

# Gender

## Implications of electing women into decision making positions

By Jacqueline Parditey & SheVera Anzagira

**T**HE role of women in parliament and leadership of all forms cannot be overemphasised in this era of sustainable development. While this is significant, many women have seen a lot of obstacles in recent times.

According to a 2023 UN data, women make up 26.5 per cent of Members of Parliament. Globally, less than one in four Cabinet Ministers is a woman (22.8 per cent).

Women's equal participation and leadership in political and public life are essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The striking fact is that women are underrepresented at all levels of decision-making worldwide, and this makes achieving gender parity in political life difficult. The 2021 Global Gender Gap Index by Afrobarometer ranked Ghana 117th out of 156 countries - 23rd in sub-Saharan Africa - on its progress (World Economic Forum, 2021).

### Global data

2024 statistics by the UN have revealed that just 19 countries have a woman head of state, and 17 countries have a woman head of government. There are only 15 countries in which women hold 50 per cent or more of the positions of cabinet ministers leading policy areas.

The five most commonly held portfolios by women cabinet ministers are women and gender equality, followed by family and children affairs, social inclusion and development, social protection and social security, and Indigenous and minority affairs. Available data affirms that only six countries have 50 per cent or more women in parliament in single or lower houses: Rwanda (61 per cent), Cuba (56 per cent), Nicaragua (54 per cent), Andorra (50 per cent), Mexico (50 per cent), New Zealand (50 per cent) and the United Arab Emirates (50 per cent). A further 22 countries have reached or surpassed 40 per cent, including 13 countries in Europe, five in Africa, four in Latin America and the Caribbean, and one in Asia-Pacific.

### Ghana's progress

Although Ghana was the first to achieve independence, several countries hold the belief that it has failed to be a trailblazer as far as women in politics are concerned. Women's voices in Ghanaian society have been the backbone of community strength and



• Prof. Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang, Ghana's first female Vice-President, being sworn into office

resilience.

However, their journey in the political landscape has mostly been met with both formal and informal barriers. These voices have mostly been quiet, while their contributions are undervalued in an environment where voices vie for attention and power. Amidst the struggle against traditional gender roles and societal expectations, however, Ghanaian women are stepping into the political arena as beacons of hope and change-makers, reshaping the governance landscape and inspiring inclusion.

The first female member of parliament was in 1958 when Mabel Danquah was elected as the only female member. Shortly after her appointment, the government saw the need to introduce the Affirmative Action Bill. This influenced the first parliament from 1955 to 1966 when ten women secured parliamentary seats. This monumental achievement gave women interest in assuming similar positions.

In the 1960s, a total of 19 women got the nod to represent their regions as members of parliament. However, this opportunity was short-lived, when eighteen female members lost their seats to their male counterparts during the next election, representing a fall of women in Parliament.

Four years later, five women were elected into parliament. The decline was shocking, reminding Ghanaians of the country's failure to ensure proper participation of women in politics to fight for the interest of women and girls.

### Fourth republic

The birth of the fourth republic gave hope to women to aspire to political positions. In the first parliament of the Fourth Republic in 1992, 16 female parliamentarians were elected to represent their regions. The number increased in 1996 to 18 women. Four years later, 19 women were recorded in Ghana's history. Progressively, there was another epic rise, with 25 women in 2004 securing seats. In 2008, the number dropped to 20 women and rose to 29 in 2012.

During the Seventh and Eighth parliaments of the fourth republic, the country recorded 35 and 40 female legislative members respectively.

Out of the 119 females who stood for the 2024 Parliamentary election, the 9th parliament is welcoming 40 females, made up of 20 new members and 20 old members who have maintained their seats.

In 2024, Africa celebrated a one-percentage-point increase in women's representation in the African Parliament—from 24 per cent in 2021 to 25 per cent.

This achievement, revealed by the International IDEA Women's Political Participation in Africa Barometer, signifies progress. However, we must move beyond superficial celebrations. Women's roles in political development deserve recognition and appreciation.

### Shift in political landscape

Ghana is witnessing a remarkable shift in its political landscape. From

being confined to homes for domestic work, women have, in recent times, overcome the stereotype, rising to crash glass ceilings. From grassroots activism to parliamentary positions, Ghanaian women are making their mark, driving change and advocating for a more inclusive and equitable society, affirming the Affirmative Action (Gender Equality) Act.

Ghana's 2024 elections featured remarkable female vice-presidential candidates ready to make a difference. A total of three females representing their various parties as vice presidents and one presidential candidate raised eyebrows about the rising recognition of gender equality. They were Elizabeth Sam, running-mate of the Liberal Party of Ghana (LPG); Dr Maryam Esaka Kriesie, running-mate of the New Force Movement; Professor Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang, running-mate of the National Democratic Congress (NDC); and Nana Akosua Frimpong Sarpong Kumankuma, Presidential candidate for the Convention People's Party (CPP), stepping forward to shape Ghana's legislative arm of government.

### Impact of women's participation in decision making positions

The election of women into Ghana's 9th Parliament is a timely intervention for women and girls. This is because there will be more attention and debates on issues confronting women. These issues include scrapping the tax on menstrual towels, increased funding of the Domestic Violence Fund, ratification of ILO C190 and the assent of the Anti-Witchcraft bill, among others.

While we wait in anticipation of these very significant changes, more can be done to increase women's participation because we need balanced political participation and power-sharing between women and men in decision-making as enshrined in the internationally agreed target set in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Also, the need for a more robust parliamentary women's caucuses can be encouraged. Women demonstrate political leadership by working across party lines through parliamentary women's caucuses—even in the most politically combative environments—and by championing issues of gender equality, such as the elimination of gender-based violence, parental leave and childcare, pensions, gender-equality laws and electoral reform.

Together, women can achieve the 30 per cent balance for political participation as enshrined in the Affirmative Action Law. This will improve the state and interest of women and girls, thereby achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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