

Breaking the glass ceiling: gender parity and Ghanaian politics

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A Global Concern

In recent times, the issue of women representation in political and other top corporate positions has resurfaced on the global agenda. Various countries have introduced numerous policies to address the issue, chief among which is the allocation of quotas to women in certain key political positions and on certain corporate and management boards. Sadly however, after two and a half decades of the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, only a paltry 25% of parliamentary seats across the world are occupied by women whereas top managerial positions can only boast of 28% percent of women (<https://www.un.org>).

Gender parity is very crucial in the development of any economy as there remains a lot more potential in the female population in the world, the harnessing of which holds very bright prospects for institutions, businesses and governments, given the right footing and opportunities. Rather sadly, the attainability of such looks very far-fetched or even close to impossible following the Global Gender Gap Report 2020, which shockingly predicts that gender parity may not be attained in our lifetime, at least not until after almost a century (World Economic Forum, 2019). On the brighter side of things, the 2020 report reveals overall marked improvements across dimensions, notably in the Political Empowerment dimension, which ironically happens to be the worst performing dimension, with the Educational Attainment dimension exhibiting very promising prospects, and about a quarter of the 153 countries studied having attained the gender parity feat.

The Ghanaian Narrative

In Ghana presently, the story is far from different. As is very characteristic of every election year, widespread calls for more women to be elected into parliament have been increasingly amplified all year long from all angles – Civil Society Organizations, women empowerment groups, NGOs, political parties as well as members of the general public. The pressing question that constantly begs for answers remains thus: **Is gender parity achievable by mere lip-service?** Very little seems to be done action wise to ensure that these wishes are converted into tangible realities and this is the situation that needs to be addressed if Ghana as a country is determined to have something to show as an achievement for the Sustainable Development Goal 5 which esteems gender equality in all spheres of life as a

fundamental human right which is a necessary foundation for the achievement of global peace, prosperity and sustainability (<https://www.un.org>).

Gender Roles in Ghana: The Evolution

In spite of the fact that men and women are, according to the laws and the constitution of Ghana, equal in all respects and are entitled to the same rights and privileges, this is not the case in practice (Sasano, 2015). Gender roles as defined within the traditional and cultural contexts of the country are essentially interpreted stereotypically to create a sense of inequality where men can best be described as the “**breadwinners**” and women as the “**bread-processors**” in a typical traditional Ghanaian family. By implication, women are traditionally expected to be involved in unpaid domestic activities including housekeeping, child rearing and other subsistent agricultural activities whereas men are required to engage in paid and other more rigorous forms of labour. Thus, according to tradition, education is deemed secondary to a woman's role as a wife, a homemaker and a mother and is therefore not accorded a lot of attention unlike in the case of their male counterparts, leaving the women largely dependent on men and putting them at a disadvantaged position in the control of resources and the making of major decisions in the household (Amponsah et. al., 2019). It is therefore little wonder that the illiteracy rate in Ghana stands at 50% for women and 28% for men (Sasano, 2015).

Prior to the attainment of independence, education in pre-colonial and colonial Ghana remained to a large extent, the reserve of the male population, and largely bordered on apprenticeship and other informal channels of knowledge transfer which was subsequently replaced by a more formalized system of education as was introduced by the colonial masters. This formalised system further widened the gap between both genders as men and boys were “pressured towards the capitalist ethic of “individualization” through the pursuance of individual achievement, self interest, and material success” as part of a training process to get them involved in the administrative duties of the colonial government (Njeuma, 1993 cited in Agbemabiese-Grooms, 2011). Women on the other hand, and more specifically, the few privileged ones who were accepted into these schools were taught subjects along the lines of health, nutrition, needlework, and childcare that would prepare them for homekeeping, marriage and raising of children (Ibid.). This trend set the stage for disparities in both genders in terms of the skills and capabilities that were imbibed in them. Sefa-Nyarko and Afram (2019) throw more light on the further advancement of these inequalities through the textual and imagery portrayal of male and female characters in Ghanaian textbooks for Junior High Schools as a reinforcement of culturally prescribed stereotypes. They further argue that women, according to statistical reports, are significantly under-represented in history

textbooks, which can be said to be a major explanation for the current trend under discussion.

These narratives were substantially redefined after independence with the introduction of the free compulsory basic education by the then Nkrumah government as well as numerous stimulus packages that were introduced in the course of the various transitions of power to ensure that the culturally defined notions of the place of women were replaced by more progressive and equitable ideologies about the potentials and capabilities of the girl-child.

The famous statement of prominent Ghanaian educationist Dr. Kwegyir Aggrey - **“If you educate a man you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a family (nation)”** - has thus resonated through historical times till date, with major grounds having been covered in the education and empowerment of the girl-child.

Till date, in spite of the major strides attained in ensuring parity in education, there are many girls of school going age who serve as farm hands for their parents and/or guardians, whereas others drop out of schools for reasons bordering mainly around teenage pregnancies and poverty. Such incidences are mostly prevalent in the rural areas of the country, where the traditional ways of thinking are still more pronounced compared to other urbanised parts of the country.

Progresses so far...

These trends enumerated above can be said to be largely responsible for the prevalence of men in the political history of Ghana, as well as in present day politics. This notwithstanding, some distinguished women have braved all odds to stand and mobilise Ghanaians under various circumstances in the run up to the fight for independence. Mention can be made of **Nana Yaa Asantewaa**, the brave queen mother of the pre-colonial Ashanti kingdom who at the beginning of the 20th century led an army of women and men to fight the British for the release of their captured kings and for the protection of the Golden Stool, which historically and spiritually signified the unity of the kingdom.

Politically, the Convention People's Party (CPP), the major political party at the time which led Ghana to independence, could boast of the likes of **Hannah Kudjoe**, **Evelyn Amarteifio** and **Mabel Dove Danquah**, some of the earliest female politicians and ardent activists for independence and nationalism, with the latter being touted as the first female member of the Legislative Assembly of the then Gold Coast, and in the African continent at large. The roles played by the likes of **Agnes Oforiwa Tagoe-Quarcoo** can also not be overlooked. A prominent trader at the time, although

she did not have much formal education, garnered support for the party and mobilised numerous market women to support the party financially (Dagba et al., 2019; Assifuah, 2007; <https://www.ghanaweb.com>). The immense contributions and solidarity of these women as well as the numerous other women they rallied played an enormous role in the attainment of independence although men were seen to be at the forefront of negotiations and deliberations. It therefore remains undisputable that **women were the major backbone and the unsung heroes behind the faces that won independence for Ghana.**

Subsequently, upon the attainment of power, the first president of the country, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah would introduce the Representation of the People (Women Members) Act in 1959 to nominate and elect ten women into parliament in recognition of the obviously enormous impact that women have, and could still make on the development of the nation when given the right opportunities (Madsen, 2019). His government would thus witness the establishment of the **National Council of Women** in 1960 to empower women through vocational training among other informal forms of training, and the eventual Affirmative action programmes of 1965 and 1979 which prescribed what could best be described as quotas for the inclusion of women in politics. These propositions have sadly not seen the light of day given the consistently low representation till date, owing to the numerous military and democratic transitions that characterised the political history of Ghana and the varying ideologies that each regime introduced and implemented.

It is again worthy of mention that Ghana is signatory to a number of conventions including the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**, the **Beijing Platform for Action (BFA)**, the **African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights**, and the **Maputo Protocol** all of which are aimed at upholding the rights of women and ensuring their active participation in political and corporate governance (Dagba et al., 2019; Madsen 2019)

With reference to the political and educational history of Ghana, a significant amount of progress has been achieved in ensuring that women are empowered to match up to their male counterparts in the corridors of power and authority. Mention can be made of women, especially in the current fourth republic, who have distinguished themselves in the political sphere and handled key positions with strength and dignity. Among many others, such women include **Her Ladyship Justice Georgina Theodora Wood**, **Her Ladyship Justice Joyce Bamford Addo**, **Ms. Charlotte Osei**, **Ms. Samia Yaba Nkrumah**, **Nana Konadu Agyemang Rawlings** and the woman of the moment, **Professor Jane Naana Opoku Agyemang**. This is also not to sideline the 37 women who currently occupy seats in parliament as well as the many others who have done same in the past and/or have held ministerial positions in the present and past governments.

It is worthy of mention that these strides albeit very commendable, are however woefully inadequate, and thus calls for concerted efforts by all stakeholders to ensure the perpetuation of these success stories.

Info Box

Nana Yaa Asantewaa	Queenmother of Ejisu in the then Ashanti Empire who led a war against British colonization in 1900. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yaa_Aasantewaa)
Hannah Kudjoe	One of the first high-profile female politicians and prominent activists for Ghana's independence. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hannah_Kudjoe)
Evelyn Amarteifio	One of the earliest women activists and a founding member of the first indigenous Women's organization in the country. (https://zlev.de/kunst-kultur/dear-white-people-check-your-privilege/living-together/african-feminism-and-the-western-feminist-agenda)
Mabel Dove Danquah	One of the first Ghanaian female journalists and political activists; the First Woman Elected in an African Legislative Assembly. (https://www.modernghana.com/news/915669/mabel-dove-danquah-the-first-woman-elected-in.html)
Agnes Oforiwa Tagoe-Quarcoopome	A prominent trader who rallied market women in the fight for independence. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agnes_Oforiwa_Tagoe-Quarcoopome)
Her Ladyship Justice Georgina Theodora Wood	First female Chief Justice of Ghana. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgina_Theodora_Wood)

<i>Her Ladyship Justice Joyce Bamford Addo</i>	<i>First female Speaker of Parliament in Ghana and West Africa. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joyce_Bamford-Addo)</i>
<i>Ms. Charlotte Osei</i>	<i>First female Electoral Commissioner of Ghana. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlotte_Osei)</i>
<i>Ms. Samia Yaba Nkrumah</i>	<i>First woman to head a major political party in Ghana. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samia_Nkrumah)</i>
<i>Nana Konadu Agyemang Rawlings</i>	<i>First woman to run for President of Ghana. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nana_Konadu_Agyeman_Rawlings)</i>
<i>Professor Jane Naana Opoku Agyemang</i>	<i>First female Vice-Chancellor of a public University in Ghana; first female running mate of a major political party in Ghana. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jane_Naana_Opoku-Agyemang)</i>

Taking cues from around the world

The laudable achievement of **Rwanda**, a fellow African country with an even more violent past than Ghana is one that is worthy of applause and emulation. Currently occupying the topmost position globally with the highest percentage of women in politics, the country has risen through the ashes to prove to the world the feasibility of gender parity even under unfavourable circumstances.

Within the EU, the numbers are quite impressive as the regional averages for most parameters exceed the global averages (EPRS, 2019). Mention can be made of countries such as **Spain, Sweden, Denmark, Finland** and **Norway**, who have made significant strides over the years. After a century of achieving universal female suffrage, **Germany** has also achieved a lot in the global fight for gender parity, currently boasting of a female Chancellor.

Additionally, other Sub-Saharan countries including **South Africa, Senegal, Mozambique, Ethiopia** and **Burundi** among others have exceeded the 30% mark, a hopeful indication of its replication and attainability in Ghana.

It is worthy of notice that, among other affirmative action plans that these countries have employed in achieving this feat, **gender quotas** remain a central theme, at least

for a greater majority. The subsequent section will throw more light on this all-important policy and its feasibility in Ghana.

What can be done?

Gender quotas, as is evidenced in most of the countries mentioned above, hold remarkable benefits for the eradication of gender inequalities. Backing them with legal conditions will move Ghana as a country from the “lip-service” era into one in which tangible results will be experienced. Thus, political parties and other corporate boards will be bound by legislations to ensure a fair female representation at all cost. This will hence become the catalyst in the country’s attainment of gender parity (EIGE, 2020).

Civic education is also a very effective channel through which the attainment of gender parity can be made more feasible. Informal sensitization programmes of the general populace as well as capacity building, training and empowerment programmes are very necessary complements to gender quotas as they are capable of ensuring that women who end up in these positions are well equipped for the responsibility, have the support of the public, and are presented as worthy role models to their fellow women.

It is also expedient that government does not relent on its efforts in **promoting girl-child education** despite the giant strides the country has achieved in the area over the years. The collective efforts of Civil Society Organizations and actors, Non-Governmental Organizations and the support of government and other well-meaning groups and individuals can help ensure that girls especially in the rural areas are given as much access to quality education as their counterparts in the urban areas, and that they are adequately supported and encouraged to brave all odds to attain the highest level possible. By so doing, females would be empowered right from childhood, thereby securing the future of females in positions of power and making the attainability of gender parity more feasible in the near future.

Gender Parity: An Achievable Endeavour

The active participation of women in politics and other corporate positions of power has been proven to yield enormous dividends for states and organisations (UN Women). The presence of women in positions of power have positive effects not only on governance and economy, but also on issues of equality, childcare and education, health and gender-based violence, among other sensitive and marginalised national issues.

With proven attestation to its effectiveness in eliminating some forms of gender inequalities, gender quotas remain a very important tool in the fight towards global gender parity, and all the more, when these quotas are legally binding.

The equally salient role of civic education cannot be overemphasized in this quest. Through capacity building and training, societies will be sensitised and empowered to push for the change we all yearn to see.

I am optimistic, that with the application of these measures, Ghana can and will be set on the right footing to achieve gender parity and reap the enormous benefits therein.

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Dieser Artikel gibt die Meinung der Autorin wieder und stellt nicht unbedingt die Position der EJBW dar.