

# Gender

## Women leaders dialogue to improve social policymaking

By Rebecca Quaiocoe Duho

**T**WENTY-FIVE women leaders made up of feminist economists, women entrepreneurs, women in academia, trade unionists, researchers, development practitioners, traders and other professionals have met in Accra to set the agenda for gender transformational social policies in the country.

The meeting, organised by the Network for Women's Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT) with support from the Open Society-Africa, was to facilitate dialogue among the women leaders to start a discourse on social policymaking that prioritises gender transformative approaches to address the needs of women, youth and marginalised groups.

Specifically, the meeting sought to start a conversation on the economy and social implications of austere measures on livelihoods, identify and prioritise key issues, and propose recommendations.

### Gender transformative approaches

Dr Mrs Esther Ofei Aboagye, who moderated the meeting in her opening remarks, said the COVID-19 experience had provided insights into ways in which certain assumptions about the structure and performance of the Ghanaian economy impacted various

sections of the population differently.

"We have gained a better understanding of how personal services delivery, physical mobility, location and other factors could make a difference in whether a family eats or not. We have also acquired insights into how protective or safety net efforts like providing water, food packages, micro-finance support or even prophylactic vaccines could be differently accessed, socially culturally feasible and/or fitted in with people's living arrangements," she said.

Describing what gender transformative approaches were, she said it went beyond addressing gender discrimination and unequal access to resources and benefits to address the structural causes of gender inequality, as well as went beyond capacity strengthening and learning to changing mindsets, shifting mental models, values and beliefs.

Gender transformative approaches, she said, involved examining, challenging and adjusting the underlying causes of gender inequality; strengthening equitable gender norms and creating systems that support gender equality.

She said while gender transformative approaches aimed at meeting practical gender needs such as knowledge and skills, and access to productive resources, they also worked towards addressing strategic gender interests, including decision-making power, position and status in society, they also triggered changes in agency, social

relations and social structures.

### Binding commitments

Giving out some thoughts, she said the policy architecture, legislation and guiding frameworks of the country required urgent attention, adding that the inability of "our country to follow up on the Affirmative Action Bill, our stalled efforts at Gender-Responsive Budgeting, the "expired status" of several sector gender policies are indicative of this".

She stated that it was important to have binding commitments to ensure attention to the differential concerns and effects that economic policy could have on women and different sections of the population.

She called for more careful attention to efforts at social protection interventions, targeting and monitoring of the impacts that these were having, adding that the idea of productive inclusion and decent work needed to be more rigorously and consciously included in policymaking to cushion women and vulnerable populations.

She said to achieve gender transformation, political

commitment at all levels was required and added that at the individual and group levels, "our gender-transformative actions and initiatives must encourage demand for action and accountability". She said that required reflection, awareness and readiness to engage, offer ideas, shake off the creeping cynicism that nothing would actually change and take proactive action.

**It was important to have binding commitments to ensure attention to the differential concerns and effects that economic policy could have on women and different sections of the population.**

### Structural adjustment reloaded

The Convenor of NETRIGHT, Professor Akosua Darkwah, who in her submission described the current economic happenings in the country as "structural adjustment reloaded", said people,

especially women, should not take the country's current situation 'lying down' but that there should be a concerted approach by all to tackle it as they unfolded.

She said the meeting was, therefore, to start the conversation to help shape the course of history as, according to her, the COVID-19 pandemic had also aggravated the situation, which had affected all people across the board.

However, she said women bore the brunt more due to their additional responsibility of care work and, therefore, if nothing was done to change the narrative now, the economic conditions of women would be worse off than before.

The Head of NETRIGHT Secretariat, Patricia Akakpo, in introducing the project, said NETRIGHT was implementing a two-year advocacy intervention on Empowering Women for

Change: Advocating for Gender Transformative Social Policies through Feminist Mobilising in Ghana.

The project, she said, was premised on the economic situation of the country post-COVID-19 and aimed to achieve a sustainable shift towards gender-transformative social policies and practices.

She said the project sought to do this by mobilising and empowering broad constituencies of women across the country and empowering them to drive systemic change by demanding gender-transformative social policymaking.

The expected project outcomes, she said, were to reshape the discourse on social policymaking to prioritise gender transformative approaches that address the needs of women, youth and marginalised groups.

### Participants

Participants in their various submissions said, among other things, the government's effort to raise more revenues, through aggressive tax policies on industry and formal sector enterprises and employment, including the effects of debt restructuring, although had affected all, was, however, affecting female entrepreneurs differently.

They also lamented the current utility challenge, especially the electricity situation of the country, saying it was pushing more women into unemployment as one entrepreneur in the food processing business said she had to throw away 50kg of flour any time she was in the process of manufacturing and the light went off.

Others also spoke about how informal women, who were not into banking, had now come to embrace mobile money but were now being charged levies and taxes on them thereby eroding their profits.

They said all the above and many more factors impacted women differentially and in more ways than men, taking into account their obligation to manage homes, children, extended families and social responsibilities that involved their practical inputs.

Writer's

email:rebecca.quaiocoe-duho@graphic.com.gh

• The women leaders after the meeting. Fifth from left is Betty Mould Iddrisu, former Attorney General and Minister of Justice

