources and weak enforcement mechanisms at the district level.

The **Affirmative Action Act (2024)** represents a landmark effort to achieve a 30% representation of women in governance by 2030.

> *Despite its progressive intent, the findings highlight significant obstacles to achieving this target. In Lambussie and West Gonja, no women were elected as district assembly members and their inclusion in governance structures relied entirely on appointments.*

This reflects a broader national trend in which women's participation often depends on political appointments rather than electoral success. The findings further reveal that entrenched political networks coupled with limited financial resources continue to disadvantage women.

> *In West Gonja, 55.9% of the respondents identified financial constraints as a key barrier, highlighting the high costs of campaigning and the lack of institutional support for female candidates.*

These challenges undermine the transformative potential of the Affirmative Action Act, which requires robust enforcement and capacity-building interventions to translate legislative commitment into tangible outcomes.

Ghana National Action Plan 2 (GHANAP2), developed in alignment with UNSCR 1325, focuses on integrating women into peacebuilding processes and decision-making frameworks. However, the findings underscore the glaring gap in its implementation. Women in Lambussie and West Gonja remain largely excluded from formal peacebuilding mechanisms such as Regional Peace Councils and community peace committees.

> *Their contributions are often confined to informal networks, which while resilient, lack the institutional recognition necessary to influence formal decision-making.*

This exclusion undermines the effectiveness of GHANAP2 in fostering inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding initiatives, particularly in conflict-prone regions.

Another critical issue emerging from these findings is the prevalence of gendered disinformation, which significantly affects women's participation in governance and peacebuilding. In West Gonja, 41.3% of respondents reported exposure to disinformation targeting women leaders, which often propagated through social media platforms. Such disinformation campaigns erode women's credibility, reinforce harmful stereotypes, and discourage them from pursuing their leadership roles. In Lambussie, offline rumours and communal gossip were identified as the primary forms of disinformation reflecting the district's limited digital infrastructure.

The absence of legal frameworks to address gendered disinformation exacerbates its impact, leaving women vulnerable to targeted campaigns that damage their reputation and confidence.

One participant in West Gonja noted, *"False narratives spread in the community destroyed my chances of winning an election"*. The lack of explicit provisions in national policies to counter gendered disinformation represents a significant gap requiring urgent attention.

Nationally, the findings reflect a society in transition, where attitudes toward women's leadership are gradually shifting, but have yet to translate into actionable change.

For example, in Lambussie, 96.1% of the respondents expressed support for encouraging women to take up leadership positions. However, this ideological support contrasts sharply with practical barriers, such as financial constraints and sociocultural norms, which continue to limit women's participation. This contradiction highlights the need for targeted interventions to bridge the gap between policy aspirations and grassroots reality.

In summary, although Ghana has established a robust policy framework to promote gender equality in governance and peacebuilding, significant challenges remain. Cultural norms, financial barriers, exclusion from formal decision-making structures, and prevalence of gendered disinformation continue to undermine the effectiveness of these policies. Addressing these challenges requires a multipronged approach that includes strengthening district-level implementation, providing financial support for female candidates, enacting legal frameworks to combat disinformation, as well as intensifying community advocacy to challenge entrenched norms. By addressing these systemic barriers, Ghana can create an enabling environment that supports inclusive governance and sustainable peacebuilding, ensuring that national aspirations align with women's lived realities at the district level.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Enhancing Women's Participation in Governance and Politics

Findings from this study confirm that barriers such as limited education, financial constraints, cultural norms and systemic biases continue to hinder women's participation in governance. However, recent developments, including the election of Ghana's first female Vice President, the marginal increase in female Members of Parliament (Mps), and the passage of the Affirmative Action Bill into law, present significant opportunities to advance gender inclusivity in governance. The ongoing reconstitution of district assemblies and the appointment of new DCEs provide an avenue for deliberate action to increase women's representation at all levels. Addressing these challenges and leveraging emerging opportunities require comprehensive, targeted strategies, including education, financial empowerment, institutional reforms, political commitment , mentorship, and community advocacy.

1. **Education and Leadership Training for Women:** Expanding education and leadership training programs is essential to equipping women with the skills, confidence, and networks needed to engage effectively in governance. The respondents frequently highlighted the need for structured training workshops, mentorship programs, and peer learning platforms to support women in understanding governance processes and navigating political systems. With the Affirmative Action Act now in place, government institutions, civil society, and political parties must invest in sustained leadership training initiatives to prepare women for leadership positions in both elected and appointed roles.

2. **Leveraging Affirmative Action in Political Appointments:** With the passage of the Affirmative Action Bill into law, the reconstitution of district assemblies and the appointment of new DCEs must reflect a deliberate commitment to gender balance. The President should ensure that at least 30-40% of appointed assembly members and DCEs are women, in line with the spirit of the Affirmative Action Act. Political parties should also restructure their internal processes to support and nominate more women for leadership roles, ensuring their increased participation in local governance and national policymaking.

3. **Financial Support and Empowerment of Women Candidates:** Economic constraints were identified as major barriers to women's participation. Targeted financial support schemes such as grants for women in leadership training and low-interest loans for campaign expenses should be established. Additionally, entrepreneurial opportunities should be created to empower women economically, enabling them to actively participate in governance without financial dependency.

4. **Institutionalising Gender Quotas in Party Leadership and Electoral Processes:** Political parties should adopt and enforce gender quotas to ensure a minimum percentage of women in leadership positions at national and subnational levels. With a female Vice President now elected, political parties must build on this momentum by actively supporting more women in parliamentary and local-level elections. Quotas should be legally binding and backed by incentives such as additional party funding for parties that meet gender inclusion targets. This will help institutionalise gender balance within party structures and ensure women are adequately represented in decision-making bodies.

5. **Financial and Logistical Support for Women Candidates:** As the research highlights financial constraints as a major barrier to women's political participation, political parties should provide targeted financial support to female candidates to enable them to contest elections competitively. This support could be reduced filing fees, campaign funding, and access to party resources for mobilisation.

6. **Mentorship and Role Models:** Structured mentorship programs that connect experienced female leaders with aspiring female candidates should be implemented. Respondents emphasised the importance of mentorship in building confidence and navigating the political system. Highlighting the success stories of women leaders through media and public events can also serve as a powerful motivator for the younger generations.

7. **Community Sensitisation and Advocacy:** Advocacy campaigns should be launched to challenge cultural stereotypes and increase community acceptance of women in leadership. Traditional leaders, faith-based organisations, and local authorities must be engaged as allies in promoting gender equality. Respondents consistently called for awareness creation programs to educate communities on the importance of women's participation in governance.

7.2 Strengthening Women's Role in Peacebuilding

Women's roles in peacebuilding, though often informal, have proven to be effective in fostering community stability and resolving conflicts. Thus, enhancing these contributions requires formal recognition and support. The appointment of new DCEs and the restructuring of district peace councils present an opportunity to institutionalize women's participation in peace processes.

1. **Integration into Formal Structures:** Women-led peace initiatives such as the Mangazia model should be integrated into formal peacebuilding frameworks. Increasing women's representation in peace committees and councils at both the local and national levels is critical for ensuring that their voices are heard in decision-making processes.

2. **Training in Peacebuilding Skills:** Women in peacebuilding require specialised training in conflict resolution, mediation, and negotiation to engage effectively in formal peace processes. Training programs should be expanded to rural communities where women play critical but often unrecognised roles in preventing and resolving conflicts.

3. **Supportive Communities for Peacebuilding:** Joint training programs for men and women can help foster mutual understanding and collaboration in peacebuilding efforts. Recognising and celebrating the contributions of women in peacebuilding through awards or public acknowledgement can inspire more women to participate.

7.3 Addressing Gendered Disinformation

Gendered disinformation has emerged as a significant issue, undermining women's credibility and discouraging them from leadership roles. Addressing this issue requires a combination of legal, educational, and community-based interventions.

1. **Legal Frameworks and Enforcement:** Laws addressing gendered disinformation must be enacted and enforced to protect female leaders. The Electoral Commission and the National Cybersecurity Authority should collaborate with civil society to monitor and counter gendered disinformation. Legislation should be strengthened to penalise perpetrators, particularly during election cycles, ensuring that women are protected from online abuse and character assassination.

2. **Digital Literacy Programs:** Respondents highlighted the need for digital and media literacy training for women to help them counteract disinformation and build resilience against its impacts. Training programs should focus on safely and effectively navigating online platforms.

3. **Mentorship and Psychological Support:** Mentorship programs should include components that address the psychological effects of gendered disinformation. Women leaders who have overcome disinformation campaigns can serve as role models, share strategies, and offer emotional support to others.

4. **Community-Based Advocacy:** Local advocacy groups should work to dispel misinformation and educate communities on the harmful effects of disinformation on governance and gender equality. Partnering with civil society organisations and technology companies can amplify these efforts.

8. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the multifaceted challenges and opportunities associated with women's participation in governance and peacebuilding in Lambussie and West Gonja. The findings reveal persistent barriers, including entrenched cultural norms, economic constraints, and systemic exclusion from formal decision-making processes, all of which significantly limit women's ability to meaningfully contribute to governance and peace initiatives. Furthermore, gendered disinformation has emerged as a critical issue, undermining the credibility of women leaders and discouraging their active involvement in political and peacebuilding processes.

Despite these challenges, this research also underscores the resilience and potential of women to drive positive changes. Informal governance structures, such as Mangazias and women's associations, have proven to be effective entry points for women's leadership, while grassroots peacebuilding efforts led by women have demonstrated the transformative impact of inclusive practices. National policies such as the Affirmative Action Act and the Ghana National Action Plan 2 (GHANAP2) provide a robust framework for advancing gender equality; however, their success hinges on localised implementation, robust monitoring mechanisms, and the active engagement of traditional leaders and communities.

This study's recommendations, which include capacity-building programs, mentorship initiatives, financial support schemes, and targeted advocacy campaigns, aim to address these systemic barriers while fostering an enabling environment for women's participation. Tackling gendered disinformation through legislative reforms, digital literacy programs, and community advocacy is critical to ensuring that women's voices are heard and respected in governance and peacebuilding contexts.

In conclusion, achieving meaningful progress in women's participation in governance and peacebuilding requires a concerted multi-stakeholder approach. By aligning national policies with district-level realities and engaging with traditional and modern institutions, Ghana can create a more inclusive and equitable governance system. The findings of this study not only provide actionable insights for addressing the unique challenges faced by women in Lambussie and West Gonja but also offer broader lessons for advancing gender equality across Ghana and beyond. Stakeholders must seize this moment to translate commitments into action, ensuring that women are empowered as leaders, peacebuilders, and decision-makers in shaping the future of their communities and nation at large.

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