

Gender

International Women's Day: A call for women's care work, recognition in politics

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UNPAID, unseen and undervalued—these are just a few words that capture the reality of women's care work and the scant recognition they receive in the political sphere.

A nuanced gender perspective on affirmative action, political appointments and the intrinsic value of unpaid care work unveils a troubling truth: these critical issues have frequently been neglected in the framework of Ghana's policies. Ghana's recently completed ministerial vetting process has triggered many discussions concerning competency, governance and the President's political nominations. Nevertheless, one notable feature of the screening process was the frequent mention of nominees' spouses.

In a nation where women have been struggling to secure enough seats at the decision-making table, the unexpected prominence and glorification of wives during the ministerial vetting process raises significant concerns: Why do men highlight their wives' importance when it serves their interests? Why does women's contribution become relevant only when it benefits their husbands' political aspirations?

This tendency generates important discussions about gender inclusion, power structures, the broader implications of the Affirmative Action Law and the often-overlooked contribution of women's unpaid care and domestic work to Ghana's economy. This discussion also ties into the broader feminist demand for a well-being economy that values care work and ensures equitable resource distribution for women.

Selective Recognition: The convenient acknowledgement of women's significance

Several nominees specifically



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mentioned their spouses during the ministerial vetting process, using them to validate their competence, morality or connection to key national issues. Statements like: "My wife is my biggest adviser," "My wife is an industrious woman," and "I have been sensitised to gender issues because of my wife."

How many of the nominees who are highlighting their wives' contributions are also advocating policies that would alleviate women's unpaid care burden? Women—wives, daughters and mothers—are often eulogised to indicate progress and address gender issues. However, the stark reality is that women remain significantly excluded from meaningful decision-making roles within government.

Having observed keenly, we find the disproportional increase of nominations and appointments of women disturbing. Although we recommend the selection of a female Vice-President as the highest effort in women's political leadership in Ghana, the AAG strongly believes that this should be the standard, not the exception, reflecting a commitment to female political equality. High-ranking women must be matched by greater representation at all levels of government to ensure their

perspectives influence policy beyond symbolic roles.

The Affirmative Action Law enacted in 2024 aims for 50 per cent female representation by 2030, requiring at least 30 per cent of women in political and public decision-making by 2026. Yet, President Mahama's recent appointments show a stark disconnect between policy and practice. Of 42 ministerial appointees, only seven (16.7 per cent) are women; among 13 deputy ministers, only two (15.4 per cent) are women. Additionally, the Ghana Statistical Service (2023) reports that only 26 out of 86 leadership positions are held by women. While praising women at vetting sessions is welcomed, it is crucial to ensure they have equal access to power and leadership. Ghana must move beyond political rhetoric to implement genuine systemic change.

Unpaid Care Work: The backbone of the economy yet ignored

A feminist well-being economy recognises that economic progress should be measured not by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth but by how effectively it meets social needs, promotes gender equality, and addresses the redistribution of care work. An essential aspect

of this conversation is the recognition, redistribution and reduction of unpaid care work, which serves as a significant barrier preventing many women from entering leadership positions.

Unpaid care work including childcare, elder care, and domestic responsibilities—acts as a hidden pillar of the economy but remains largely unrecognised and uncompensated. Many women who are celebrated for their professional achievements are often overburdened with domestic responsibilities that limit their leadership opportunities. Women's unpaid labour effectively subsidises the formal economy, enabling men to engage in political and economic activities without interruption. However, this labour is neither counted in GDP calculations nor compensated in any meaningful way.

Ghana's genuine commitment to gender equality and economic justice must go beyond political rhetoric and implement policies that:

1. Recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work by investing in public childcare, improving parental leave policies and creating time-saving infrastructure such as piped water and clean energy.
2. Ensure that the feminist well-being economy is a central focus in economic planning, incorporating women's unpaid labour into national budgets, labour policies and social protection systems.
3. Implement and enforce the Affirmative Action Law in political appointments and economic policymaking to prioritise women's economic empowerment, ensure access to decent work (such as ratifying ILO conventions) and improve social protection.

Beyond Wives: True gender inclusion must be institutionalised

As social justice advocates, we strongly recommend that women's recognition should not be limited to their roles as wives of powerful men. Their competence, leadership skills and accomplishments should be valued on their merits—not merely when they enhance the public image of a political nominee.

With the very commendable step that Ghana has taken in enacting the Affirmative Action Law, there needs to be a deliberate shift toward structural inclusion:

1. Ensure full enforcement of the 40 per cent representation requirement, allowing more women to occupy ministerial, parliamentary and leadership roles.

2. Move beyond a symbolic acknowledgement to make genuine investments in women's leadership and political participation.

3. Recognise and economically value unpaid care work as part of Ghana's feminist well-being economy approach.

4. Ensure that political parties view women not just as campaign strategists but as actual candidates and decision-makers.

IWD 2025: "Accelerate action"

Ultimately, women's influence should not be contingent upon circumstances. The theme for International Women's Day 2025, "Accelerate Action," reminds us that achieving gender equality requires genuine, legally enforceable change rather than mere platitudes.

We encourage all parliamentarians and ministerial nominees to keenly advocate policies that empower all women. If we recognise the value of women's contributions as a country, then it must be reflected in leadership roles, government positions and national decision-making—not just in carefully chosen words.

Furthermore, women's unpaid care work—often dismissed as a "family duty"—must be fully acknowledged as a significant economic contribution to sustaining households and by extension, the entire country. Ghana cannot attain a feminist well-being economy where women enjoy equal opportunities in both paid and unpaid employment without recognising, minimising and distributing the efforts involved in this crucial work.

As a recognised social justice organisation, we emphasise the need for concrete actions that go beyond words. It is time to ensure that all women—whether they are wives, professionals, farmers, girls or caregivers—receive the recognition, opportunities and leadership roles they rightfully deserve.

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