



Contributing

Under-representation of Women in Leadership in Ghana: Action needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

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Purpose

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, it intends to trigger a rethinking on the subject of women's participation in political and public life at the local and national levels. It also seeks to examine a challenging and urgent subject for Ghana. Second, it provides insights that will be used as a substantive contribution to inform programmes and monitoring trends.



Summary

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 political spheres and economic decision-making processes in Ghana.

The 1992 Constitution of Ghana guarantees women's political rights, but there remains a paucity of female representation in government and many public spaces. The number of women in Ghana's leadership has increased marginally over time, yet it still remains low. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), an International body that has been reporting on women in parliament, as of March 2022 only 26.1% of all national parliamentarians globally were women which still represents a low increase compared to the UN benchmarks set at 30% female representation in decision-making positions. In Ghana, the situation is no different. In 2012, there were 29 (11%) females and 246 (89%) males among the 275 Members of Parliament (MPs). After the 2016 general elections, Ghana's Parliament recorded 35 (13%) female MPs (Madsen, 2019) and 240 (87%) male MPs out of the 275 Members of Parliament, while the 2020 general elections recorded 40 female MPs (14.5%) and 235 (85.4%) male MPs.

The situation at the local assembly level is even worse, signifying a decline. An analysis of results from the District Assembly elections over the years shows a decrease in the number of women elected from 478 in 2006 of a total of 1772 women candidates, to 216 in 2019 of a total of 909 women candidates¹². Various research on the low participation of women has pointed to a number of factors. For example, Gyimah and Thompson (2008) reported on women's participation in the Nadowli District in Ghana and revealed that intimidation, lack of recognition and illiteracy³⁴ were among the major obstacles and at the national level, lack of resources to finance campaigns⁵, gender based violence, lack of political will by parties to support women, political parties putting forward men as candidates in their strongholds as those with high chances to win. Also, according to Oguonu (2004), lack of resources to execute planned projects, corruption, ignorance, discrimination and exclusion prevented women from contesting again. Lack of self-confidence, unsupportive family, and their traditional gender roles were the predominant factors that barred them from active politics⁶⁷.

¹ <https://www.modernghana.com/news/990851/womens-participation-in-local-governance-in-ghana.html>

² <https://www.clgf.org.uk/whats-new/news/ghana-holds-local-elections/>

³ <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/gender-ghanaian-politics-brief-analysis/>

⁴ <https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/RHSS/article/download/46113/47612>

⁵ Madsen, D. H. (2019). Gender, Power and Institutional Change – The Role of Formal and Informal Institutions in Promoting Women's Political Representation in Ghana. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 54(1), 70–87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909618787851>

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ Michael Tagoe & Ellen Abakah (2015) Issues of Women's Political Participation and Decision-Making in Local Governance: Perspectives from the Central Region of Ghana, *International Journal of Public Administration*, 38:5, 371-380, DOI: 10.1080/01900692.2014.938822

Ghana's Progress Towards Gender Parity in Decision Making

Despite the history of low participation and representation of women in traditional political institutions, Ghana has worked to improve women's representation in decision-making since its independence. The first post-independence regime, led by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, established the National Council for Ghana Women in 1960 to promote female empowerment. This was to compensate and recognize the key roles women had played in the political struggle for independence.⁸

Ghana has endorsed and ratified a number of laws at the international level to promote gender equality. At the International level, Ghana ratified CEDAW in 1986, thereby committing to substantive equality between men and women in all spheres. Article 8 governs equality in public life.

The Beijing Platform for Action, 1995, Paragraph 90 (a) called for equal representation of women and men, if necessary, through positive action, repeating the ECOSOC target of 30% women in decision-making levels by 1995. MDG 3 mandated a Gender Equality target of 50% in National Parliaments by 2015 which was not

achieved, and the current SDG 5 calls for gender quality. The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality, targeted women's representation at a minimum of 30% in parliament and local government by 2015.

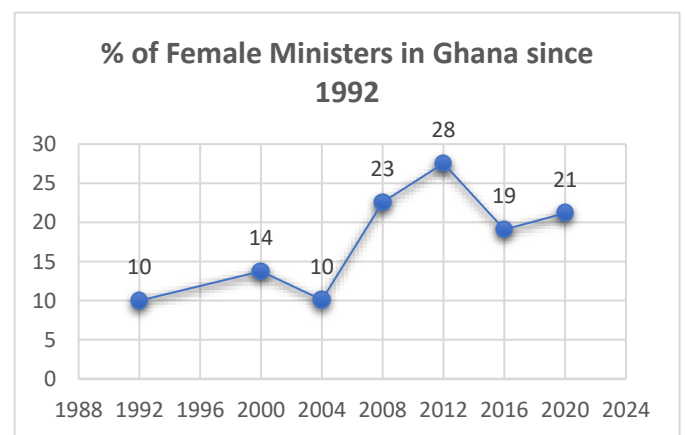


Figure 1: Ghana has over the years seen an increase in the number of female ministers appointed, from 10% in 1992 to 21% in 2020.

⁸ <https://www.modernghana.com/news/990851/womens-participation-in-local-governance-in-ghana.html>

⁸ <https://www.clgf.org.uk/whats-new/news/ghana-holds-local-elections/>

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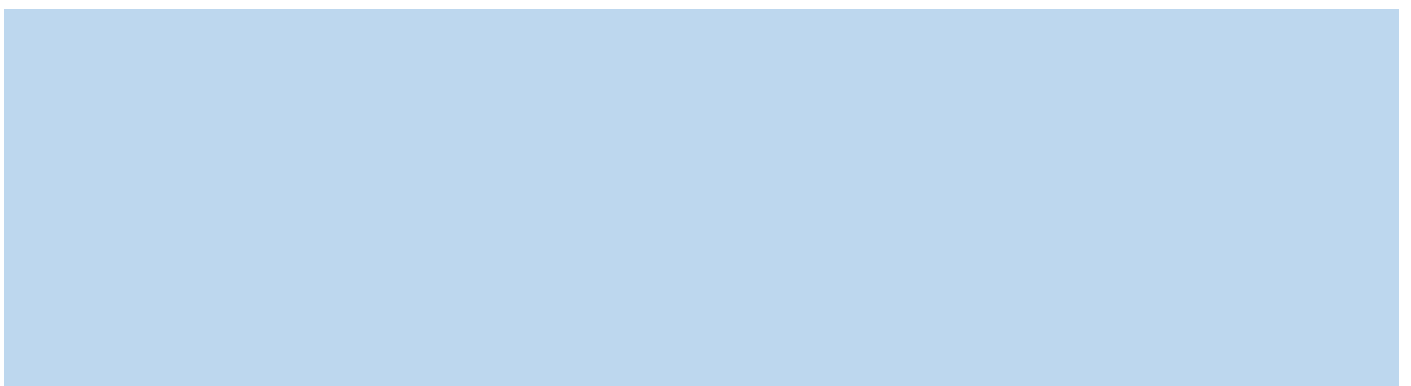
⁸ Madsen, D. H. (2019). Gender, Power and Institutional Change – The Role of Formal and Informal Institutions in Promoting Women's Political Representation in Ghana. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 54(1), 70–87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909618787851>

⁸ *ibid*

⁸ Michael Tagoe & Ellen Abakah (2015) Issues of Women's Political Participation and Decision-Making in Local Governance: Perspectives from the Central Region of Ghana, *International Journal of Public Administration*, 38:5, 371-380, DOI: 10.1080/01900692.2014.938822

⁸ (Allah Mensah, 2005)

At the regional level in Africa, the Protocol to the African Charter on the Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa 9 (1) (b) called for equal representation of women with men at all levels in all electoral processes. 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. 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.



Is Women Under-representation in decision making a problem?

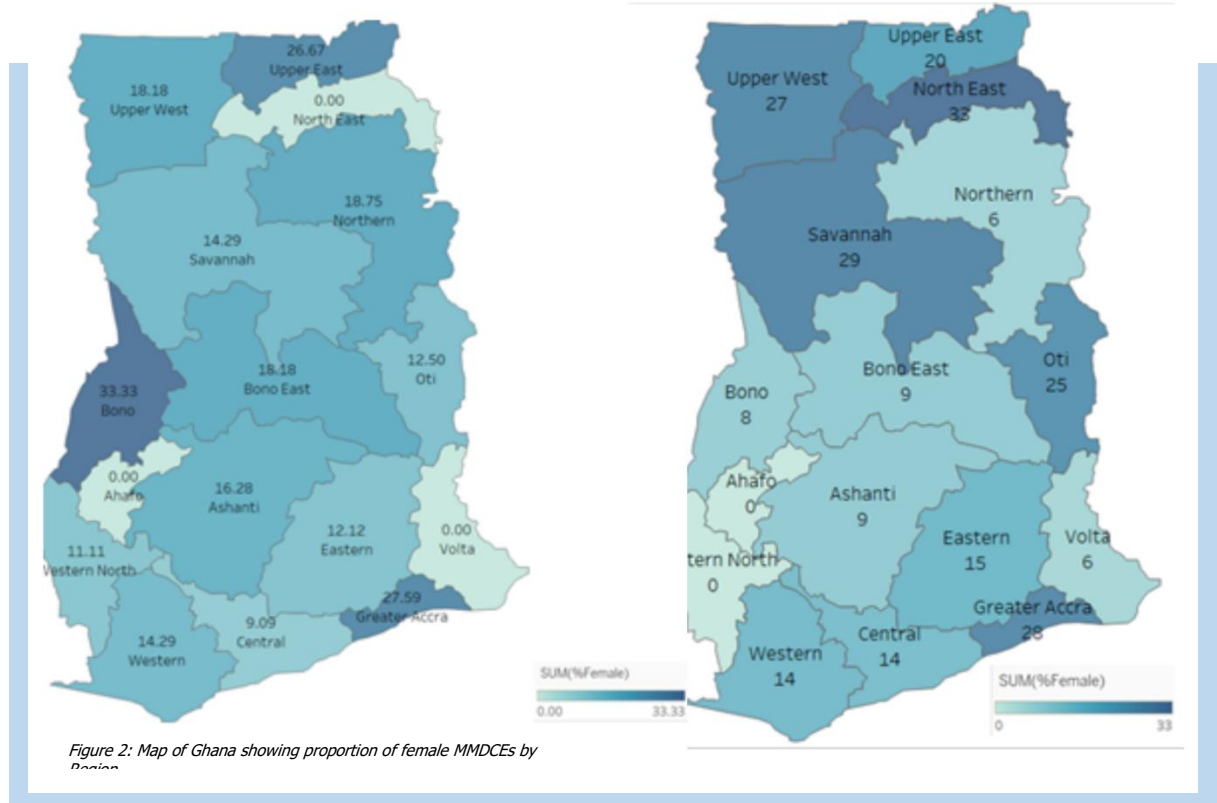
According to the 2020 Population and Housing Census, more than half of Ghana's population is made up of women (50.7 percent). Despite the advances towards recognition of women's political, economic and social equality with men, there is a continuing inadequate representation of women in leadership at senior positions in the national and international institutions that govern our society (Sweetman, 2000). For example, women's representation in parliament is currently at 15%, which is quite low in comparison to their population. It also falls short of the minimal UN-recommended proportion of 30%.

More women are needed in senior leadership, women's opinions must appear in decision making. Women bring different experiences and perspectives to political decision making that are likely to exert a positive impact on both the culture and parliamentary politics and the quality of policy making. It is said that women's traits such as consensus seeking, and gentleness could have a positive effect on general political climate, introducing a different style of exercising power. Women assumed abilities to listen and consider different points of view could moderate conflicts. Women's distinct experiences serve to enhance their input into health, education and social protection policies.

The positive impact of women's experiences on policy making benefits their families and society. Women's absence from political leadership means that, half of the population would not be adequately represented (Galligan and Clavero, 2008). It will therefore be difficult for Ghana to achieve people-centered inclusive sustainable development without women engagement in public debate and decision-making processes. Gender inequality leads to discrimination, social injustice, and slow economic progress due to a serious neglect of a large part of society's human resources. Gender inequality manifests itself in all aspects of human life; economy, security, education, health, politics etc. The fewer women in formal decision making, the less likely it is that the decision made are working in favour of gender equality (Tsikata, 2009).

The representation and participation of women in formal decision-making positions is therefore an important factor to improve gender equality and development. Sweetman (2000) mentioned that achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning.

Women in local Governance in Ghana



Enhancing female representation in various decision levels has over the years gained currency, with some advocates pushing for a 50/50. Considering Assembly elections and appointments of MMDCEs, Ghana, though progressing, has a long way in achieving gender parity in its local governance. In 2019, two regions, Northeast and savannah registered a less than 1% proportion of female assembly members. *This is shown in figure 2.*

In 2021, proportion of female MMDCEs increased from 14% in 2017 to 15% in 2021. Though insignificant, it is safe to say this increase is a step in the right direction. The Ahafo and Western North regions on the other hand, had no female MMDCEs in 2021.

Women Parliamentary Representation in Ghana

The representation of women in parliament is at its highest level since 1960, with 40 women MPs out of 275, accounting for about 15% of the total. The table below shows the very slow increase, with 2020 having the highest number of women and 1969 with the lowest. Ghana had its first woman speaker of parliament in 2009 in the person of the Rt Hon Joyce Adeline Bamford-Addo JSC. Though this progress is commendable, achieving a fair, equal and appropriate representation of women in Ghana's legislative processes remains a major challenge.

YEAR	1960	1965	1969	1971	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020
SEAT	104	104	140	140	200	200	200	230	230	275	275	275
WOMEN	10	19	1	5	16	18	19	25	20	31	38	40
% OF TOTAL	9.6	18.2	0.7	3.5	8	9	9.5	10.9	10	11	13	14.5

Table 1: SOURCE: (Allah Mensah, 2005) (Madsen, 2019) desk reviews on GhanaWeb 2022

The table below displays the number and proportion of female parliamentarians by region in 2021. Four out of the 16 regions recorded zero representation of women though on average each of the regions had at least 1 woman contesting.

Region	Male	Female	Total No. of Seats	%Male	%Female
Bono	12	0	12	100.0	0.0
Northern	18	0	18	100.0	0.0
Upper West	11	0	11	100.0	0.0
Western North	9	0	9	100.0	0.0
Western	16	1	17	94.1	5.9
Ashanti	43	4	47	91.5	8.5
Bono East	10	1	11	90.9	9.1
Eastern	29	4	33	87.9	12.1
Oti	7	1	8	87.5	12.5
Upper East	13	2	15	86.7	13.3
Savannah	6	1	7	85.7	14.3
Ahafo	5	1	6	83.3	16.7
Northeast	5	1	6	83.3	16.7
Volta	14	4	18	77.8	22.2
Central	16	7	23	69.6	30.4
Greater Accra	21	13	34	61.8	38.2
Total	235	40	275		
Percentage	85.5	14.5	100.0		

Table 2: Source Desk Review, 2022

Female Ministers in Ghana

As shown in figure 1, the proportion of female ministers in Ghana has fluctuated over time, with the highest in 2012 and the lowest in 1992 and 2004. As of 2021, the Ghanaian government had appointed six central government ministers, ten deputy ministers, and two regional ministers, representing 20, 26, and 13 percent respectively. Only 18 of the 85 ministerial portfolios are held by women. This is however an increase in the proportion of female ministers from 19% in 2017 to 21% in 2021.

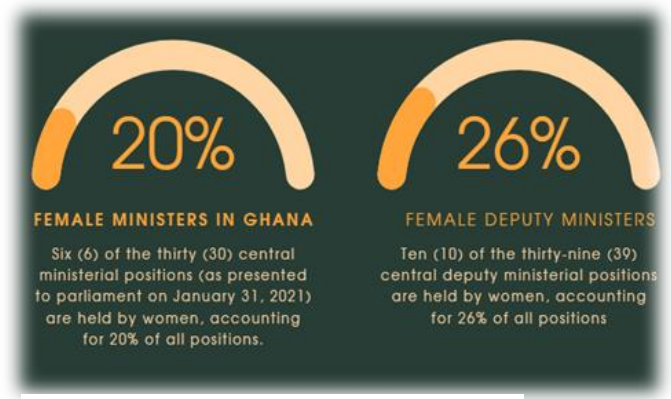


Figure 4 Female Ministers in Ghana 2021 SOURCE: Desk Review

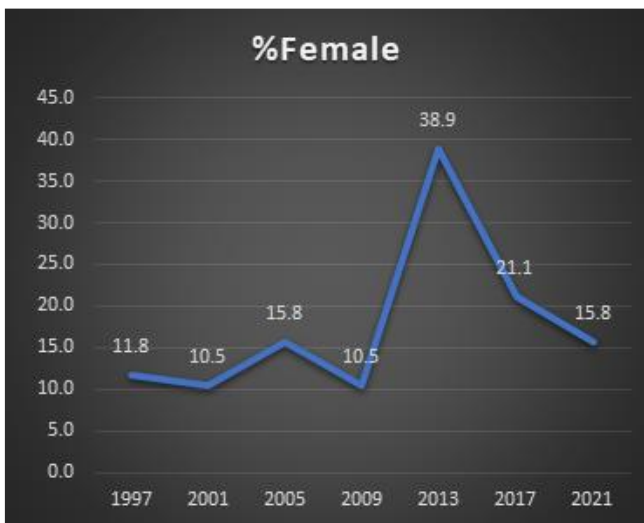


Figure 3 Percentage of Female Cabinet Ministers since 1997.

Women as Cabinet Ministers

The Cabinet of Ghana is the executive power of the government of Ghana and can be termed to have the overall responsibility for the governance of the state. Since 1997, successive presidents have maintained on average nineteen (19) cabinet ministers. However, across these years, the number of female cabinet members averaged just three (3). Figure 5 shows that the largest share of female cabinet ministers was in 2013, at 38.9 percent, while the lowest was in 2009, at 10.5. Currently, there are three women cabinet ministers, accounting for 16 percent of the total.

Head and Chairpersons of Government Agencies

Out of 123 government institutions data reviewed, only nineteen (19) are headed by women as of November 2022, accounting for only 15% of the total.

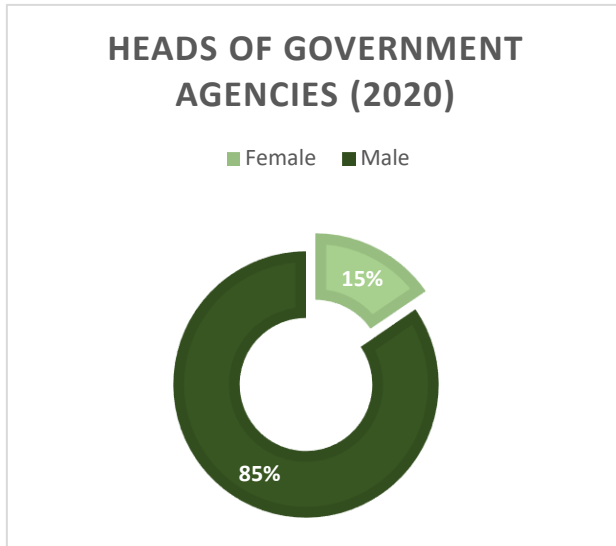


Figure 5: Heads of Government Agencies in Ghana 2020

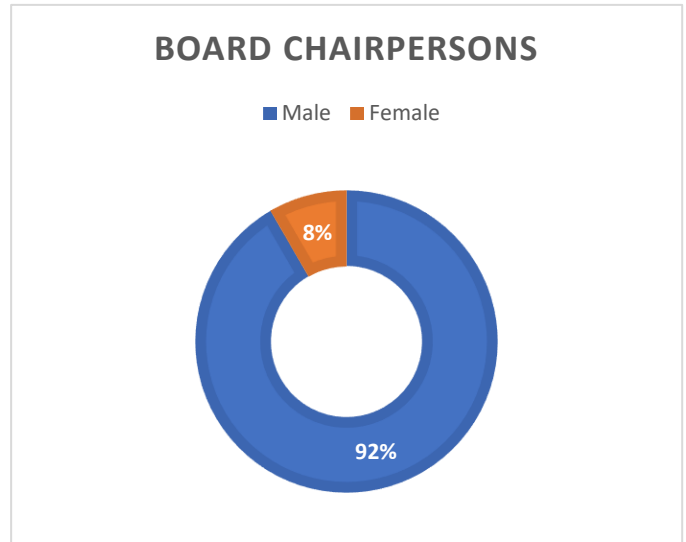


Figure 4: Board Chairperson of 108 sampled government agencies

In Ghana, the board chairperson of state institutions is usually separate from the institution's head, while there are cases where one person holds both posts. Based on 108 institutions, males make up 92 percent of board chairpersons in Ghana. When compared to the proportion of female-led organisations, it can be seen that some institutions led by women have men as chairpersons.

Female Representation in the Private Sector

In Ghana, discussions about female equality and representation rarely include female inclusion in the private sector. Taking into account 27 private firms listed on the Ghana Stock Exchange in 2022, only 2 firms are headed by women. This however is not surprising, according to the World Bank, women's productive role is often stifled due to prejudices and taboos against hiring women.

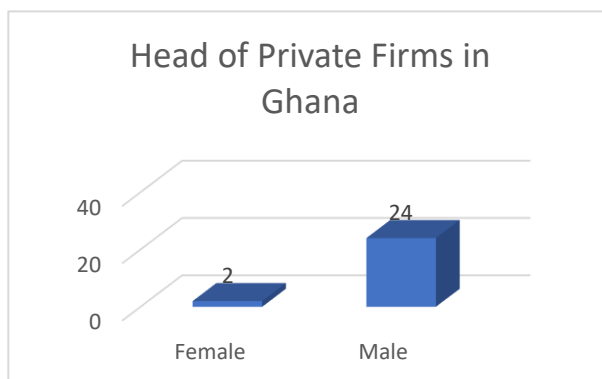


Figure 6: Heads of GSE listed firms 2022

Box 1: KEY FINDINGS

- 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 in 2022. This demonstrates that Ghana's female population's high dominance is not mirrored in the gender makeup of its leadership, for both appointed and elected leaders.
- The assembly level has the lowest female representation of any decision-making level in Ghana.
- Once again, no decision-making level in 2022 meets the recommended 30 percent minimum female representation.
- The Volta region tops the chart as the region with most females in Ghana according to the 2021 population census. On the contrary, the region, along with the Northern region, are among the regions with the lowest proportion of female MMDCEs, at 6%.
- The closest Ghana has ever come to achieving the ECOSOC-recommended 30 percent proportion of female representation in decision making was in 2012, when it recorded a 28 percent proportion of female ministers.

The data above shows the under-representation of women in various leadership positions in Ghana. There are several factors that contribute to these numbers, the socially ascribed roles and attributes which are mostly subordinate, grounded in patriarchy, generally predicated on the belief that they should be docile, not aspire too high, and remain within the boundaries set for women. These beliefs are then reinforced by custom and practice such as forced/early marriages, lack of education which limit women and young girls' ability to aspire for leadership positions.

Gender discrimination in access to and control over productive resources and social services exacerbates women's vulnerability to poverty and lack of resources to finance their campaigns. Political parties and financiers are wary of sponsoring female politicians, partly because they believe they are unlikely to win and partly because of the patriarchy that exists regarding the place for women in public life. Another challenge that affects women's rise to take up leadership is the lack of structures and nature of work environment to support women. Most offices or work environments lack child friendly facilities for women with children, the late-night meetings, travels among others make it difficult for women⁹ to balance work and family. For most women, they must make a choice of taking up leadership positions that require more of their time away from their family.

⁹ ['TOWARDS INCREASED WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION IN PARLIAMENT' | Betty Mould-Iddrisu \(wordpress.com\)](#)

Promote participation in public institutions

- a. Reforms in Parliament itself to ensure gender equality in numbers and positions within the governing body. Parliament should produce gender-sensitive working policies and mainstreaming gender in all its works.
- b. Culture and infrastructure in Parliament - offices both public and private should be monitored to ensure facilities available are suited for men and women.
- c. Continuous gender training should be institutionalized to address the lack of awareness of gender issues from the local to national level.
- d. Political parties should support women candidates by lowering the filling fee for party level elections, support their campaigns and also encourage them to contest other positions beside the usual women organiser positions.
- e. Identify men who champion gender equality and support them to advocate for change.
- f. On balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making, there is the need for the media to be putting across a balanced image of women and men. The important role played by journalists in ensuring impartial media coverage of women's participation in elections and gender-balanced participation in decision-making is critical. There must also be equal representation of women and men in the media. Journalists have the particular task of combating stereotypes, and focus on women's skills and responsibilities.
- g. Development partners and civil society should support capacity building workshops for women aspirants for both local assembly and parliamentary elections to build their confidence. There is also the need for mentorship by other women who are already in parliament or in assembly.
- h. Training programs are required for district assembly women by government institutions/NGOs and development partners like UNDP for women to effectively engage and participate in local government processes and programs.
- i. Governments should nominate at least 50% of females of the 30% it is required to at the district assembly level. This is to ensure that more women have the opportunity to participate in local governance if they are not elected in the 70%. However, this should be backed with advocacy of the elected assembly members and other stakeholders that government consults.
- j. Push for legislations and reforms in the constitution that will support quotas and affirmative actions (affirmative action bill) to promote the increase of number of women in decision making spaces and public life.
- k. Support income generating initiatives for women at the local level to economically empower them to enable them to finance their campaigns.
- l. 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.
- m. Development partners should take keen interest in gender issues and ensure that government policies they support have very strong gender sensitivity in order to achieve intended developmental objectives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there have been some successes but the challenges facing women are enormous. This requires all stakeholders on board to change the narrative for the better, as we work towards achieving the Agenda 2030 and the aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063 that calls for “an Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth”. UNDP’s [Country Programme Document 2023-2027](#) has identified the low representation of women in decision-making and leadership platforms and will partner with other key stakeholders to improve the numbers and level of participation. A lot of lessons have been learnt and there is an opportunity to improve the election and appointment of women in the upcoming district level elections in 2023 as a good starting point.



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