

# GOVERNANCE

NEWSLETTER

A Publication of The Institute of Economic Affairs

Vol.17 No.6 November/December 2011

## TOWARDS GREATER REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN NATIONAL GOVERNANCE

by

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### Summary

The importance of women's participation in national governance has been established at the highest level of international policy on human rights, equality and equity. In African democracies, the case for women's participation has gained further momentum, as women's participation in politics and governance has been recognized as an indicator of democratic governance. Yet, in the West African sub-region, the percentage of women in national governance remains below the minimum target of 30%.

This Policy Brief presents the case for women's participation in national governance as a requirement of democratic governance and a condition for achieving the MDGs. It recommends proportional representation, combined with quotas, as the strategy for increasing Ghanaian women's representation in national governance.

**IEA  
Ghana**

**Governance Newsletter** is a bi-monthly publication of The Institute of Economic Affairs, Ghana, an independent public policy institute. This edition is sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). Subscriptions to the **Governance Newsletter** are made available to those who make contributions to The IEA. Address all correspondence to:

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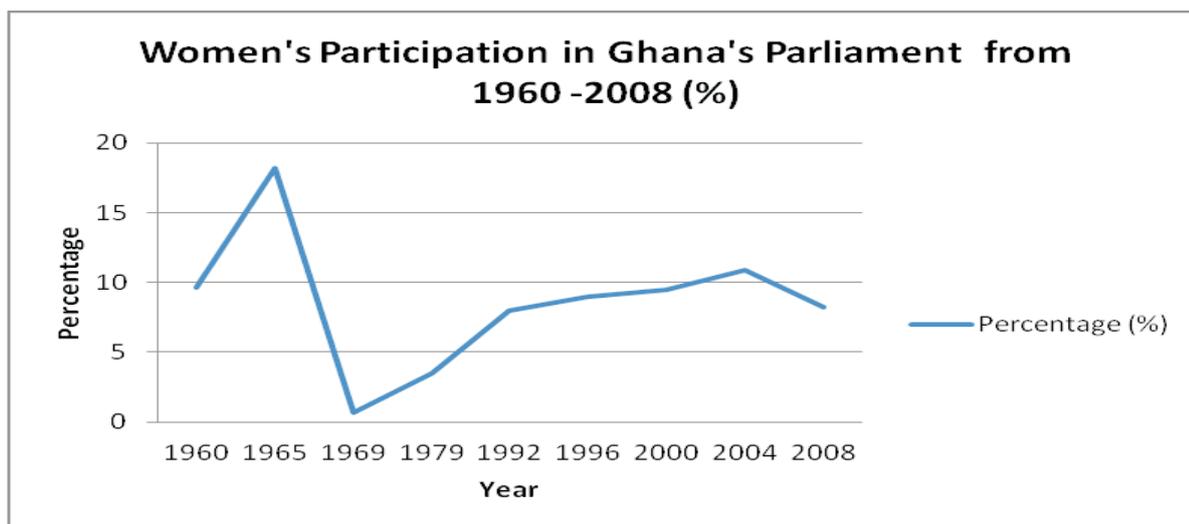
ISBN 0855-2452

The call for increased participation of women in national governance in Africa gained momentum in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as many Sub-Saharan countries transitioned from one-party state systems and military rule, to democratic rule and multi-party systems. In Ghana, this call began as early as the 1960s, resulting in 10% representation of women in Parliament. Ghana's transition to democratic rule strengthened the case for women's participation. Again, the formulation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 gave strength to the arguments for women's participation, as

governance experts indicated that without women's involvement and participation at high levels of decision making, it would be difficult to achieve the MDGs.

However, the institutional and structural changes that accompanied Ghana's transition to democratic rule have not given sufficient attention to women's representation in governance. Ghana's statistics thus show a fall in women's participation in Parliament over the past 50 years.

### Women's Participation in Parliament from 1960-2008



This trend is explained by various studies which show that while many Ghanaian women vote in elections, a high proportion are not members of parties and do not hold office at any levels in parties. The low participation of women in political parties, coupled with the increasing monetization of politics and political campaigns, and growing political violence and intimidation, creates insecurity for women and builds resistance to their participation from spouses and

other family members. Interventions by government and other development partners aimed at addressing the downward trend in women's participation tend to be too close to elections to make an impact, and are often not sustained after elections.

The proportion of seats held by women in national Parliaments is a key indicator for monitoring a country's progress on MDG 3 on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.

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The UN system proposes a 30% benchmark for women's participation in national governance. At the present rate, however, Ghana is not likely to meet this benchmark by 2015. This becomes more critical as Parliamentary and Presidential elections approach in 2012. Without Affirmative Action of some sort, these elections will not show much progress in women's participation and representation, and Ghana will miss the target. The following short, medium and long-term measures are necessary.

### **Short Term Measures**

1. Advocacy must build public support for legislation on affirmative action. It should be based upon Ghana's treaty obligations; the statistics on Ghanaian women's representation in politics and national governance; and trends in sub-Saharan Africa. The advocacy process for an affirmative action bill must be spearheaded by the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, in collaboration with the Media and civil society.

2. Ghana's Constitutional reform process presents an opportunity for deep institutional and structural changes to be made to Ghana's governance structure, through provisions that promote and protect women's position as full participants in national governance, at national levels of politics, decentralized levels of governance and within non-political positions of decision-making. This opportunity should be recognized and taken full advantage of by:

- i) Addressing low participation of women in governance through the Constitutional review process.
- ii) Moving beyond aspirational Constitutional provisions on women's participation in national governance to

justiciable and enforceable provisions. The Constitutional Review Commission must recommend a provision that will oblige governments, appointing authorities, and political parties to ensure gender balance in politics and national governance.

- iii) Presenting Ghana's proposed public funding of parties as a key leverage point to compel adherence to affirmative action by political parties. Parties which fail to implement mandated quotas could have funding withheld, or reduced proportionately, as currently occurs in Burkina Faso.

3. A deliberate effort at strengthening the Women's Caucus of Parliament should be made, as support to women's caucuses enhances women parliamentarians' abilities to influence Parliament across party lines, and to get relevant legislation for the promotion of gender equality passed.

4. Organizing women as a constituency that transcends political divides would strengthen their hand in demanding increased political representation of women. Women's CSOs, in concert with women's groups and associations in churches and mosques, trades and vocations may need to consider establishing a league of Ghanaian women voters to make specific, time-bound demands on political parties, for women's political participation. A league such as this could be the basis for establishing a *Hawa's List* to raise funds to support women candidates who commit to advancing gender equality.

5. Political parties must be encouraged to institute voluntary quotas to encourage more women to stand and to be elected as candidates,

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as well as to occupy executive positions at different levels in the party. Such actions by political parties would send strong signals to the electorate about their commitment to women's participation in politics and governance.

6. Timeliness of action and continuity of responses beyond 2012 by development partners is critical. There must be commitments by Development Partners to prioritize interventions on increasing women's representation in Parliament and to financially support the process beyond the 2012 elections. Gender should be a focal issue in Multi-Donor Budget Support. Development Partners should develop long term plans with specific activities and timelines beyond 2015.

#### **Medium-Term measures**

1. Executive Action must be taken to implement an Affirmative Action Policy to achieve 40% representation of women in politics and national decision-making

2. In addition to resources provided for women candidates in the Public Funding of Political Parties Bill, a Trust Fund for Women in Politics, supported by the government of Ghana, the private sector, and development partners must be set up to fund women candidates.

3. Robust Citizenship Education must be undertaken by NCCE, CHRAJ, CSOs and the media to affirm equality and respect for both sexes as well as their leadership potential. Changes in curricula and pedagogy by the Ghana

Education Service and tertiary institutions must be made to affirm gender equality, respect and valuation of both sexes as well as their leadership potential. CSOs must intensify their work with faith-based groups and men, to enlarge the constituencies for gender equality.

#### **Long-Term Measures**

1. There must be continuing executive and legislative action to ensure parity of women and men in national governance and public life in Ghana

2. An Institute for Women in Politics must be established with secure funding to support women already in Parliament, and women aspirants. The Institute would be a centre for continuous engagement with women politicians and aspirants to ensure that increased women's representation in national governance achieves both quantity and quality, and ensures that politics becomes more gender-responsive.

3. Political parties must reform their internal structures, cultures and practices to encourage parity between women and men in holding offices within the parties, and in standing as candidates for national office

4. Moves must be made towards proportional representation of the different interest groups in the Ghanaian society, in order to deepen democracy.

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