



67 Years of independence: Where are the women?

By Rebecca Quicoe Duho

GHANA continues to have more females than males according to the 2021 Population and Housing Census (PHC).

The female population is now 50.7 per cent of the total population with 49.3 per cent being males.

While women constitute more than half of the country's population, they represent only 13.8 per cent of members of parliament, and constitute less than 30 per cent of ministers, members of the Council of State, heads of public institutions and boards.

The first parliament of the Fourth Republic had 16 women out of the 200-member parliament. This figure increased to 18 women in the second parliament and to 19 women in the third parliament. In 2004 and 2008, out of the 230 members of parliament, only 25 and 20, respectively, were women. In 2012, 30 women, representing 10.9 per cent of the 275 MPs, were voted into power. This percentage slightly increased to 13.1 per cent in the 2016

parliamentary elections. The 2020 parliament presently has only 40 women, representing 14.55 per cent of the 275 members.

Data from the Electoral Commission (EC) on the just ended District Level Elections (DLEs) showed a continuous low representation of women in local governance as female representation is now 4.1 per cent. The percentage of elected women assembly members was an increase of 0.3 per cent compared to the 3.8 per cent in the 2019 election.

The numbers are a decline from over the years; with 10 per cent in 2006, to six per cent in 2010 and 5.4 per cent in 2015.

Though equal representation and participation of men and women in decision-making is a precondition for improved functioning of a democratic society, women continue to be under-represented in the decision-making processes of the country.

Women participation

Even though Ghana was the first country to gain independence in Africa, it is still many scores behind other African countries in the area of gender and politics, and is ranked 107 out of 153 countries on the Global Gender Gap Report of 2020.

Women participation in decision-making is not just a right, but also key to sustainable development. In a democracy, it is important that every part of the population is equally represented. Having both men and women involved in decision-making broadens the perspectives, increases creativity and innovation, diversifies the pool of talents and competences, reduces conflicts, and improves the process of decision-making. Indeed, women's participation in decision-making in general has benefits not only to women but to the general society as a whole.

Ghana has endorsed and ratified a number of laws at the international level to promote gender equality. The country ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1986, thereby committing to substantive equality between men and women in all spheres and article eight governs equality in public life.

At the regional level, the Protocol to the African Charter on the Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa called for equal representation of women with men at all levels in all electoral processes.

Also, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance of 2007

prescribed gender parity in representation at all levels including legislatures and likewise the Maputo protocol, a charter on women's right to social and political equality with men, which was adopted by the AU in 2003.

According to the Africa Human Development Report (2016), promoting women's political voice and leadership will help to drive gender equality and women's empowerment and accelerate the achievement of all the sustainable development goals (SDGs). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) five acknowledges this fact and therefore has a target to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

Female ministers

The proportion of female ministers in Ghana fluctuated over time, with the highest in 2012 and the lowest in 1992 and 2004. As of 2021, women held 18 of the 85 ministerial portfolios. This is however an increase in the proportion of female ministers from 19 per cent in 2017 to 21 per cent in 2021.

Furthermore, even though females outnumber males in 10 of Ghana's sixteen regions, just two regions have female regional ministers, four of these regions have no female parliamentarians, and two regions have no female MMDCE as at 2022. This demonstrates that Ghana's female population high dominance is not mirrored in the gender makeup of its leadership, for both appointed and elected leaders.

The closest Ghana has ever come to achieving the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) recommended 30 per cent proportion of female representation in decision-making is in 2012, when it recorded a 28 per cent proportion of female ministers.

Notable women

The 1995 Beijing conference has become the principal document on gender equality across the globe. The conference symbolised the commitment of the international community to eradicate economic, social, cultural and political issues, which engender asymmetrical conditions between men and women.

Also, the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5.5 particularly advocates for a gender balance in politics by championing the full participation of women in leadership and decision-making roles.

Even though the 2020 parliamentary elections so far has the highest number of women parliamentarians since the country attained independence in 1957,

it still falls short of the UN recommended minimum of 30 per cent threshold and that of the Beijing conference.

Some notable achievements in the women's front in terms of women in decision-making positions over the years are the appointment of Georgina Woode, as the first female Chief Justice in 2008, the election of Joyce Bamford-Addo, as the first female Speaker of Parliament in 2009, the appointment of Charlotte Osei as first female Chairperson of the Electoral Commission in 2015 and the appointment of Frema Osei Opara as Ghana's first female Chief of Staff.

Others are the selection of Professor Jane Naana Opoku Agyemang as the running mate of one of the two major political parties for the 2020 general elections, Dr Esther Offei Aboagye, first female to head the Institute of Local Government and Dr Grace Bediako, first female Government Statistician among others.

Training

It is therefore imperative that continuous gender training be

institutionalised to help propel more women who are willing and interested to take up decision-making positions at both the local and national levels.

In addition, there is the need for training programmes for

district assemblywomen by government institutions, non-governmental organisations and development partners so that women can be effective to engage and participate in local government processes and programmes.

There is also the need to push for legislations and reforms in the constitution that will support quotas and affirmative actions, to promote the increase of the number of women in decision-making spaces and public life, as it is clear that in spite of all these charters which Ghana has signed, the need for the equal voice and representation would not happen without legal intervention.

Evidence around the world shows that most countries which have a decent representation of women in decision-making have used some form of affirmative action including Uganda, Rwanda, and South Africa and therefore there is the need for Ghana's parliament to pass the Affirmative Action Bill (Gender Equality Bill) into law soon.

To ensure that women are able to take control of their space there is also the need to support income-generating initiatives for women at the local and even national levels to economically empower them to finance their campaigns.

Also addressing gaps in delivery of social services such as access to water, health facilities and education can create the needed time and space for women and girls to participate in politics and public life.

Writer's email: rebecca.quicoe.duho@graphic.com.gh



• Georgina Woode, Ghana's first female Chief Justice