Local & national roles of women in development: Ghana's experience

Rôle local et national des femmes dans le développement : l'expérience du Ghana

Gloria Quansah Asare

Ghana Health Service, Ministry of Health, Ghana

(BSc. Human Biology, MB, ChB, Dr.PH, FGCPS)

Abstract: The presentation focused on the roles of women in the Ghanaian society as well as the country's efforts in women's development. Historically, the role of women in Ghana has been acknowledged as ensuring the society's stability and progress from the household level to national level, and this has been integrated into all of the country's sectors in line with global developments. Over the years, Ghana has adopted international laws and initiatives that seek to protect and strengthen the rights of women. Successive Ghanaian Governments have adopted and incorporated relevant provisions of the international laws, treaties, conventions and regional frameworks into legislations, policies and taken action towards placement of women into decision-making positions as well as their economic empowerment to bridge the gender gap. Despite this, there are still some challenges related to unpaid labour, non-child friendly learning institutions and unfriendly work places, subtle discrimination, the balance between work and home commitments and lack of mentorship due to limited opportunities. Therefore, much more is required to improve the plight of the girl child. Teachers, and indeed all stakeholders, are called upon to follow-up on girls that missed school as well as institute measures to mitigate against other conditions or factors that perpetuate the plight of girls as they grow and women to optimize their status and contribution to development.

Résumé : La présentation s'est concentrée sur le rôle des femmes dans la société ghanéenne ainsi que sur les efforts du pays dans le développement des femmes. Historiquement, le rôle des femmes au Ghana a été reconnu comme assurant la stabilité et le progrès de la société du niveau du ménage au niveau national, et ceci a été intégré dans tous les secteurs du pays en fonction des développements mondiaux. Au fil des ans, le Ghana a adopté des lois et des initiatives internationales visant à protéger et à renforcer les droits des femmes. Les gouvernements ghanéens successifs ont adopté et incorporé les dispositions pertinentes des lois, traités, conventions et cadres régionaux ou internationaux dans leurs législations et politiques et ont pris des mesures pour placer les femmes aux postes de décision et leur donner les moyens économiques de combler l'écart entre les sexes. Malgré cela, il y a encore quelques défis liés au travail non rémunéré, aux institutions d'apprentissage non amicales avec les enfants et aux lieux de travail hostiles, à la discrimination subtile, à l'équilibre entre les engagements professionnels et familiaux et au manque de mentorat en raison des opportunités limitées. Il faut donc faire beaucoup plus pour améliorer le sort des petites filles. Les enseignants, et en fait toutes les parties prenantes, sont appelés à assurer le suivi des filles qui n'ont pas été scolarisées et à prendre des mesures pour atténuer les autres conditions ou facteurs qui perpétuent le

sort des filles pendant leur croissance et des femmes pour optimiser leur statut et leur contribution au développement.

1 Background Information on Ghana

Ghana is a country in West Africa which gained independence from British Colonial rule on the 6th of March 1957. The country is divided into ten Administrative Regions and two hundred and sixteen Districts. The estimated population (January 2017) was about twenty eight million with about one million live births [1] and a quarter of a million deaths; a net migration of close to eleven thousand people and a male to female population sex ratio 1.036 i.e. 1,036 males per 1,000 females. Life expectancy at birth is 61 years (for both sexes): 59.8 years for males and 62.3 years for females, respectively. The infant mortality rate is 50 per 1000 live births [1] and the maternal mortality ratio (MMR) in 2015 was estimated at 319 per 100,000 live births [2]. The MDG targets for infant and maternal health were not attained. The doctor-to-population ratio and midwife to women in fertile age ratios are 1:8481 and 1:1023 respectively.

Ghana has a rich and revered culture characterized by a strong traditional rule system – The institution of Chieftaincy, which was in existence prior to independence, remains strong and carries on with little interference despite constitutional democratic rule. There are over one hundred ethnic groups and languages. The largest are Akan, Moshi-Dagbani, Ewe, and Ga. The Akans are the largest tribe and one of the few societies in West Africa where lineage is traced through the mother and maternal ancestors. The family unit is revered and age is respected [3].

Traditionally, the roles of women in nurturing and maintaining of peace and stability, from the household level to national level, as well as custodians of culture are valued. Consultations with the *'old woman'* on issues of family and community concerns are common practice in most Ghanaian cultures. For example, in matrilineal inheritance'queen mothers' (traditional women leaders) are the kingmakers in nomination of their sons and other male members of royal families to occupy the Traditional Stools and in training of the girl child. In other social settings, influential women leaders such as the *'Magajiya's'* in Northern Ghana lead and sustain several development efforts in their communities. In domestic affairs, decisions on meals and management of other household resources, particularly feeding, is by women. In the markets'Food Item Queens' organize their groups to manage prices of food items and improve their general working conditions and welfare.

Women and girls are significant contributors to society in terms of economic development, reproduction and nurturing and support of families, households and communities, and by extension also acknowledged as ensuring the society's stability and progress. However, the vulnerability of women, girls and children biologically, socially and economically has rightly led to various global laws to address these issues of vulnerability and inequities in opportunities, to which Ghana has been party and or subscribes to and duly reflected in Ghana's Constitution (1992). Notable among these Instruments of International law concerning women are:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952); International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1967); Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict (1974); Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979); Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993); Inter-American Convention for the Prevention, Punishment and Elimination of Violence against Women (Belém do Pará Convention) (1995); Universal Declaration on Democracy (1997); Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women [4].

Successive governments of Ghana have adopted and incorporated the relevant provisions of the international laws, treaties or conventions and regional frameworks into national legislations and policies, to empower women and bridge the gap between men and women: examples being: increase in proportion of women in decision-making positions and in Justice, The Demographic Dividend strategic Plan and Access to Financial assistance in Industry.

2 Women in Development & Gender in Development Approaches: Ghana's Response

The Women in development (WID) approach emanated from the realization in the 1970s that like the poor, women were marginal and often not factored into most development assistance programmes of large donors in developing countries, calling for the need to re-strategize. As a result, the United Nations in 1972 designated 1975 as International Women's Year, highlighting the need to involve women in issues of economic development [5]. Therefore the WID approach has been implemented by integrating women's issues into development assistance policies and programmes of developing countries. However, these were based mainly on westernized models which were not in the same context in the developed countries resulting in slow progress and sub-optimal impact [3]. After decades of implementation with little progress, and beginning in the 1980's, rather than dwelling only on women's issues, appreciation and acknowledgement of the complex relationships between males and females led to gender analysis and therefore broader perspectives and a more accurate contextualization in development policies and programmes of major donors was referred to as the gender and development (GAD) approach. International laws, treaties or conventions and regional frameworks have been formulated into national legislations and policies, to empower women and bridge the gap between men and women.

In Ghana, these historical trends have been realized and implemented resulting currently in mainstreaming gender into the national development agenda upheld by successive governments. In the 1970s the Women and Development approach resulted in the establishment of the National Council on Women and Development (NCWD) and the Ghana National Commission on Children (GNCC) to ensure inclusion and

implementation of women's and children's interests in national development. The NCWD was established in 1975 as Ghana's response to a UN resolution that called on member states to establish appropriate government machinery to accelerate the integration of women in development and the elimination of discrimination against women. This was Ghana's first machinery to ensure full integration of the WID. The Council examined how customary beliefs and practices affected the advancement of women in the educational, political and economic fields reporting to government and coordinating and fostering collaboration between national and international levels. The initial achievements included laws on intestate succession, and criminalization of harmful cultural and traditional practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and ritual servitude'Trokosi' in the 1990s [4].

In the 1980's and thereafter, GAD implementation has culminated in the creation of sector Ministries. In 2001 the first Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs (MoWAC) was established by the elected government with Departments of Women and Departments of Children among others. Following a change in government in 2013, restructuring led to the current Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection; this time with the Department of Social Welfare moving from the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare to be a part of this Ministry which addresses gender equality, equity and empowerment of women for national development; and have co-sponsored the intestate succession and property rights of spouses bills, the passage of the Affirmative Action Bill and National Child Protection Policy which were approved by Cabinet in February, 2015 [6].

The 1990's focused on Rights. Prominent was Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights from the landmark International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo, Egypt in 1994 and the Beijing Conference in 1995.

3 Ghana's Constitution with reference to Appointments to Public Office

Ghana's 1992 Constitution guarantees women's equality with their male counterparts based on the principle that males and females are equal before the law. Examples include Article 17 of Ghana's 1992 Constitution states: in order to ensure equal treatment and non-discrimination, provides that all persons shall be equal before the law. Subsection 2 provides that no one shall be discriminated upon on grounds of gender, race, colour and social or economic status. Also, in the Constitution, the state is obliged to take measures to achieve reasonable regional and gender balance in recruitment and appointment to public offices. Article 17(4) also provides that nothing shall prevent Parliament from enacting laws that are necessary to provide for programmes aimed at redressing social, economic or educational imbalance in society.

Apart from the Constitution, specific policies are in place to protect the rights of women seeking employment in the Public sector. These are based on the underlying principle of equality of men and women before the law and imply equality of reward for work of the same kind performed by both men and women alike. Thus, legally, women have a right to equal place with men in decision-making bodies such as in

boardrooms, Parliament and executive councils. However, in practice, the position is not that simple. There is still a wide gap between theory and practice [7].

In Ghana's 15-year National Platform for Action for the implementation of the Beijing platform, power sharing and decision-making was chosen as one of the critical areas of concern. The government has formulated national initiatives with specified gender considerations to address the low representation of women in Parliament.

In December 1998, the Cabinet issued a policy statement on affirmative action, pledging 40 per cent representation of women in all decision-making bodies. It requested the Electoral Commission to encourage all political parties to nominate more women parliamentary candidates so that they constitute 40 per cent of nominated candidates for Parliament; another directive was issued to the Local Government to ensure that women constituted 30 per cent of government appointees to District Assemblies.

A National Gender and Children Policy of 2004 was formulated with an overall goal of mainstreaming gender concerns in the national development process, to improve, among other things, the participation of women in decision-making bodies in Ghana. The specific objective was to redress imbalances, which arise from existing gender inequalities through policy formulation, review, legal reforms and enforcement of existing legislation.

The Women's Manifesto [8], a non-partisan political document developed by an inclusive consultation among Ghanaian women (2004), sets out the critical issues of concern to women in Ghana and makes demands for addressing them. The document recognises that in spite of the pivotal role played by women within the family and community, they do not occupy key decision-making positions in political life and are relegated to the background as far as public decision-making is concerned.

The implementation of the legislative and policy initiatives over the past four decades have yielded appreciable achievements in the empowerment of women in the public service of Ghana. Significant among these are the appointments of women to head important governance and other public service institutions, including the Supreme Court of Ghana, the Public Services Commission, the National Commission on Civic Education, the Office of Speaker of Parliament, the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, Ghana AIDS Commission, Controller and Accountant General's Department, National Development Planning Commission, Ghana Insurance Commission, the Ghana Prisons Service, Ghana Investment Promotion Council and Ghana Statistical Service. The numbers and proportions of women in the public sector vary by categories as political appointments change with changing governments and parliamentary and other local elections.

In spite of these laudable achievements, there are still a number of serious challenges militating against the empowerment of women in Ghana's public service [5]. Discrimination of all forms prevails. The literature makes reference to several factors which are very real, ranging from social-cultural discrimination,'glass ceiling' effects, mechanisms of recruitment and promotion, stereotyping, limited access to resource and lack of adequate education; all these factors constrain women's advancement and effective participation in the public service of Ghana.

In most African traditions, communities are gender-blind and largely silent on the participation of women at the forefront of issues and may even deliberately play down women's role in society. In Ghana too, discriminatory socio-cultural practices consciously or unconsciously practiced by men against women exist. Generally, Ghana operates a patriarchal system, which gives dominance to men in authority and decision-making in and outside the home, where women's participation in public affairs is perceived as abnormal and where motherhood is a crucial factor that excludes women from public work.

Psychologists propose that careers in public organisations are perceived as synonymous with male characteristics. Women are perceived by natural design and socialisation to lack motivation to achieve in male careers. It is further explained that women lack the opportunities for training in vocational skills, are burdened with family responsibilities as mothers and wives and there is generally strong negative views about their ability to assume leadership positions. Also the multiple roles played by women which include their duties as caretakers of homes, mothers and office workers, tend to be conflicting and thus divide their attention in different directions with negative consequences on performance at work and promotion. Related to these challenges is the absence of child-care facilities at work places for women employees, which is a common deterrent for women to opt for formal employment or move up the career ladder in public administrative positions, while those employed may have opportunities to take care of their children while at work. Many women have to take their children to day-care centres and schools often far from their workplaces, often resulting in high rate of absenteeism and low productivity among women employees.

Moreover, women lack strong social networks and mentors among themselves, to encourage each other to seek top positions in public service. Women at the top fall into the minority and in most cases lack support, and are therefore forced to'toe the line'.

4 The roles of women in society

Throughout history, the central role of women in society has ensured the stability, progress and long-term development of nations. The quality of the population depends largely on the nurturing of the children often referred to as'the future leaders'. The household is the primary producer of health. An empowered (educated, economically sound) woman impacts positively on the health and survival of her family! The proverb *"Charity begins at home!"* is relevant. Ghanaian leaders recognize the role of women; examples are in the following statements which have international approval: *"If you educate a man, you educate an individual. But if you educate a woman, you educate a whole nation"!* by Dr. Kwegyir Aggrey, renowned Ghanaian Educationist (1875–1927) while advocating for female education. This was also affirmed by Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah (First President of Ghana: 1957-1966)

The former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in 2002 stated: *"The Millennium Development Goals, particularly the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, cannot be achieved if questions of population and reproductive health are not squarely addressed. And that means stronger efforts to promote women's rights, and*

greater investment in education and health, including reproductive health and family planning."

The roles of Women in the local Ghanaian context are many. These include Mothers; Care givers of children & aged; Homemakers; Custodians of culture & Tradition; Traditional Rulers (Queen Mothers); Teachers; Farmers, Nutritionists & Cooks; Entrepreneurs; Sometimes Heads of Households; Peace Makers; Traders; Pastors and Evangelists, Organizers of home and community projects and activities; Assembly Women, even Warriors! – a historical example is Nana Yaa Asantewaa, Queen of Edweso, Ashanti region of Ghana was the principal inspiration of the Asante-British War, known as'War of the Golden Stool'(1900 -01) [9] also known as the Yaa Asantewaa War, to the admiration of all. However, while her leadership has been acknowledged in the scholarly literature, her precise role in the war had not been examined until the centennial lectures. This oversight was remedied by the eminent Ghanaian historian, Professor Emeritus A. Adu Boahen, in his account written for the centenary of the war. *"With their king and many leading chiefs already in exile, the Asante faced a new crisis in 1900 with the British Governor's demands for additional tribute and the symbolic Golden Stool. It was Nana Yaa Asantewaa who rallied Asante's resistance with'her fiery and provocative speeches and gender-conscious challenges"'.*

A columnist in 2009 cites from the literatures that in Ghana 65% of women are solely responsible for their children's daily nutrition and are increasingly heading households (40% in 1970). While Ghanaian women have traditionally occupied key positions alongside men in the production of goods and services for subsistence and for the market, as is often the case, the actual contributions women make to the economy have been underestimated or missing from national accounts and are often not considered as work [10].

At Community level, Queen Mothers and other Prominent Women: the role of "Magadzias", in health promotion, community women mobilisation. Examples are: In the era of 31st December Women's Movement, Headed by a Former First Lady had "susu groups" i.e. local financial contribution groups, gari processing factories, day nurseries (provided economic empowerment); support CHPS (Community-based Health Planning and Services) activities; Media Support programmes e.g. Connection with Women in the Diaspora etc. Traditionally Queen mothers have played the role of mother figures and provided support in development at community and national levels and are currently *'Champions'* of several causes in Maternal and Child Health Programmes.

Very Notable in Ghana also is the role played by our first ladies – real role models and mothers of our nation. They have supported very worthy causes; notable among them are maternal and child health campaigns – Reduction of maternal and child mortality, Family Planning Campaigns, Immunization, Health Systems Strengthening efforts -Community-Based Health & Planning Strategy (CHPS), Primary care services towards Universal Health, Infrastructure Maternal and Newborn Centre, Parents Hostel for Childhood Cancers, Cervical Cancer Vaccine Pilot Project, Cervical Cancer Regional Conference, Women's empowerment strategies. Also at Regional, Continental

and Global scales, Actions such as the African Union Campaign on Acceleration of Reduction of Maternal Mortality and Morbidity in Africa (CARMMA) in Ghana.

Traditional Leaders, Entrepreneurs and private sector stakeholders, Ministers of State, Members of Parliament, Public Servants, Development and Implementing Partners, Media Practitioners, teachers, women from all spheres of life playing leadership roles wherever they are and contributing to nation building. We pay tribute to them all as well as to men who have truly and passionately championed the cause of women and children (including boys)!

5 The Role of Men

The Role of men in appreciating and supporting the development of women is very important and has to be nurtured from early childhood. There should be structures in place and programmes and strategies that foster a proper understanding of gender issues and how the capacity and full potential of every individual, whether male or female, young or old, can be realized in a reassuring manner, non-threatening/confrontational manner, which benefits both sexes and all ages and programmed for the efforts and positive outcomes and impact to be sustained. This fits in the GAD approach.

6 Conclusion

Women's contributions to the socio-economic and political development of Ghana and other countries cannot be over-emphasized. Women have played and continue to play leading roles in the development of nations. The roles and contributions of women and girls in Local, National and Global progress towards development is crucial with many similarities and few differences across cultures and countries. It is the responsibility of all to ensure that gender inequities are addressed for global sustainable development. Policy Makers at all levels must highlight the value of women's participation and inclusion in local, national and international frameworks for realisation of the SDGs, particularly SDG5 on'Gender Equality'. These were well expressed in all sessions and in the Conference Declaration.

References

[1] Ghana Demographic and Health Survey, 2014 Ghana Statistical Service (GSS); www.statsghana.gov.gh_publicatons

[2] Maternal Mortality in 1990-2015 World Health Organization
www.who.int/gho/maternal*health/countries/gha.pdf

[3] https://www.commisceo-global.com/resources/country-guides/ghana-guide

[4] From International Parliamentary Union Website: http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/law.htm

[5] https://www.jstor.org/stable/3993130?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contentsaccessedinDecember2018

[6] http://www.ghana.gov.gh/index.php/media-center/news/1131-gender-ministry-celebrate-the-40th-anniversary-of-national-women-s-machinery accessed 28th January 2018.

[7] http://www.ghana.gov.gh/index.php/media-center/features/1749-the-role-of-ghana-s-public-service-in-women-s-empowerment article from the Ghanaian Times Newspaper accessed in March 2018

[8] The Women's Manifesto for Ghana Copyright © 2004, The Coalition on the Women's Manifesto for Ghana (Hosted by ABANTU for Development) ISBN No: 9988-8212-8-x. PDF document accessed March 2018 & January 2019

[9] https://www.betterworldbooks.com/product/detail/yaa-asantewaa-and-the-asante-british-war-of-1900-1-yaa-asantewaa-and-the-asante-british-war-of-1900-0852554435 accessed in March 2018 and January 2019

[10] https://www.ghanaWeb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/The-Role-Of-Women-In-Ghana-s-Development-159773 by columnist Tuokuu, Francis Xavier, Ghana Web April 1, 2009 and accessed January 2018