Parliamentary Caucuses in Ghana's Fourth Republic: Challenges and Recommendations

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

ABSTRACT

A unique feature of the Ghanaian Parliament as compared with other democratic institutions of State is the establishment and development of recognized caucuses. The objective of these caucuses is to promote the development of the ideals of society and democratic principles within the Legislature, besides seeking the welfare of identified groups of parliamentarians. The membership dynamics of the caucuses are contingent on the name of the caucus, which varies in terms of constituency, from occupation to religion and gender. This paper using coalition theory as a framework of analysis seeks to assess the impact of parliamentary caucuses in the Fourth Republic, highlight the differences, and assess the challenges confronting their lobbying skills and the extent to which these challenges affect their propensities to achieve changes in the Ghanaian body politic, as well as the extent to which tangible outcomes are documented in the annals of parliamentary proceedings using Mixed-Method methodology. Caucuses are useful in the parliamentary development matrix, although there are challenges, such as members of multiple caucuses and inappropriate structures that hinder optimal performance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ghana, a developing West African country, is a constitutional democracy whereby the three defined organs of government, namely, the Executive, the Legislature, and the Judiciary, function closely together to promote the tenets of good governance. These organs are expected to work to promote accountability among each other, promote political and socioeconomic development, and protect the rights of the citizens of the country. The historical trajectory of the country shows that the Judiciary and the Executive have endured and survived malevolent military regimes that the country has experienced over the years. Parliament was regularly disbanded and dissolved with the inception of military regimes, but it was revamped with the introduction of democratic constitutional governance, as the case of 1969 and 1979. The current Parliament, established on January 7, 1993, is the fourth in the history of the country.

A unique feature of the Ghanaian Parliament as compared with other democratic institutions of the Fourth Republic is the establishment and development of officially recognized caucuses. The objectives of these caucuses are to promote the development of the ideals of society and democratic principles within the Legislature and to seek the welfare of identified groups of parliamentarians. Despite their political and social importance, parliamentary caucuses receive little scholarly attention in Africa and globally.

Ghana has several parliamentary caucuses, structured along regional, party, religious, gender, and occupational lines. Whilst their roles within the Ghanaian Parliament are of diverse nature, their roles as coalitions of mutual interests and means of lobby for policy leverage are crosscutting. A critically examination of the contribution of these caucuses to parliamentary democratic development in Ghana is the central question to be answered by this paper. The study is based on the hypothesis that caucus are analogous to any other group in any of the democratic institutions.

The antecedent of the caucus philosophy commenced in the 1951-1954 Legislature, when the Northern Territorial Council representatives within the Legislature spearheaded the formation of the Northern People's Party to advocate the interests of the Northern peoples of Ghana. With the inception of Ghana's Fourth Republic, however, the caucus system was made a permanent part of Parliament, taking effect on January 1, 1993. In Ghana, as elsewhere, caucuses provide a united front for their respective interests and develop best practices to address issues affecting the particular interest groups. For example, the regional caucuses advocate on behalf of citizens affected by regional challenges, such as education, healthcare, sanitation, and development.

The impact of these caucuses, that is, their ability to effectively lobby for policy change, is marred by diverse challenges, and the degree of their success is often determined by their membership as well as their mandate. For instance, the regional and party caucuses, by membership numbers alone, hold greater weight in policy decisions than the Gender Caucus does. Such issues raise questions as to how Ghana's caucuses are mitigating these challenges and whether or not they are successful in meeting their objectives.

Understanding the role that caucuses play in influencing policy and their ability to advocate for their interest groups is essential to understanding the level of democracy within the Ghanaian Parliament. A study on such topic would provide evidence-based recommendations for Parliament and caucus members to increase effectiveness and efficiency with respect to advocacy, decision making and negotiation within Ghanaian caucuses. This is exigently necessary to maintain transparency and accountability and to evolve existing practices to ones that accurately reflect Ghanaian societal realities.

Consequently, this paper seeks to discuss the impact caucuses have within the Ghanaian Parliament, highlighting not only the differences between the caucuses themselves, but also those factors that contribute to and inhibit the impact of such caucuses. While the importance of these caucuses will be made clear, the paper will also stress the avenues for their further development with improvement in the successes so far achieved. The paper adds to the neglected topic of caucus literature and sheds new panorama on their functions and challenges in Ghana.

2. CAUCUSES

2.1 Definition, Structure and Functions

McLean and McMillan [1] define a caucus as an "exclusive meeting of the members of a party or faction for organizational and/or strategic

purposes". According to these authors, a "caucus can be of formal or informal nature, with official membership and regular meetings or with an informal, *ad hoc* or temporary basis of those parliamentarians 'who share common interests and come together in attempting to influence the agenda".

Although the structure of parliamentary caucuses varies globally, Fleschenberg [2] has outlined three main types:

"a. a specific group of members within one political party, for example women;
b. Cross-party alliances of either ruling or opposition parties or of different parties; or
c. Parliamentarians for shared strategic purposes and political interests".

While caucuses vary in form and structure, their functions and objectives as elucidated by McLean and McMillan [1] are essentially the same: To influence policy and decision making to meet the defined agenda of their stakeholders. Gonzalez and Sample [3] delineated the functions of caucuses as follows:

- Help define the issues on the political agenda and set priorities, carry out detailed analysis of draft legislation, and propose new policies and legislation, raise public awareness and keep citizens informed.
- Facilitate the participation of civil society organizations in the development of the public and political agenda.
- Act as a safeguard to ensure that affected groups and individuals are aware of any legislation being debated that affects them; in particular, they are a visible and accessible contact point for women on issues that affect them.
- Monitor compliance with legislative and executive branch actions on gender issues.

Indeed, by its very existence, a caucus seeks to support the deepening of democratic culture, principles, and processes through the transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness of various state actors. Ainsworth and Aiken, as cited by Victor and Ringe [4], suggest that "the caucus system exists to counterbalance the dominant committee system". Hammond [5] quite blatantly makes a similar argument by stating that "[a] ll caucuses exist to affect policy. …Regardless of their principal purpose, caucuses serve as forums for the exchange of

information on pending issues, legislation and legislative procedure among members and with outside groups, executive branch officials and on occasion, with the president". Hammond [5] expands this by outlining a number of key activities and objectives of caucuses:

Caucus activities are designed to accomplish members' goals and caucus purposes, through information and coordination activities, members seek to overcome perceived deficiencies in the formal system legislative leadership.

A review of U.S. congressional caucuses by Hammond [6,7] culminated in the conclusion that caucuses are powerful enough "to influence the legislative agenda in positive ways…[and participate] in an environment ripe for caucuses to play active and influential role"[4]. The effectiveness of this process, however, has yet to be determined. In Ghanaian parliament the party caucuses determine the business of the floor of the House.

Victor and Ringe [4] further portrayed caucuses as having a more communicative and participatory nature; they emphasized the information exchange and mutual learning opportunities inherent in caucuses. They suggest that caucuses have four overlapping roles:

- To serve as useful signalling devices whereby members can indicate their policy preferences or priorities to their colleagues or constituents;
- To serve as venues for information exchange and institutions through which members can meet, interact, and relate with colleagues;
- To serve as institutions that can help facilitate and coordinate legislative action on a particular issue, and where members can share information with one another;
- To serve as a general support structure that is indicative of preference coherence and policy priorities.

Regardless of the exact function of caucuses, Batstone [8] suggests that what is most important in discussions of caucuses is their very existence. He opines that the existence of caucuses and the adequate space provided for their function is essential to holistic governance [8]. He argues that "[t]o nurture an open and tolerant culture is an essential starting point for building a balanced workforce [within parliament]. To move a step further, underrepresented groups

need meaningful channels for voicing their concerns and mechanisms for bringing about change" [8]. Thus, parliamentary caucuses are seen as the avenue through which this change is attained and accountability is solidified.

It is perhaps Hammond [5] who summarizes the importance of caucuses most succinctly:

Caucuses have become an important link in the policy chain for everyone – government official, private citizen or group – who is engaged in the business of [politics]. Caucuses have, on occasions, initiated and resolved major policy actions.

2.2 Caucus Membership

The membership and structure of caucuses vary in the same manner as the membership and structure of parliaments worldwide. Victor and Ringe [4] suggest that members join caucuses as a means to improve communication and information sharing. Specifically, they suggest that "members join caucuses in order to make and maintain important relationships and to gather information on important subjects".

Salisbury [9] and Heider [10] suggest, however, that members join caucuses in an effort "to receive solidarity benefits". Indeed, Heider [10] contends that "membership is an expression of belonging…[and] is a natural occurrence within one's social milieu". It is this social interaction and connection that draws members to caucus membership. This is the case, however, in places where membership is voluntary rather than automatic.

Hammond [5] suggests that members join caucuses for the personal and career benefits that membership offers due to the relationships and information sharing that exist within such groups. He argues that because of the ease of establishing caucuses – they "do not require formal system approval" – and because they "are vehicles for information, education, and the development of new policy options, they can coordinate across party lines and bring adversarial groups together … for these reasons, caucuses have become increasingly important to members' personal careers and to policy making".

Therefore, Hammond [5] suggests that it is junior members who benefit most from caucus membership, as caucuses provide the space for expertise development and gaining of knowledge

on issues and legislative processes. Ultimately, Hammond [5] argues that members join and form caucuses in an effort to gain access and influence in areas from where they were previously restricted. He argues, "Members have used congressional caucuses to do what they could not otherwise accomplish: Organizing, reviewing, and balancing information and expressing and advocating policy concerns" [5].

Thus, contemporarily, caucuses and membership within them are seen as an important support to the parliamentary system.

2.3 Caucuses and the Theory – Coalition Theory in Practice

The formation of caucuses is based on the collective interest of a group of members who work together to ensure that their common goals are achieved. Hammond's [6,7] studies of caucuses and caucus formation emphasize the characteristics of the individual as motivating his decision to join a caucus. Victor and Ringe [4] emphasize the social element and relationships between legislators as the motivating factors for joining caucuses.

William A. Gamson's [11] proponent of coalition theory outlined "four parameters which predict the formation and evolution of a coalition, that is who will join with whom in any specific instance" [12]. These four parameters are defined as the "initial distribution of resources, the payoffs or rewards, non-utilitarian preferences and the effective decision point or rules of the game" [11]. Thus, according to O'Neill et al., [12] coalition theory suggests that coalitions, groups, or caucuses involve the combination of the resources individuals bring with them, "including a sense of purpose, information, prestige, contacts, authority derived from their size, wealth, and so on", the rewards they hope to attain from being members of a group rather than working alone, and the ties or connections they establish, both positive and negative, that contribute to their progress. An individual may join a specific group as a mechanism of benefiting from the dividend of the system of the coalition.

Jenkings-Smith and Sabatier's [13] study of advocacy and coalition theory suggests that for coalitions – or caucuses – to be successful in advocating their group's interests, they must understand "the process of policy change, …focus on policy subsystems, that is the

interaction of actors from different institutions who follow, and seek to influence, governmental decisions in a policy area, …[recognize the] intergovernmental dimension,…[and the conceptualization of policies] in the same manner as belief systems".

Thus, caucuses, as understood through coalition theory, are more than group formations based on similar interests or goals. Their effectiveness and strength are grounded in their ability to liaise between civil society and government actors. Achieving this requires not only the combination of their resources and talents, but also a well-versed understanding of the policy environment they wish to change.

3. The Ghanaian Scenario

3.1 Methodology

The present study was conducted using mainly a phenomenology type of qualitative research methodology. A study on parliamentary caucuses in Ghana required exploration because these are groups that cannot be measured by identifiable variables as required by quantitative methodology[1]. The study interviewed 40 Members of Parliament from the four caucuses studied. The basis of selection was determined by membership duration in the caucuses; It included members with several years' experience, members with few years' experience and new MPs. MPs with several years defined as MPs who have served more than two terms, MPs with few years are those who have a served more than a term and newly elected MPs serving their first term.

Structured and semi-structured interviews were the principal sources of primary data collected from members of Ghanaian parliamentary caucuses. The use of interviews emphasized the key perceptions and viewpoints of the respective caucus members. The interviews were useful in identifying caucus members' understanding of the following:

a) The process of caucus formation,
b) The relevance of caucuses in Parliament, and
c) Key challenges limiting caucus effectiveness and efficiency.

Interviewees were asked a series of questions regarding the following:

▪ The structure of their respective caucuses,

▪ The perceived impact of their caucuses on Parliament and policymaking, and
▪ Key challenges to effective caucus membership and caucus efficiency.

Beyond the collection of data through the interview, information was organized into appropriate thematic areas to make meaning of the data after the assignment of respective codes in accordance with the steps prescribed by Creswell [14] in strategies of data analysis.

Extensive desk reviews of documents were carried out to understand the terrain of caucusing and its contribution to policy formulation and change. According to Creswell [15], documents are considered a valuable source of information in qualitative research. A review of documents and literature pertaining to caucus formation and functions is, therefore, an essential undertaking to gain a thorough understanding of the caucus process and ability and the members' rationale for membership.

3.2 The Ghanaian Parliament

The Sixth Parliament of the Fourth Republic has a membership of 275. It is the biggest in the political history of the country. The First Parliament of 1957 had 198 members, the Second Parliament of 1969 had 140 seats, and the Third Parliament of 1979 had 104 memberships. All members of Parliament are elected for a four-year term in a universal adult suffrage on the basis of a first-past-the-post voting system. The Constitution of the Fourth Republic stipulates a hybrid system of government whereby majority of Cabinet ministers must be members of Parliament (MP). The membership of current Sixth Parliament is as follows:

Party	Number of seat(s)
Convention Peoples Party	1
People's National Convention	1
Independent Members	3
New Patriotic Party	123
National Democratic Congress	147
Total	**275**

Source: Office of the Speaker of Parliament 2014

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[1] *See John W. Creswell for detail and further discourse on requirements of qualitative methodology in Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design.*

3.3 The Ghanaian Parliamentary Caucuses

The composition and size of caucuses differ from parliament to parliament depending on the size of the parliament as well as the multiplicity of diversity of its membership. Caucuses are formed based on singular or multiple identifiable distinguishing elements that are common and shared by MPs.

Four dominant caucuses were identified within the Ghanaian Parliament: Regional, Party, Religious, and Gender. Membership in Ghanaian parliamentary caucuses is predetermined: An individual is elected as an MP. There are a few other caucuses, however, such as professional caucuses, that have least significance to the work of the Legislature because of their perceived importance and relevance. Caucuses are formed for a number of reasons: Networking, mitigating information deficiencies, forging new relationships and partnerships, and presenting a united front to advocate for policy change.

3.4 Regional Caucuses

Ghana has ten regional caucuses representing the ten administrative regions in the country. The history of the Regional Caucus in the Fourth Republic emerged out of an ad-hoc group, the Northern Regional Caucus, as a response to an inter-ethnic conflict in 1993, the "Konkomba-Nanumba" civil conflict. Subsequently, regional caucuses have become a permanent feature in Parliament since the Second Parliament in 1997. Membership affiliation is based on the regional location of the constituency of MPs who consequently become automatic members of the regional caucus irrespective of their party affiliation.

The central role of a regional caucus is to lobby the executive for the development of the people of the region. Regional caucus programs have focused on information dissemination to and from the central government, besides ethnic dispute settlements (especially in the northern regions) and advocating as well as lobbying on behalf of their respective regions for amenities such as better road networks, electricity-grid extension, improved water supply and provision of educational scholarships for needy students. The caucus achieves these through various avenues, such as creating and liaising with various local and international development partners, establishing affiliations with student groups or civil society groups in their region, or using government to speak out regarding issues in their regions (for example regional violence) and ultimately seeking to exercise oversight responsibilities on the various constituencies that make up their region. The ten regional caucuses differ in composition with respect to size and priorities, although they share a common similarity with respect to geographic elements.

3.5 Party Caucuses

Ghana's party caucuses comprise the Majority Caucus, representing the party in power, and the Minority Caucus, representing the opposition party. The mandatory membership applicable to the regional caucuses also applies in the formation of party caucuses. The MPs become automatic members of a party caucus upon election by the constituents to represent them through the nomination and sponsorship by the party. This was documented by Hammond [5] as follows: "Most party caucuses are formed to articulate and advance the policy views of an intraparty group. Members of party caucus generally share both values and ideology".

The success of a party caucus is contingent on party discipline either in the majority or the minority party. Party discipline is a challenge for parliamentary leadership worldwide. Although MPs contest on the party ticket and have a responsibility to contribute to the implementation of the party agenda, MPs prioritize constituents over party. In spite of the role of discipline to maintain party unity and the progress of the caucus, Kam [16] argues that discipline is costly and has a limit. The leadership ought to adopt socialization mechanisms, and MPs should internalize party norms over time, which will help to constrain their behaviour and limit their propensity to dissent upon the prospect of a career decline[2].

The Majority Caucus is responsible for a number of programs and strategies pivoted on protecting the interests of the ruling political party, ensuring discipline and promoting unity within Parliament, building the capacity of caucus members and representing and protecting government policies in the media. The Majority Caucus places greater

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[2]*Party discipline is a very important to the development of caucus in Ghanaian politics. Although there are rare occasions of 'political party rebels', the development of parliament has a huge accompanying challenges with discipline.*

emphasis on ensuring that they win parliamentary debates to enable the execution of government policies and agenda. The legal framework of the Legislature, the Standing Orders of Parliament, officially regulates the party caucuses. The Standing Orders stipulate that the party with the highest numerical number of seats shall constitute the majority party. The party, consequently, emerges as the Majority Caucus. The respective leadership of the Majority Caucus, Minority Caucus and the Speaker constitute the leadership of the House.

The Minority Party Caucus serves as agency and provides the requisite platform for interest articulation and aggregation in Parliament. It serves as the reflection of the larger interest of the minority party by providing the watchdog role of the opposition to the government. It further builds the capacities of its own members: the Minority ensures that listed government programmes remain a priority for debate and decision. This perspective affirms Osei's [17] view that political parties in Ghana are strong in their capacity to mobilize voters and shape public discourse on national issues, although they are weak in social integration.

According to Kam and Indridason [18], party caucuses provide the opportunity to directly challenge leadership, whether the Prime Minister, the President, or the Majority Caucus, and can, in some cases, act as internal rivals or watchdog. In January 2014, for example, the Minority Caucus initiated a motion that compelled the Speaker to recall Parliament from recess to deliberate on the sale of Merchant Bank to Fortiz Private Equity Fund Ltd.

The rules governing party caucuses are generally informal and based on mutual "trust and as hared identity among co-partisans. This political understanding and perceived common fate may, in time, lead members to coordinate without coercion with the party position" [19]. These informal rules have proven effective, and members are obliged to toe party lines. Thus, a "clear breach in ethics, gross party disloyalty such as supporting another party's presidential candidate), or perhaps defection on an initial organizational vote might be the only basis for caucus enforcement" [19].

3.6 Religious Caucuses

Christians, Muslims, and traditional worshippers coexist and work harmoniously towards national development and integration. Christian, Muslim, and traditional religious prayers are offered at every state function, at the district, regional, and national levels. Political party conferences, congresses, and meetings commence with a prayer irrespective of the agenda and political party. Religious leaders play a very crucial role in mediating conflicts between and amongst political parties. Prayers are offered every morning prior to the commencement of sittings of the Ghanaian Parliament. Religion plays a very important role in politics in Ghana. Leaders of dominant and leading churches are associated with either the New Patriotic Party or the National Democratic Congress.

There are two religious caucuses in the Ghanaian Parliament – the Christian Caucus (Fellowship) and the Muslim Caucus. While the formal acceptance of religious caucuses in Parliament raises questions about the separation of church and state, their existence in Ghana is neither questioned nor considered out of place. Ghana is one of the most religious countries in West Africa [20,21]. Affiliates of Christianity, Islam, and traditional religions coexist harmoniously with tolerance and acceptance. It is rare to find a Ghanaian who does not relate his/her life and social realities to a form of religion [21].

Membership in the religious caucuses is based on the religious affiliation of MPs. Christian or Muslim MPs are invited to join the respective religious caucuses as members. Religious caucuses are not affiliated with one specific constituency or region, although the majority of members in the Muslim Caucus tend to hail from the three northern regions of the country, which are largely populated by Muslims. Unlike the gender, party and regional caucuses with mandatory memberships, MPs have a choice in determining as well as switching caucuses depending on their current religious faith.

While religion is the uniting force bringing together members, both religious caucuses work towards charitable programmes. The Christian Fellowship advocates weekly prayer and Bible study, besides collecting donations for orphanages in various regions. The Christian Caucus also organizes Carols Nights to herald Christmas festivities. The Muslim Caucus advocates and serves as a lobby group for Muslims. The practice of "zakat" (alms-giving) has created the Sadaqah Trust Fund, which enables Muslims working in the public and

private sectors of the Ghanaian economy to observe the Fourth Pillar of Islam in fulfilment of their faith through the provision of educational grants to needy students. Religious caucuses are open to non-parliamentarians: Former MPs and members of the Parliamentary Service, as well as members of the general public.

3.7 The Gender Caucus

The Gender Caucus was established with the objective of demonstrating women's presence in the Legislature in the context of descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation of the Ghanaian woman. Franceshet et al. [22] summarizes women representation in terms of the kind of women elected to the Legislature, their ability and the capacity to represent women policy interest as well as public perception towards women in politics[3].

Ghana's Gender Caucus welcomes MPs from every party and region as members. Although the caucus is composed solely of women, there are no inhibitions with regard to male membership. The Gender Caucus operates as the feminist wing of Parliament. According to Shifman et al. [23], the future of the women's movement is contingent on MPs in Parliament building open communication channels with women in civil society. Hammond [5] argues, however, that members of gender caucuses "are perceived, and perceive themselves, as representing groups nationwide, outside and within their congressional districts or states". He further contends that "[t]hey represent the interests of women and strive to ensure that gender is taken into consideration in policy".

Fleschenberg [2], deliberating on global gender caucus issues, maintained:

> The formation of a women's caucus depends on various factors: The partisan environment in the legislature, level of resistance/threat from male colleagues, former legislative legacies of cooperation, and alliance building.

Since the inception and recognition of parliamentary caucuses in the Fourth Republic, the Gender Caucus has continuously remained the smallest caucus. Its membership in the Sixth Parliament of 34 of 275 is the highest in the history of the caucus. In spite of its diminutive size, Ghana's Gender Caucus bridges the gap between men and women in terms of education, employment and political appointment. The

Caucus advocates for girl-child education and promotes initiatives against domestic violence and gender-biased cultural practices, such as widowhood rites and female genital mutilation, besides promoting affirmative action at all levels of government and society.

The Gender Caucus has been successful in establishing vocational schools for training women, in offering short-term loans to women, and in encouraging the Government of Ghana to sign on to the United Nation's Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2003. In essence, the Gender Caucus acts as the gender watchdog to Parliament by providing sound research on gender concerns, and by monitoring and evaluating government action – or inaction – with respect to gender issues. It also carries out analysis of the gender implications of the bills passed by Parliament.

The accomplishments of the Gender Caucus demonstrates the integration of women in public life in Africa. According to Bauer [24], women parliamentarians have made great strides in public life in the 1990s and beyond in spite of dominant parties, weak opposition, and powerful executives, especially in symbolic representation, although minimal successes in substantive and descriptive representation are discernable[4].

4. DISCUSSION

The Ghanaian parliamentary caucuses have been associated with a number of benefits. Firstly, with the exception of the party caucuses, caucuses provide space for MPs to work across party lines. Such capability ensures that the ruling party's agenda does not rule the activities of government but instead that government activities are guided by the needs of beneficiaries. The non-partisan nature of most caucuses deepens the democratic practice.

Secondly, caucuses provide the opportunity for increased information sharing between and amongst MPs. Specifically, "party caucuses increasingly affect political and policy information flows to members. This growing party

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[3]*The perception of the public about women in politics is very critical in determining the future of qualified women who offer themselves in public life. Although women in public life have earned good reputations in Ghana.*
[4]*See Gretchen Bauer (2012) for an analysis of women success stories in the 1990s.*

coordination has resulted in a greater bonding and shared strategic information among rank-and-file co-partisans" [19]. Such information sharing increases transparency and accountability, creating the environment for MPs to acquire the essential skills and tools regarding their service delivery, especially in the context of their constituents. Essentially, through increased information sharing, MPs can gather self-improvement tools to enhance work performance [8]. There is a risk, however, of substantial competition arising between MPs for limited information as well as for the sharing of regional dividends resulting from lobbying by the caucus.

Additionally, caucuses can offer an enhanced sense of belonging and community consciousness. Personal and professional support networks, especially for those members who are under-represented, provide the requisite opportunity to share challenges and best practices. Nonetheless, inherent within the caucus system are a number of challenges that inhibit their effectiveness and ability to effectively effect policy change.

The fundamental challenges of the Ghanaian parliamentary caucus are issues of funding. With the exception of the party caucus, all other caucuses are considered to be private, informal groups that must raise their own resources to fund their programmes. Financial constraints prohibiting their effectiveness lead to a number of debilitating outcomes. All caucuses contend with issues requiring urgent attention but lack the resources to adequately address them. Caucuses do not have fund-raising mechanisms to sustain them financially. The Ashanti Regional Caucus, however, has developed a system of money collection through the periodic contribution of GH¢100.00 by each member; this has yet to be adopted by the other nine regional caucuses, as well as by the religious and gender caucuses. The caucuses ought to design and implement their own ingenious financial solicitation mechanisms amongst themselves.

A second over-arching challenge centres around automatic membership in caucuses. Besides their responsibilities as MPs, members must also assume additional roles and responsibilities as caucus members. Automatic membership in a caucus further creates a scenario in which low turnout and member buy-in become rampant, largely due to the already heavy workloads of MPs.

Multiple membership constitutes an equally challenging operational bottleneck for some MPs. For instance, one Honourable Hajia Mary Salifu Boforo, a female MP for Savelugu Constituency from 2008 to 2016, belongs to all the four caucuses – Gender, Regional, Party, and Religious. These multiple memberships do not only put a strain on the MPs but also create conflicting loyalties with regard to investing the time and effort in a specific interest group. Moreover, membership in multiple caucuses can reduce the membership strength of caucuses: The Gender Caucus could be accorded low-priority attention because the demands of larger caucuses often hold more weight in policy decisions as well as the personal commitment of MPs on development issues. This leads to an over-burdened workload and extensive and competing demands.

A further challenge relates to the lack of formal structures – communication and physical space – allocated to caucuses. At present meetings are held at the discretion of the individual caucuses. A lack of well-defined communication strategies as well designated meeting spaces acceptable to all greatly underscore the low member turnout at meetings and delay decision making in the process, besides reducing representation. Low attendance at meetings further creates animosity between members, as such as an attitude is misinterpreted by the regular members as a lack of commitment.

Finally, an over-arching challenge affecting all caucuses, with the exception of party caucuses, concerns the multi-party nature of the three remaining caucuses. Whilst multi-party caucuses have the potential to promote the interests of the larger group (for example gender equality) rather than the party agenda, the latter often transcends party lines and influences decision making in multi-party groups. These conflicting interests often impede the decision-making process, creating an environment of competition rather than collaboration, with the MPs losing sight of the broader issue at stake.

A challenge identified by the researcher relates to project impact. Specifically, none of the MPs interviewed outlined specifically the impact of their projects. With the exception of the Gender Caucus, which clearly stated the specific policies and international protocols that the Government of Ghana has committed itself to as a result of their efforts, no caucus specifically outlined the key outcomes of their projects. Programmes and

initiatives were rather spoken of broadly with sweeping categories such as "lobbying for the interests of constituents" and "implementing charitable programmes". This confirms the assertion that caucus members may lack adequate knowledge in the operational intricacies of the caucuses, thereby affecting their overall impact.

Besides these over-arching challenges, each caucus itself also faces its own internal challenges or contradictions. These, which were outlined specifically by the interviewed MPs who are caucus members themselves, inhibit the effectiveness of each as well.

Ghana's regional caucuses are further entangled with challenges of partisan decision-making and partisan caucus membership. Two regional caucuses with a large membership from a specific party have been labelled as party caucuses due to the non-partisan characteristics of their members. Specifically, the Volta Regional Caucus and the Ashanti Regional Caucus have been labelled as the 'National Democratic Congress (NDC) Caucus' and the 'New Patriotic Party (NPP) Caucus', respectively, because the majority of their members belong to these political parties.

In the Volta Region, for example, while all twenty-two MPs in the Fifth Parliament of the Fourth Republicin the region were members of the regional caucus, twenty-one of these MPs were members of the NDC whilst only one MP was a member of the NPP. Consequently, with such an inherent make-up, decision making is swayed in favour of the NDC agenda, making the job of the sole NPP member quite challenging. In the same manner, in the Sixth Parliament of the Fourth Republic, in Ashanti Region forty-seven members constitute the Ashanti Caucus, three of them being NDC members. Discussions of issues are consequently skewed towards the partisan interests of the NPP.

For both the Majority and Minority Party Caucuses cited, maintaining party discipline and loyalty are central challenges. The Majority Party Caucus cited specifically the lack of authoritative leadership, with a caucus consisting of peers rather than subordinates being the over-riding factor adversely affecting the enforcement of party discipline. Difficulties in maintaining party discipline are perceived as arising from a lack of commitment among members. This affirms a long-held view by Krehbiel [25] regarding the

determination of the influence and importance of parties in the choices made by legislators.

The Majority Party Caucus cites members' level of education a further challenge within its ranks. The large membership of the party caucuses is associated invariably with a diversity of member qualifications, skills and expertise. Whilst such a diversity could certainly be advantageous regarding caucus membership, some members felt that the rather low educational level of some of the members tends to limit their contribution to broader parliamentary discourse and moreover to reduce their insight.

The Muslim Caucus identified the non-existence of a place of worship in Parliament as the main challenge to their efforts. Although their right to congregate and implement programmes is well recognized, their right to practice their religion – the backbone of their existence as a caucus – is yet to be adequately recognized with the provision of prayer space. Poor member attendance is another challenge to the Muslim Caucus. Members of the Christian Fellowship cited extensive time spent at fellowship as the most significant contributing factor underscoring poor attendance.

Furthermore, the members stated there was a lack of continuity within the caucus due to unpredictability of mandate renewal. The Christian Caucus, however, indicated that it does not encounter such a challenge.

5. THE GHANAIAN PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUSES IN PERSPECTIVE

A number of key lessons can be learnt from this appraisal of Ghanaian parliamentary caucuses. These lessons could be useful in developing recommendations for the improvement of these caucuses' effectiveness and efficiency:

- Caucuses are only as effective as the effort they extend towards their peculiar policy interests. As indicated above, failure to meet regularly, or in caucus membership entirely, results in sentiments of lack of commitment and effort and thus limits their efficiency to deliver the core objectives of the caucus.
- Adequate and sustained funding is essential for the operational effectiveness and functional efficiency of the caucuses. The inability of caucuses to address the concerns of their constituents due to

issues of inadequate funding limits their standing within their constituencies. If the beneficiary-constituents are not satisfied with the service, programmes, and service delivery of the caucus, its legitimacy would be jeopardized.

- Ensuring an adequate balance of workload will ensure that each MP contributes to the best of the MP's abilities and creates an environment where the potentials and skills of all members are fully harnessed. Batstone's [8] study of workplace caucuses concludes that "half-hearted efforts to hire a few token workers won't do. Building a balanced workforce demands a deep commitment from top to bottom in the organization".

- For caucuses to be effective, there should be a concerted effort and commitment from policymakers/legislatures to act on the caucuses' agendas. "The combination of inspired caucuses and responsive [legislators] makes the difference…the caucuses set the agenda, yet without a solid commitment from management… [efforts are in vain and] voices wouldn't be heard" [8].

- Multi-party caucuses have the potential to be more transparent and to focus on the issues rather than party agenda. Members ought to make concerted efforts to uphold the tenets of transparency and accountability rather than the interests of the respective parties and thereby represent their beneficiaries. This is most applicable to the regional caucuses where the majority of members are from the same party.

- Representation through gender quotas does not lead to substantive representation or policy influence. Members of Parliament must be committed to issues of the vulnerable in society. The gender of the beneficiary must be inconsequential. Although "linkages of women's legislators with the women's movement and networking for collective voice and capacity enhancement may be identified as key milestones in the pathway to women's political empowerment" [26], the lack of male support and scenarios of solely female MPs ensure that the Gender Caucus remains restricted in its actions.

- The variable nature of caucuses means that a universal management model cannot be adopted for them. The lack of stringent rules regarding membership and

responsibilities of caucuses affords members the leverage to demonstrate limited commitment and effort to the success of their respective caucuses.

6. CONCLUSION

The main underlying objective of this article is to evaluate the current structure and effectiveness of Ghana's parliamentary caucuses. Apparently, caucuses are indispensable with regard to Ghana's parliamentary development. The caucuses provide avenues for policy influence on special interests, and influence decision-making on behalf of their constituents. The rare opportunity to work across party lines creates prospects for establishing new relationships and partnerships and thus builds new skills, besides gaining new tools as well as strategies and mutual learning experiences. However, the ability of members to be highly effective within their caucuses is greatly hindered by a number of key challenges, as herein elucidated. The absence of adequate, reliable and sustainable funding avenues hinders the ability to implement programmes needed by beneficiary-constituents.

Failures in programme implementation lead to a perceived lack of legitimacy. Lack of clearly defined structures and policy orientation within caucuses culminate in poorly attended meetings and low commitment of members. The latter is further attributed to the overworked nature of MPs, who must meet the demands of their constituencies as well as those outlined in their multiple caucus memberships. Automatic and multiple membership is clearly debilitating the ability of members to effectively contribute to competing responsibilities. These very inter-related challenges demand attention because of their propensity to affect others.

Avenues for further caucus development, therefore, must be those that focus on providing flexibility in member responsibilities as well as adequate funding and space for meetings. Inviting members of civil society could further be seen as an innovative way of increasing transparency and adding the much-needed new skill sets and partnership opportunities with democratic actors and stakeholders such as the Centre for Democratic Development –Ghana, Institute of Economic Affairs and Institute of Democratic Governance.

The role of the Gender Caucus should be redefined to admit male MPs who are interested

and share the aspiration of the objectives of the Caucus. These MPs should be encouraged to become members. The connection and linkages between the Caucus and women advocacy groups, such as Abantu for Development, Netright, and Women in Law and Development, must be harnessed to increase the synergic effect of various advocacy issues that are championed on parallel lines.

Ensuring the success of a parliamentary caucus would be contingent on the level of effectiveness of its leadership's ability to organize, both internally and with each other and the level of commitment of their members to continue to promote and bring their policy interests to the fore. In conclusion, the effectiveness of Ghana's parliamentary caucuses would depend on the receptivity and transparency of the Legislature in ensuring that caucus interests are heard and taken seriously within the inner echelons of the Ghanaian decision-making framework.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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