

PROPOSALS FOR MULTIPARTY LOCAL GOVERNANCE REFORMS

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Addressing Exclusion and Marginalization

In a winner-takes-all electoral context where winners monopolize control over the entire executive arm of the state at both local and national level, various social groups have been marginalized in democratic and local governance. This was one of the principal reasons why various stakeholders including Chiefs, women, youth and minority groups vehemently opposed the first effort to amend Article 55(3) in 2019.

Currently, the Chiefs are only to be consulted in the appointment of 30 percent of government representatives in the assemblies. Chiefs are particularly aggrieved that even in local governance, they have been sidelined inspite of the pivotal role they play in traditional society. Similarly, women who constitute just over half of the Ghanaian population also continue to experience heavy underrepresentation at every level of government. The 2020 parliamentary election demonstrated the continuing marginalization of women in national and local-level decision making processes. Women comprised 13.8 percent of parliamentary candidates and 14.5 percent of elected parliamentarians in the 2020 elections.

The level of representation in ministerial positions and local government leadership is equally dismal. The advocacy for the Affirmative Action Bill has, therefore, gathered momentum. The Bill, when passed, will enhance the position of women at all levels of government from 30 percent on initial implementation to 50 percent by the end of the SDGs in 2030.

Women form 50.7% of the total population in Ghana but face marginalization and exclusion in political representation in the country. Their population gives them the power to mobilize and vote to bring change on critical issues in the country.

The 1992 Constitution in various sections guarantees fundamental human rights and makes provision for the protection and promotion of the rights and welfare of women (Chapter 5). Furthermore, the Directive Principles of State Policy stipulate that the state shall actively promote the integration of all peoples and prohibit discrimination or prejudice on several grounds including gender and that the president must ensure the achievement of reasonable regional and gender balance when recruiting and appointing persons to public offices (Article 35, clauses 5 and 6b, 1992 Constitution).

Marginalization of women in governance has been a challenge in Ghana for decades. The Affirmative Action bill is the most important effort to address this gender inequality that has plagued the Ghanaian political and public space. However, there have been various obstacles hindering the passage of this law.

On the positive side, Ghana has passed various legislation at the national level while also creating institutions and implementing programmes to protect the rights of women. Ghana also remains signatory to regional and global frameworks such as the African Union's Agenda 2063, and has ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1986) and the Maputo Protocol (2003), all of which seek to promote human rights and the empowerment of women. Participation in governance and political decision-making remains one of the main areas of inequality against women. A lot still needs to be done to achieve gender parity in representation as the country still lags behind on addressing inclusive and representational issues with respect to the active participation of women in politics

In the current eighth parliament of Ghana, despite the fact that women form 50.7% of the Ghanaian population, they occupy only 14.55% of the total number of seats in Parliament. While this signifies a marginal improvement from 13% in the seventh parliament and 10.7% in the sixth parliament, it is significantly below the global benchmark of 30% representation in National Assemblies or Parliaments. Additionally, although, the number of female presidential aspirants increased from one in the 2016 presidential elections to three in the 2020 presidential elections, these candidates were from the smaller parties that had no real chance of winning the presidential election. At the local governance level, women have faced marginalization as well. Also, the proportion of women appointed as ministers and DCEs has consistently been less than 20% since the fourth Republic. Specifically, the percentage of women holding positions within the District Assemblies has remained below 10% nationwide. In terms of ambassadorial positions, only 12.3% of all politically appointed ambassadors in the Fourth Republic are women (MoFA & RI, 2017). Moreover, the directive that one-third of the 30% members of the MMDAs appointed by the president should be reserved for women has not been enforced (Ayee, 2018).

The World Economic Forum's 2017 Global Gender Gap Report notes that Ghana is behind other Sub-Saharan African countries, such as Rwanda and Namibia, in terms of women's representation. Ghana is in the bottom 25% worldwide for the number of women in parliament (The Conversation, 2020). In Rwanda, women have 61.3% of seats in the lower house of Parliament, making it the country with highest number of women in parliament (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019), while Ghana's 14.5% falls far short of the sub-Saharan Africa average of 27.2% of women in parliamentarians (Inter-parliamentary Union, 2019).

Several factors can be attributed to this systematic under-representation and marginalization of women in the country. One of them is the first-past-the-post electoral system in which the candidate who wins the most votes in each constituency is elected has hindered the effective representation of women in the country.

There is evidence to suggest that marginalization and exclusion of women in political representation has negative impact on governance and institutions. It has been established that increasing women representation in governance leads to improved provision of essential public goods such as education and health, maternity and child care leave as well as increased spending on child care (see Svaleryd, 2009; Clayton and Zetterberg, 2018; Hessami, 2020). Also, greater women representation enhances the quality of institutions by reducing corruption or rent-extraction by those in authority. Further, the presence of women in parliament and decision-making process helps to improve the quality of debate and policy making.

The youth, however have much higher stakes in the positive outcomes of a Democratic Multiparty Local Governance System (DMLGS). Their heightening agitations for jobs, equality of opportunities, and the delivery of effective public goods and services demonstrate their displeasure with the system.

The opportunity to change this system plagued with flaws through a referendum is more likely to offer hope for the youth whose future remains critical in the next 30 years of the republic and douse the heightening tension and threat of violence in the upcoming 2024 parliamentary and presidential elections.

Based on the 2021 Population Housing Census, the largest concentration of voters in Ghana can be found between the voting ages of 18 and 35 years. This age bracket accounted for about 12,690,460 or 74.53% of total voters in the 2020 voters roll (Jonah, 2022). Ghana is indeed a youthful population. Therefore, a winning strategy to easily secure the constitutional threshold of 40 percent turn-out and 75 percent approval in the referendum cannot and should not ignore this grim reality of the youth distributed in the country, especially the six major regions; Greater Accra, Ashanti, Eastern, Central, Western and Northern.

This means that concentrating campaign energy where most votes are located is likely to court national attention and make the possibility of locking-in the proposals through a national referendum before 2024 a national priority.

Currently, PWDs belong to the marginalized groups affected by the exclusionary system of governance at the local level. The question then is, how do we reform the existing local governance system in order to remove the barriers to developing a fully liberal democratic and multiparty governance system in Ghana. The proposed reforms would ensure that the representation of women and other marginalized groups such as the Chiefs, youth, people with disability, among others, would be included in the governance system.

The participation of citizens in politics including PWDs is crucial in mitigating marginalization, promoting local governance, political and social inclusion and advancement of democracy in every nation around the world. The 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution grants every citizen the fundamental rights and freedoms to participate in social and political activities. The Persons with Disability Act, 2006 (Act 715) was thus enacted to promote and protect equal rights of participation of PWDs in the country's political activities.

It can be argued that, Ghana has robust laws and legislations that encourage PWDs to participate in both local and national governance. However, participation in politics by PWDs is low since the promulgation of the Fourth Republican Constitution in all the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) regarding appointments to parliamentary or ministerial positions.

The importance of PWDs participating in the political process of any country has been acknowledged internationally because it enhances their dignity, promotes their fundamental human rights and political awareness. It is through such inclusion of everybody in the political process that democracy would be deepened.

IDEG Publication

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