



# Can Gender-Targeted Employment Interventions Help Enhance Community Participation? Evidence from Urban Togo

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**Summary.** — The Participatory Development (PD) approach aims at improving the quality of governance by empowering local populations. Particularly for Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), PD is regarded an opportunity to help shift from unjustified centralization to more decentralized forms of governance. Yet, PD projects are frequently fraught with undesired effects of elite capture which critics ascribe to insufficient appreciation of local context. Our study adopts a sequential quantitative–qualitative mixed method approach to broaden the empirical foundation needed for context sensitive project design. By exploring the effects of gender and employment on community participation we contribute to narrowing two research gaps: First, political science research on female participation in SSA has mostly focused on participation in national-level processes. Second, while development economics literature has devoted much attention on effects of female employment on intra-household bargaining, it has so far omitted the question what this means for the empowerment of women beyond the household, that is in the public life of their communities. Analyzing original survey data of over 1,300 respondents, collected across four urban municipalities in Togo, we find that unemployment negatively impacts community participation. Specifically, we show that this effect is mainly driven by female unemployment and establish self-efficacy driven by norm perception as the causal link between female employment and participation. Complementing our quantitative findings with data from 98 qualitative interviews, we show that employment constitutes an important psychological resource that enables women to overcome multiple discrimination barriers to community participation. However, this effect is stronger for women in a formal employment situation than for those working in less formalized settings. We conclude that gender-targeted employment interventions can help to increase community participation. We recommend that such efforts should not fixate on the creation of female job opportunities but also seek to strengthen the role of female informal workers in local political processes.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION: PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES IN AFRICA

The Participatory Development (PD) approach aims at giving control over planning decisions and investment resources for local development projects to community groups. Over the past decade, PD has gained considerable importance as an instrument of channeling development assistance. The World Bank's lending for PD projects has risen from US\$ 2 billion in 2003 (Mansuri & Rao, 2004, p. 2) to US\$ 30 in 2013 (Wong, 2013, p. 1). In 2013, the World Bank supported approximately 400 PD projects in 94 countries. The largest numbers of these projects were located in Africa, followed by South Asia and Latin America (Wong, 2013, p. 1). This trend has largely been motivated by the recognition of decentralization and democratic local governance as key to sustainable development.

It has been argued that particularly for Africa decentralization will be the strategic imperative for the post-2015 development agenda (Crawford & Hartmann, 2008; Nganje, 2013) with both the 2011 Busan-High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in 2011 and the 2012 Rio+ 20 Conference on Sustainable Development emphasizing the centrality of the local space to any future development agenda for the African continent.

In this context, PD is as an opportunity for Africa to strengthen local institutions through more inclusive decision-making processes that seek to engage and empower local populations (see e.g., the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development of 1990 and the International Monetary Fund's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper of

2014). However, critics have noted that empirical evidence of a sustained positive impact of PD initiatives considerably lags behind the rate at which such projects are implemented (Mansuri & Rao, 2004; Oakley & Clegg, 1998). In fact, PD projects frequently fail to effectively target marginalized groups and are frequently fraught with undesired effects of elite capture (Agarwal, 2001; Cornwall, 2003; Eversole, 2010; Mansuri & Rao, 2013; Rao & Ibanez, 2003; Wong, 2013). In essence, researchers agree that the effectiveness of PD projects frequently suffers from insufficient appreciation of local context in project design (Cornwall, 2003; Mansuri & Rao, 2013).

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Against this background, there is still surprisingly little research on the determinants of community-level political participation in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Although the body of literature on the barriers to community participation in the region is growing, many of the qualitative studies in this field concentrate on the institutional set up of specific PD projects rather than on individual-level factors (see for example Kilewo & Frumence, 2015 or Yamada, 2014). Thus, to date most of what we know about the individual-level determinants of political participation on the African continent is informed by cross-national comparative research based on Afrobarometer data (see for example Coffe & Bolzendahl, 2011; Isaksson, Kotsadam, & Nerman, 2014; Kuenzi & Lambright, 2005; Resnick & Casale, 2011).

Furthermore, and despite the fact that the political marginalization of women and their discrimination in the labor market are commonly recognized as a major development obstacle in Africa (see e.g., African Development Bank, 2015; Saba Arbache, Kolev, & Filipiak, 2010) we still know little about the extent to which African women's employment status and situation affect their ability to impact the public life of their communities.

On the one hand, much of the political science literature that studies the relation between female labor force participation and female political participation, both in Africa and worldwide, focuses on participation in formal political institutions at the national level such as turnout in national elections, partisanship, and gender representation in legislative assemblies (e.g., Iversen & Rosenbluth, 2008; Rai, 2011; Resnick & Casale, 2011). On the other hand, the strand of development economics literature that studies the relation between labor force participation and female autonomy has focused on women's bargaining and decision-making power in the household (see Anderson & Eswaran, 2009; Antman, 2014; Atkin, 2009; Dharmalingam & Philip Morgan, 1996; Heath, 2014; Majlesi, 2016). Hence, a research gap exists concerning the community-level impact of female employment which may partly be due to the lack of a clear theory linking employment to community participation outcomes.

In their cross-national analysis covering over 27,000 respondents across 20 African emerging democracies, Isaksson *et al.* (2014) found employment to have a marginally positive impact on voting and a sizeable positive effect on inter-electoral participation, measured as the frequency with which respondents "get together with others to raise an issue" (Isaksson *et al.*, 2014, p. 305). The authors' interpretation of this difference is that inter-electoral participation is a more active form of political participation than voting, since it takes place in groups rather than individually and hence requires access to social networks which can be provided through employment (Isaksson *et al.*, 2014, p. 311). Nevertheless, their cross-national analysis also found that individual employment does little to explain the gender gap in political participation (Isaksson *et al.*, 2014, p. 308). To shed light on this puzzle, we provide an in-depth analysis of the impact of female employment on women's participation in community meetings. We consider female participation in these meetings as particularly relevant since this is the place where bargaining and prioritization of local development needs takes place.

In this paper we propose internal political self-efficacy driven by norm perception as a possible link between unemployment and community development participation. The basic premise of psychological self-efficacy theory is people's beliefs in their ability to produce a desired outcome by their own actions (Bandura, 1977; Maddux, 1995). The concept of political efficacy derives from this premise but has been differenti-

ated as having two dimensions. Internal efficacy describes the extent to which a person believes to understand politics and perceives itself as being able to influence politics, whereas external efficacy refers to the extent to which a person trusts in the responsiveness of government to citizen demands and interests (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Gamson, 1968).

We hypothesize that being employed has psycho-social implications in terms of enhanced internal political self-efficacy which, in turn, encourages women to engage in the public life of their communities.

Internal efficacy has long been an established predictor of electoral participation (Beaumont, 2010; Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954; Niemi, Craig & Mattei, 1991), and it is only reasonable to assume that its impact on community participation is at least equally strong or even stronger than on the anonymous act of voting. In African culture and African traditional life just as in other places in the developing world, gender is strongly defined according to roles and functions in society (see Ngubane, 2010). Patriarchal systems in Southern Africa have made a major contribution toward the discrimination of women (Njenga & Ng'ambi E., 2015). According to Mwaba (2010), African women are generally regarded as subordinate to their male counterparts and have less voice and autonomy. In addition, as discrimination can take many forms, many women face multiple discrimination because, for example, of their age, ethnic background or income status.

Discrimination can negatively impact women's political self-efficacy in different ways. First, women who have internalized existing gender stereotypes may think that (by virtue of their sex category) they do not have the necessary abilities to successfully engage in politics (compare Evans, 2016a, p. 391). Second, the behavior of individuals is guided by their perceptions of social norms (Evans, 2016b; Tankard & Paluck, 2016). Hence, if women believe that the majority of their community's members regards women as politically incompetent and consider the participation of females in politics as inappropriate, their intrinsic motivation to engage in politics themselves may be diminished. On the one hand, they may fear that transgressing these norms by trying to influence political decisions in their community could lead to their social rejection. On the other hand, they may ex ante have little faith in the success of their participation. "It would be pointless for someone like me to attend community meetings and speak my opinion about politics," they might conclude, "if nobody will listen to me, why even try?" In this context, employment could be an important psychological resource that could help women to act against the discrimination they experience from fellow citizens in their everyday life and to make their voices heard in decision-making processes that affect their communities. Evans (2016a), for example, who investigates the causes of the rising proportion of female members of parliament in Zambia, finds that growing flexibility in gender divisions of labor has led to a gradual erosion of gender stereotypes and fostered women's political leadership. By performing work previously presumed to be outside their abilities, women are increasingly perceived of, and perceive of themselves, as equally capable of leadership. We thus hypothesize that female employment positively impacts female community development participation.

Our hypothesis translates into two research questions:

(RQ1) *Can gender-targeted employment interventions help to increase overall community participation?*

(RQ2) *Which factors mediate the relationship between employment and community participation?*

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