

Towards a Compact for Ghana's Political and Economic Transformation

Gender Equality

Technical Background Paper: Executive Summary

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Introduction

Ensuring inclusive roles for women in society, politics, and the economy is a necessary precursor for Ghana's political and economic transformation. That transformation will not take place without women having equal access to jobs, finance, and political and private sector careers. Ghana's poor performance on women's inclusion in areas such as health, education, and politics is evident in its low rankings on global gender equality indices. In fact, Ghana fell from 58th on the World Economic Forum's Gender Parity Index in 2006 to 117th in 2021. Ghana currently lags behind many African peers in achieving gender parity in employment, representation at the highest levels in politics, government and the private sector. It also lags behind in terms of female participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and in tertiary education, leading to a ranking of 23rd out of the 35 countries in sub-Saharan Africa measured on the same index in 2021. This poor performance on a variety of international gender equality indices is evident in every facet of Ghanaian life.

Measures of gender inequality

Women are under-represented in decision making at both national and local levels. The current parliament has the highest proportion of women representatives in the history of Ghana. However, at 14 percent, it falls far short of the affirmative action directive of 40 percent. While the levels of women's representation in the District Assemblies is better, the majority of the women there are appointed. This points to the real challenges women face in the electoral process, stemming largely from social norms that discourage them from vying for political office.

Access to and ownership of land is yet another challenge that women face. While women are obligated to provide labor on their husbands' farms, customary law is silent on women's ownership of land cultivated with the husband in the event of death or divorce. Ownership of gifted lands is also subject to husbands' or relatives' discretion upon divorce or death. The sharecropping system (abunu and abusa) does not favor women who use half or one third of their produce to pay for land rents especially since in most cases, for women, the transaction is also mediated by men who take a proportion of the produce or money.

Girls' literacy and school attendance have increased significantly over the years. The 2021 Population and Housing Census shows that the gender gap between males and females has been largely closed at the primary and secondary levels. However, the gap widens from post-

secondary education upwards and is even more severe when it comes to girls' enrollment in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). These courses have generally been erroneously perceived in Ghana's male-dominated society as requiring "high intellect", which females supposedly do not possess. Overall, the percentage of females with absolutely no education is much higher than the percentage of males with no education.

The education gaps have implications for women's role in the economy. Women form the majority of business owners in the informal sector, however, they lack access to financial, technical and other relevant services that would enable them to grow their businesses successfully. As a result, very few of them are able to make a decent living. Similarly, women constitute the backbone of the agricultural value chain: they form 70 percent of crop producers, 95 percent of actors in agro-processing and 85 percent of food distributors (ABANTU, 2016: 4). Yet, the incomes they earn in this sector of the agricultural value chain are much lower than what is earned in the cash crop sector. Beyond incomes, entrepreneurs and workers in the agricultural sector often do not enjoy any of the characteristics of decent work identified by the International Labour Organization. Even those in the formal economy do not fare better. During the retrenchment exercises of the 1980s, a much larger percentage of women than men lost their jobs due to the last-in-first-out principle that served as the basis for the retrenchment exercises (Haddad et al., 1995: 892). Those who remained tend to be found in the lower echelons of formal economy work and while they are better paid, only a third of them enjoy at least one of the major components of decent work – sick leave, pensions, annual leaves, and so on. In addition, the burden of addressing the social reproduction needs of our homes are unduly placed on women with little done to ameliorate its impact on the time and energy women can then devote to productive activities. Due to this social norm, some women are therefore making choices about their productive activities with their reproductive activities in mind, a decision that affects not just the women but also the rest of society, robbed of the services that women could provide if they chose their career paths with no inhibitions.

Ghana's health gaps are also worrying. Although the maternal mortality rate has dropped by half in the last 60 years, Ghana is far from eliminating this challenge. As of 2017, about 308 out of every 100,000 live births in Ghana ended in the death of a woman. The adolescent pregnancy rate for girls with low levels of education is also high at 138 per 1,000 births (UNICEF, 2019: 17). Women's right to reproductive health is also restricted by traditions and cultural practices that vest decision making authority in men or husbands. While women face marginalization and discrimination based on social conventions, women with disability are confronted with twice the burden. They are unable to access public buildings and services. Their enrollment in schools is lower than that of their male counterparts and they face added challenges in the labor market.

Domestic violence levels are also high and the social stigma of leaving a relationship, whether violent or not, deters many women from leaving their abusive environments. Those who choose to do so receive very little state support for it. While there is a Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Police Service, there are not nearly enough shelters to house women who need refuge from an abusive partner. Other cultural practices that are abusive towards women such as trokosi and witchcraft accusations/camps still exist – witness the daylight lynching of Akua Denteh, a 90-year-old woman in 2020.

Solutions

Ghana's challenges are hydra-headed and to tackle them, there is need for a set of approaches that tackle the structural underpinnings of the gender equality gaps. Five actions can be proposed to address the structural constraints to women's equality. These actions are also likely to have a domino effect. These five recommendations are: affirmative action; implementation of the Land Act; structural reforms in the employment sector; gender budgeting; and transformation of socio-cultural norms.

In terms of political representation, the Affirmative Action Bill should be passed and implemented with immediate effect. There should be gender parity in government appointments to high-level decision-making positions in public and corporate institutions.

To ensure women's equitable access to and ownership of land, the legislative instrument for the Land Act should be drafted immediately and an education campaign mounted on its contents to enable women take advantage of the security provisions it provides.

In the economic sector, government needs to restructure the banking industry to ensure easy access for women to affordable credit facilities. In addition, there should be accelerator programs targeted at women to ensure that as entrepreneurs, they can grow their businesses. There should also be a review of agricultural policies to protect women across the entire agricultural value chain. Women's unpaid care work should be recognized and valued and the state as well as corporate bodies need to come up with innovative ways of providing decent, affordable care for children to reduce the care burden on women.

Gender budgeting training should be provided to Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) so that gender budgets can be introduced at district, regional and national level and all budgets vetted for compliance prior to submission to the Ministry of Finance. Finally, with regard to socio-cultural norms, the state through the National House of Chiefs should modify and/or abolish all customary practices which dehumanize or are injurious to the physical and mental well-being of any person, as mandated by the 1992 Constitution. These five actions will enable faster progress in ending gender stereotypes and structural discrimination.

Principles of engagement

Implementation of these policies and laws to ensure gender equality requires a concerted and sustained effort on the part of all stakeholders – citizens, political office holders, religious and traditional leaders. Stakeholder engagement is key to understanding the different perspectives on the challenges of the task and the resources required to effect change.

Second, gender equality concerns should be mainstreamed in all MMDAs as well as ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) serving a coordination function. The responsibility of ensuring that Ghana becomes a gender-equal society cannot be shouldered by MoGCSP only.

Political parties must embrace the concept of gender equality and effectively incorporate its tenets in their party constitutions, not simply as a formulaic exercise but as a demonstration of their commitment to this core ideal and as a first step to taking the measures to demonstrate gender equality at all levels of party structures.

Non-governmental and civil society organizations working on women's issues should commit to sharing knowledge and working collaboratively with the relevant ministries and/or external partners that aim at solving some of the challenges outlined.

Private sector organizations should devote a percentage of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) resources to the implementation of programs that enhance the gender equality efforts of the state.

Media houses should commit to donating airtime to discuss the importance of gender equality for both individuals and the nation as a whole and to educate the public on policies, laws, and programs to ensure gender equality.

Religious and traditional leaders should also commit to using their positions to spread the message of gender equality and commit to demonstrating gender equality in their policies and activities.

Key questions for dialogue

To engage these stakeholders, especially the general public, the following are key questions for consultation and dialogue.

1. What are some of the challenges to attaining gender equality in Ghana?
2. How can these be addressed?
3. What are the strategies that are essential to achieving gender equality in Ghana?
4. Who are potential allies in this effort?

Conclusion

The struggle against gender inequality has been waged for many years, with not much success so far. There are many challenges to achieving the goal of gender equality in Ghana but we need to press ahead with determination. Many other countries on the African continent have made strides on this front and Ghana can too. The state must take a leading role in this effort by developing the appropriate policies, actively implementing laws as soon as they are passed and leading by example both in word and in actions so that Ghana becomes a gender equal society for the generations to come. The efforts of the state must be complemented by corporate organizations as well as civil society organizations and individuals committed to building an equal and just society for all. Ghana can and should be a country where each individual, male or female, can live their lives to the fullest potential. Taking cues from the many countries that have successfully implemented gender policies Ghana can shape its development strategies to achieve similar or better results. It is imperative to reform or repeal policies and laws that hinder progress and enact laws that reflect the global consensus on gender equality.