

Politics



“There cannot be true democracy unless women's voices are heard. There cannot be true democracy unless women are given the opportunity to take responsibility for their own lives. There cannot be true democracy unless all citizens are able to participate fully in the lives of their country.”

— Hillary Clinton, former U.S. Secretary of State

Boosting women's parliamentary representation in Ghana (2)

By Dr Samuel Kofi Darkwa

THE first part of this article examined the issue of comparatively low female representation in Ghana's parliament. With only 40 out of 275 parliamentary seats occupied by women, which is 14.5 per cent, the percentage of female representation falls significantly below the global and sub-Saharan averages of 26.7 per cent and 27.1 per cent, respectively. This situation is likely to worsen in the 2024 elections as many female incumbents lost their primaries. To address this in the short-term, political parties should take steps to support their female parliamentary candidates and the Affirmative Action Bill should speedily be passed into law. In the medium to long term, the 1992 Constitution should be reviewed to incorporate proportional representation and gender quotas to ensure that women are better represented. Finally, the creation of a Second Chamber would allow for the inclusion of more women in Ghana's decision-making processes.

Three barriers to women's parliamentary representation in Ghana

The current article (Part 2) discusses three barriers (economic, cultural, and educational) to women's parliamentary representation in Ghana and how they can be addressed.

Factors

First, women's comparatively low economic power in Ghana makes it difficult for females to excel in politics. This perpetuates women's political and economic



• Lydia Seyram Alhassan — NPP MP for Ayawaso West Wuogon



• Comfort Doyoe Cudjoe-Ghansah — NDC MP for Ada



• Zanetor Agyeman-Rawlings — MP for Klottey Korle



• Tina Naa Ayele Mensah — NPP MP for Weija-Gbawe



• Agnes Momo Lartey — NDC MP for Krowor



• Darkoa Newman — NPP MP for Okaikoi South

marginalisation. It is explained by the “chicken and egg” phenomenon between economic power and political power, which is self-reinforcing, as those with economic power are also likely to have political power, and vice versa. Unfortunately, politics has been monetised in Ghana. It takes approximately \$693,000 to win a parliamentary seat on a National Democratic Congress (NDC) or New Patriotic Party (NPP) ticket. This is beyond the reach of many women. Moreover, campaign financing is often tainted by corruption. Successful candidates must find ways to pay back their financiers. Some people accuse female politicians of giving sex in exchange for

campaign financing and this deters many women from venturing into politics.

Second, cultural barriers hinder women's political participation, including seeking political office. Cultural barriers are reflected in proverbs depicting women's presumed place in society, such as “baa t n nyadowa na nt n atuduro” (it is a woman's job to sell garden eggs, not gunpowder), “baa t tuo a twere barima dan mu” (if a woman buys a gun, it is kept in a man's room), “baa Yaa Asantewaa” (the Iron Lady; Lady Yaa Asantewaa), “Alomo gyata” (wild woman), and “baa kayirikayiribombom” (a witch; bloody woman). In addition,

families at times discourage “their” women from engaging in politics due to negative cultural perceptions.

Third, the comparatively lower levels of education of many women in Ghana put them at a disadvantage against most of their male counterparts when seeking political office. Furthermore, the relatively high dropout rates of girls from schools do not help to advance their education. This undermines their ability to participate both in politics and in democratic governance.

The way forward

Addressing these issues requires policy and attitudinal change to ensure that women have equal opportunities in Ghana. Consequently, changing negative cultural norms is important and appropriate. Therefore, institutions like the National Commission for Civic Education, the media, civil society, and faith-based organisations could usefully champion this course of action.

Second, the issue of public funding of political parties

should be addressed, as it has the potential to curb corruption and promote women's political participation if properly developed and implemented. In addition, policies of financial inclusion where targeted products are tailored towards specific segments of the population (the marginalised and excluded) are to be targeted at women, especially those in politics. Again, those who win their seats should be reimbursed to curb corruption.

Third, more female-targeted educational policies should be developed and effectively implemented, especially in rural areas. Equally important is a targeted policy towards female dropouts. Families should be educated and supported to prioritise their girls' education and help them pursue their careers, including politics. Additionally, capacity-building training for women candidates is to be designed to get them into positions of power. This should be followed by capacity-building products tailored to improving their effectiveness while in office, to ensure that they succeed in their careers because too often, it appears that women are easy targets. They are more easily brought down than their male counterparts and rarely given a second chance when they make mistakes.

Finally, political parties should reserve seats in certain strategic areas such as their strongholds, the Greater Accra Region, and other metropolises (urban areas) for female candidates. The justification of this proposal is based on the analysis of the 40 seats held by the NPP and NDC. Out of the 40 seats (20 each for the NDC and NPP), the NDC got seven while the NPP got six from Greater Accra alone, which is 32.5% (13÷40×100). The remaining 67.5 per cent (27 seats) were from their strongholds. Table 2 provides the list of Female MPs from Greater Accra. Furthermore, female incumbents should not be allowed to be contested by male candidates across the nation till we reach parity of representation.

Although these proposals may be resisted by men, party officials must be determined to explore them as they are “low-hanging fruits” that can significantly boost female parliamentary representation and advance Ghana's democracy.

The writer is a Political Scientist

List of Current Female MPs from Greater Accra

Name	Constituency	Party	Name	Constituency	Party
Darkoa Newman	Okaikoi South	NPP	Agnes Naa Momo Lartey	Krowor	NDC
Lydia Seyram Alhassan	Ayawaso West Wuogon	NPP	Cudjoe Comfort Doyoe	Ada	NDC
Sarah Adwoa Sarfo	Dome Kwabenya	NPP	Linda Obenewaa Akweley Ocloo	Shai Osudoku	NDC
Sheila Bartels	Ablekuma North	NPP	Rita Naa Odoley Sowah	La Dadekotopon	NDC
Tina Gifty Naa Ayeley Mensah	Weija Gbawe	NPP	Sophia Karen Adukuaku	Domeabra/Obom	NDC
Ursula Owusu	Ablekuma West	NPP	Theresa Lardi Awuni	Okaikwei North	NDC
			Zanetor Agyeman Rawlings	Klottey Korle	NDC