

APSA Small Research Grants Project Proposal
The Impact of Senegal's Decentralization on Women in Local Governance
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This research proposal is situated within the political science literature's growing focus on decentralization in Africa (Tendler 1997; Olowu & Smoke 1992). Decentralization includes either devolution of power to legally established, locally elected government authorities that have clearly differentiated legal powers and responsibilities, or deconcentration of administrative authority to representatives of central government agencies (Conyers 1983). While the political science literature has examined the causal variables that have led to decentralization in Africa and the effect of decentralization reforms on political competition and resource allocation (Tendler 1997), this literature has ignored the impact of decentralization on women's ability to shape rural development policies. My proposed research will address this gap in the literature, by using a detailed analysis of women's involvement and representation in Senegal's rural councils since the 1996 introduction of a partially proportional representation (PR) electoral system. This research addresses two necessary aspects of the effect of decentralization on women: how women get elected to rural councils and, once elected, how female officials have promoted issues of concern to women. My project will be an important contribution to the policy literature on rural development because it focuses on peasant women, who produce the majority of Africa's food and work most of the hours in the formal and informal economies (Gordon 1996).

The Theoretical Context for African Decentralization

Decentralization has occurred in the context of political and economic uncertainty on the African continent. The economic crises that began in the 1980s caused most African states to adopt free market reforms in order to receive further loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. The unemployment and inflation that resulted from trade liberalization, austerity measures, and currency devaluation contributed to the democratic protests that occurred in Africa in the early 1990s (Bratton & van de Walle 1992). One way in which state officials reacted to civil society's call for multiparty elections and government accountability was to decentralize power to local institutions (Olowu & Smoke 1992).

Proponents of decentralization argue that local governments can more efficiently administer development programs than African central states and can be held directly accountable to individuals. Local institutions also provide an avenue for increased political representation of diverse groups in society (Conyers 1983). On the other hand, critics of decentralization have illustrated that local governments may lack adequate resources to implement development policies and may be dominated by the state (Tordoff 1994). Decentralized state institutions also may perpetuate social inequalities and political exclusion, when patron-client relations, class cleavages, and ethnic divisions limit the ability of political organizations to be democratic (Ribot 1995). While both proponents and opponents of decentralization have provided critical analyses, they have not focused on the effect that these institutional designs have on women's election to decentralized institutions and their ability to shape local policies once elected. Because the success of African rural development depends on women's labor, participation, and resources, the study of decentralized institutions cannot ignore women's involvement and the representation of women's interests (Gordon 1996). My research will question how Senegal's design of electoral rules for rural councils has affected women's influence in the local political realm.

The Senegal Case

There are two reasons that Senegal provides an ideal arena to study the impact of decentralization reforms on women's rural participation and representation. First, women in rural Senegal not only have numerous experiences with collective action, as have many African women,

but they also have organized despite obstacles to participation that are unique to Senegal. Rural Senegalese women are the country's poorest citizens and have little time and few resources to devote to politics (Callaway & Creevey 1994). Few women have the education needed to participate in politics, since only 23 percent of women are literate, one of the lowest rates for women in Africa (*Europa World Yearbook* 1998: 2950). Senegalese women also face patriarchal attitudes rooted in Islam that teach women not to challenge the ideas of male authorities. The country's unique form of Islam that stresses the role of male religious leaders (*marabouts*) in directing their disciples' religious, political, and personal actions urges women to display piety and generosity and limits their political participation (Evers Rosander 1997).

Despite these hindrances, rural women create organizations (*mbootaay* in Wolof) to provide credit and mutual aid to members. Women have also formed state-recognized women's groups (*groupement de promotion féminine*-GPF). GPFs pay a registration fee to the central state, in return for access to bank credit, government technical advice, and recommendations for international donor projects. Over 3,500 women's groups in Senegal have registered as GPFs. Several of these women's organizations have developed successful income-generating projects and some GPFs have challenged local traditions on issues such as polygamy and female circumcision (*Africa News Service*, 25 February 1999). More research is needed on the strategies Senegalese women use in collective action, and this proposal seeks to address that gap by examining how women mobilize to win election to decentralized state institutions and how they represent women's concerns once elected.

The second reason that Senegal is an ideal venue for examining the relationship between decentralized institutions and women's participation is that the country has undergone several waves of redistribution of state authority. As a reaction to the French colonial policy of centralization which allowed the colonialists to control the Senegalese cash crop economy, the newly-independent Senegalese government created institutions to foster democracy and rural development in 1960. These reforms increased the number of administrative districts, created popularly-elected regional assemblies, developed a network of rural cooperatives, and devised a state bureaucracy to foster rural development (Gellar 1995). Within a decade, though, these policies had become ineffective. Local government institutions had few resources and little autonomous control over decision-making; rural peasants, whom these institutions were supposed to serve, viewed these institutions to be illegitimate (Boone 1992). As evidence of these problems, the regional assemblies were dismantled in the early 1970s. A decade later, President Abdou Diouf reintroduced decentralized institutions, such as regional assemblies and state-recognized development organizations. As yet, the regional assemblies have not been fully implemented and some scholars have found that, as was the case immediately after independence, state organizations lack resources and legitimacy (Ribot 1995). Recent decentralization reforms accompanied the introduction of multi-party elections, liberalization of the media and civil society, and the inclusion of opposition party leaders in national unity governments (Gellar 1995).

This research project focuses on one aspect of President Diouf's decentralization efforts: changes to the rules for rural council elections. Since 1972, rural councils have been the governing body of the rural community (*communauté rurale*-CR), which is the lowest level of administrative structure between the county (*arrondissement*) and the village. Each of Senegal's 319 CRs is composed of 10,000-15,000 individuals. Rural councils are under the supervision of the *sous-préfet*, who is accountable to the central state. Councils can assess taxes and allocate tax revenue, though it was only after 1990 that they could determine the rate of taxation (Ndoye, Gaye & Tersiguel 1994). Rural councils may also work closely with international donors on village development projects, a process which may increase the council's access to external funds but may also make it beholden to donors. Before 1996, elections to the council were conducted using a winner-take-all (plurality) party list system. This system insured that council members in a given CR were always from the same party, particularly the ruling Socialist Party (*Parti Socialiste*-PS).

After the electoral code changes, half of the seats are now allocated based on winner-take-all and half are allocated based on PR. This change has had two effects. First, opposition parties are more likely to win representation (Duverger 1954). In 1996, national opposition parties such as the Socialist Democratic Party (*Parti Démocratique Socialiste*-PDS), the Unity Party (*And Jef*-AJ), and the Democratic League (*Ligue Démocratique*-LD) won seats in all of Senegal's regions; the PDS won seats in 81 percent of the councils (Vengroff & Ndiaye 1998). Second, women are more likely to be elected under the PR system than the plurality system because patriarchal attitudes that might prevent an individual female candidate from being elected are tempered by the system's focus on party. Research indicates that women are twice as likely to be elected in a PR system than in a plurality system (Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994). In the 1998 Senegalese national legislative election, all 18 competing parties included female candidates on their party lists, though women composed on average only two of the top 14 names on the party lists.

The Research Design

This proposed research will examine the relationship between the decentralized rural councils with their new electoral rules and women's involvement in local governance. Though women currently compose only 12 percent of the Senegalese national legislature, their representation in rural councils has increased from 8 percent in 1984 to 25 percent in 1996. The largest share of this increase--10 percent--occurred with the 1996 election (*Reuters*, 28 June 1999; Callaway & Creevey 1994). What have been the factors that have led to this change? Can increased representation be solely explained by the new electoral institutions, or the PR system that is more likely to enable women to be elected? Or are there additional explanations for women's increased representation, such as women's ability to mobilize to take advantage of these new institutional rules? Further, once women are elected to rural councils, what strategies have they used to represent other women's concerns?

My proposed research will test three overarching hypotheses that derive from these research questions. The first two hypotheses address the factors that enable women to win elections to rural councils, while the third theorizes on the factors that empower elected female rural council members to represent women's interests. Both the election of female candidates and the representation of women's interests are necessary components to the question of how decentralization affects women in the rural policy-making process. Hypothesis #1: When one party dominates a CR, women will be more likely to be elected to the rural council. The logic behind this hypothesis is that in a PR system parties that dominate are more likely to share seats with women because male party leaders know that they will still have access to power. Similarly, research has illustrated that in PR systems with a high threshold, women are more likely to be included in party lists because thresholds create larger parties that are guaranteed to win seats and are willing to run more diverse (and risky) candidates (Matland and Taylor 1997). Hypothesis #2: When women in the villages of the CR have a history of working together in united women's organizations (either *mbootaay* or GPF), women will be more likely to be elected to rural councils. This hypothesis is based on the idea that women's associations provide an organization through which a female candidate can mobilize her peers to vote for her party. Hypothesis #3: When women who are elected to rural councils have a power base independent from men, such as a supportive women's group or their own sources of income, they will be more likely to represent the interests of women in rural councils.

This research will be conducted predominantly in the capitals of two CRs, Ndoulo and Leona. These case studies are similar in that peasants in both CRs are from the Wolof ethnic group and the Muslim religion, and they are peanut farmers, who for the most part lack income-generating or educational opportunities. The case studies are different based on the two independent variables of number of dominant party organizations in the CR and successful experiences with women's group mobilization. Leona is situated within the Louga region, the home

of President Diouf and a region with strong support for the PS. Ndoulo is situated within the Diourbel region, an area that during the 1960s and 1970s strongly supported the PS because regional *marabouts* encouraged their followers to do so. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, as the *marabouts* have become less enthusiastic about the PS, voter turnout and support for the PS has declined while support for the PDS and LD has increased (Schaffer 1998). Ndoulo also has a history of ineffective women's organizations, especially the GPF which has faced corruption and class divisions (Patterson 1998). In contrast, women's organizations in Leona have been more successful and unified. Choosing cases that are different based on my first two independent variables will enable me to more effectively isolate the influence of the number of dominant parties and the mobilization of women's organizations on the election of female candidates to rural councils. Because the independent variables of my third hypothesis are based on the individual situation of each female council member, I cannot choose case studies based solely on those variables.

My dissertation research in the Ndoulo CR in 1994 and 1995 and my service as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Leona CR from 1989 to 1991 have provided me with multiple contacts in each community. I have developed a rapport with the rural council presidents, several council members, and the presidents of the major women's organizations in both Leona and Ndoulo. I also am fluent in Wolof and understand local customs. My research will rely primarily on interviews with the members of each rural council, the heads of major women's associations in the CR, the *sous-préfet* for Leona and Ndoulo, the president of each rural council, and the leaders of the political parties that competed in the 1996 rural council elections in Leona and Ndoulo. I will interview approximately 20 individuals in each CR. Interviews will be conducted in Wolof and will utilize primarily open-ended questions. The following are a few sample questions to test my hypotheses:

(For party leaders to test hypothesis 1) How are women incorporated into the party? Were women slated as candidates in 1996? Why? Why not?

(For women's group presidents to test hypothesis 2) Do women's groups get involved in rural council elections? If so, how and why? If not, why not?

(For rural council presidents to test hypothesis 3) What issues do female council members address at council meetings? How do these differ from the issues that male councillors raise?

(For female rural council members to test hypothesis 3) What issues have you sought to address on the council? Do you feel you have been successful? Why/why not?

A secondary source of data will come from election records at the Ministry of Interior in Dakar. These records will provide voter turnout information, vote totals for each party, and the party list (and women's position on the list) for the 1996 election. My proposed research project will take from mid-May until early-August, 2000. I will spend the first month completing interviews with individuals in the Ndoulo area. I will utilize my contacts in the community to introduce me to rural council members that I do not know and to explain my research objectives. Because most members of the Ndoulo rural council live in Ndoulo, and because the *sous-préfet* and opposition party leaders live there, the vast majority of my interviews will not require travel. I will then spend approximately two months in the Leona CR. This longer time period is because members of the council are from a variety of villages and because travel in the Leona region is more difficult than in the Ndoulo area. Trips to Dakar to collect election data will be interspersed with my rural interviews. I plan to incorporate my research into one or two articles to be submitted to a refereed journal.

This research project seeks to increase our theoretical knowledge of the impact of decentralized institutions on the ability of women to be elected to local decision-making bodies and,

once elected, to utilize such institutions to facilitate gender-conscious development. More broadly, this proposed research provides a unique perspective on an area which has suffered from scholarly neglect--the impact of institutional design on under-represented groups in society.

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Budget and Budget Justification
The Impact of Senegal's Decentralization on Women in Local Governance
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Air travel \$1164

Round-trip airline ticket from Chicago O'Hare to Dakar, Senegal
May 20-August 12, 2000
Chicago--Paris--Dakar on Air France

Housing--Rental of Room in Leona and Ndoulo \$ 210

I will rent a room from a family so as to more easily do my interviews in the Leona and Ndoulo areas

\$70/month x 3 months

Food and Living Expenses \$ 180

I will pay monthly food, laundry, and utility costs in Leona and Ndoulo

\$60/month x 3 month

Travel cost, Dakar--Leona and Dakar--Ndoulo \$ 86

I anticipate making 2 trips between Leona and Dakar and 2 trips between Ndoulo and Dakar in order to obtain election records and other information not available from local officials. For any necessary trips, I will stay with friends in Dakar.

\$23/round trip Dakar-Leona x 2 trips = \$46

\$20/round trip Dakar-Ndoulo x 2 trips = \$40

Tape recorder for taping interviews \$ 50

I will record respondents if they allow it in order to have a record of my interview data.

Tapes for tape recorder \$ 30

TOTAL BUDGET

\$1720

NOTE: No other research grants or institutional funding from Elmhurst College will be available to subsidize the cost of this research.