

Gender

Affirmative action accelerating Ghana's gender equality



By Doreen Iliasu

GHANA'S journey toward gender equality took a significant step forward with the passage of the Affirmative Action (Gender Equality) Act on July 30, 2024.

This landmark legislation aims to eliminate systemic barriers that have historically limited women's participation in governance, business and society.

By setting ambitious targets for female representation and institutional reforms, the Act provides a structured approach to accelerating gender inclusivity across sectors.

The Affirmative Action Act outlines clear policies to promote gender equality, ensuring that both the public and private sectors take deliberate steps to enhance women's representation and empowerment.

Some of its key provisions include public sector representation, where the Act mandates a minimum of 30 per cent female representation by 2026 and 50 per cent by 2030, in governance and decision-making roles.

This requirement extends to ministerial positions, the Council of State, constitutional bodies, the Public Service, District Assemblies and other presidential appointments.

Private sector

In the case of the private sector, businesses are expected to integrate gender-inclusive policies. Employers must ensure fair hiring and promotion practices to boost women's participation at all levels.

Companies that comply with these guidelines may benefit from tax incentives and better access to public contracts, whereas those who fail to do so could face financial penalties and imprisonment.

Relative to education and health initiatives, recognising that gender disparities often begin in childhood, the Act includes provisions to improve girls' access to education.

These measures include scholarships for girls, gender equality education in school curricula, policies to stop child marriage and teenage pregnancies and improved access to reproductive health services.

The intent and purpose of Ghana's Affirmative Action Act, if effectively implemented, can significantly bridge gender gaps across multiple sectors.

Intending to create systemic change

in leadership, economic participation and social mobility for women, it is incumbent on the enforcers of the law to set concrete targets and reinforce accountability.

Gender parity

Achieving true gender parity requires a collective effort from the government, private sector and civil society. Organisations must go beyond compliance and actively foster an inclusive culture where women are empowered to succeed.

The private sector, especially financial institutions, plays a critical role in advancing gender equality. Stanbic Bank Ghana, for example, has proactively embraced gender-inclusive policies even before the enactment of the Affirmative Action Act.

Stanbic Bank Ghana has implemented a series of strategic gender initiatives aimed at fostering inclusivity, career advancement and leadership development for women within the organisation. A key focus is targeted leadership development, with the bank setting ambitious goals for female representation at leadership levels.

Programmes such as Blue Heels and Ignite Women in Leadership have been designed to offer structured training and mentorship, equipping women employees with the skills and confidence needed to excel in leadership roles.

In addition, the bank emphasises workplace inclusion and career advancement through initiatives like the Blue Fusion Women's Forum, which provides a platform for career growth and professional development.

Complementing this, Stanbic Bank has established comprehensive policies to create a conducive work environment that supports both men and women.

The bank also prioritises talent development, actively identifying high-potential female employees and offering career acceleration programmes to prepare them for leadership positions.

Through these efforts, Stanbic Bank has already surpassed the Act's 2026 target of achieving 30 per cent female representation in the workforce and remains committed to advancing gender inclusion even further.

Biases

Despite the progress made, there are persistent cultural stereotypes and societal norms that hinder the full realisation of gender equality in Ghana.

Unconscious biases among hiring managers and workplace structures that do not adequately support women still pose challenges. To overcome these barriers, organisations must first recognise and acknowledge the existence of gender disparities within their structures.

Addressing these issues requires deliberate action, particularly in eliminating unconscious bias in recruitment and promotions, ensuring that opportunities are based on merit rather than implicit prejudices.

Additionally, governments and businesses must work together to

improve policies that support a healthy work-life balance.

Initiatives such as flexible working arrangements and comprehensive parental leave policies can create more equitable workplaces, fostering an environment where both men and women can thrive professionally and personally.

A truly gender-equal Ghana means equal access to education, healthcare and employment for all, reflective of the country's demographic composition.

As one respondent put it, "Not including women is akin to fighting with one hand tied behind your back".

By working together - government, private sector and civil society - Ghana can build a future where women are not just included but are active decision-makers and leaders.

The Affirmative Action Act provides the framework, but its success depends on continuous commitment and collaboration from all stakeholders.

Stanbic Bank's leadership in women's empowerment initiatives is a good example of how institutions can drive real change under the framework of the Act.

With sustained efforts, Ghana can achieve true gender parity and find a pathway to the full potential of its people and economy.

The writer is the Head, Legal and Governance, Stanbic Bank.

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• Dr Agnes Naa Momo Lartey, Gender Minister