

# Gender

## ECOWAS Commission pushes for 50/50 gender parity in elective bodies by 2035

By Diana Mensah



**T**HE ECOWAS Commission has called for bold electoral reforms across West Africa to ensure equal political participation of women and young people, as the regional body targets 50/50 gender parity in elective positions by 2035.

Speaking at the opening of the ECOWAS Regional Consultation on Political Participation and Leadership of Women and Youth in Accra last Tuesday, the Director of the ECOWAS Gender Development Centre, Sandra

Oulaté Fattouh, said findings from a 2024 ECOWAS study on gender inequalities, revealed that women occupy only 18.4 per cent of parliamentary seats across the region, while youth under 35 remain severely underrepresented in legislative assemblies.

The figures, she said, highlighted a troubling paradox given the numerous initiatives undertaken by member states to promote inclusive political participation.

"This dismal situation of women and young people in the political space of our region raises the urgency of finding consensual and innovative solutions for the effective participation

of women in political life as stipulated in the spirit of Vision 2050," she said.

### Meeting

The four-day regional consultation, which was from February 17 to 20, was organised by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP), in collaboration with the ECOWAS Gender Development Centre.

It aimed to advance the political participation and leadership of women and young people across West Africa.

The meeting brought together policymakers, gender experts, youth leaders and development partners from across the sub-region to assess progress, identify persistent barriers and develop practical recommendations to strengthen inclusive governance.

The meeting saw the election of the members of the Bureau and adoption of the agenda, and coincides with the 50th anniversary of ECOWAS, founded on May 28, 1975, to deepen human, economic, social and cultural integration in the sub-region.

### Reset

The Chief Director of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Dr Afisah Zakariah, on behalf of the sector minister, said the government was systematically advancing its RESET agenda across all sectors to remove

barriers that hinder the full participation of women and youth in national development.

She said the RESET agenda is being pursued deliberately to address structural, institutional, financial and social barriers that continue to limit the full participation of women and youth in governance.

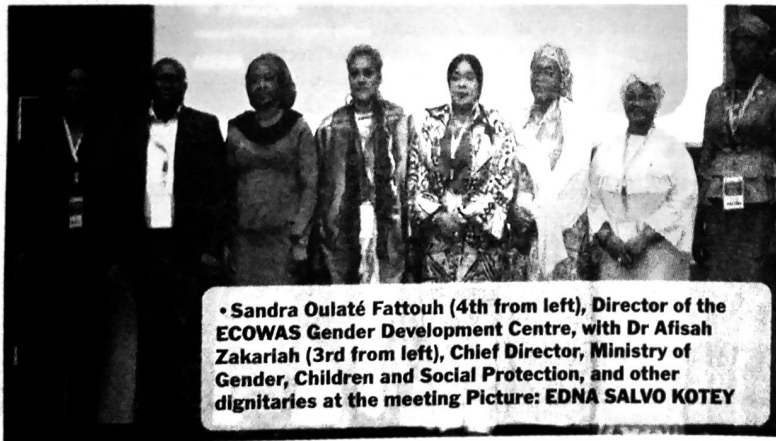
That, she said, was "evident" in the historic appointment of the country's first female Vice President and the increasing inclusion of women and young people in key decision-making roles.

### Efforts

The Senior Advisor to the Vice President of the Commission and Programme Coordinator for Human Capital Development, Ruben K.D. Johnson, in an interview, called for renewed and coordinated efforts to close the persistent gender gap in political and economic participation across West Africa.

He said that gender equality remained one of the bloc's key priority areas.

According to him, effective human capital development could not be achieved without the full participation of women and young people in both political and economic spheres.



• Sandra Oulaté Fattouh (4th from left), Director of the ECOWAS Gender Development Centre, with Dr Afisah Zakariah (3rd from left), Chief Director, Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, and other dignitaries at the meeting. Picture: EDNA SALVO KOTÉY