Gender Equality Policies for Sustainable Development: A Ghanaian Experience.

*Dr. Alice C. Mensah¹ and Dorothy Anima Frempong²,

¹Mathematics and Statistics Department, Accra Technical University, Accra
²Computer Science Department, Accra Technical University, Accra

*Corresponding author: acabakah@apoly.edu.gh ; aliceabakah@yahoo.com

Abstract

Gender equality is a fundamental development objective, and is essential to enabling women and men to participate equally in society and in the economy. It’s a strategy for reducing poverty levels, social injustices among women and men, improving health standards and enhancing efficiency of public and private sector investments and domestic finance. Thus, achieving gender equality is regarded as the attainment of human rights and a pre-requisite for sustainable development. The objectives of the study were identifying the various gender policies, laws in the country and their impact on sustainability. Literature Search method was applied. Although not much had been achieved regarding the targets, results indicate a decline in the poverty gap ratio, increase in election of women to Parliament and District Assemblies, gender parity, etc. For effective implementation of the National Gender Policy, the government has set up national machinery which is well connected to all relevant and necessary stakeholders needed and required for carrying out Gender Equality and Women Empowerment. This will make it possible for the Ghanaian economy to reap the full gender equality benefit towards a sustainable development.

Key words: Gender, Equality, Empowerment, Policy, Sustainable, Development,

Introduction

Gender refers to “social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female”. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed; are learned through socialization and are context/time-specific and changeable (UN 2006). Gender equality is defined by UNICEF as “levelling the playing field for girls and boys by ensuring that all children have equal opportunity to develop their talents. This implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both, women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups women and men. It can then be considered as a human right principle and a development goal vital to accelerating sustainable development. The term Sustainable Development (SD) has been defined variously by many development pundits and organizations in an effort to deepen its feasibility and relevance to humanity. However, the one that appears universally comprehensible is the definition proffered by the Brundtland report in 1987. The Brundtland Commission describes SD as a type of development that strives to meet the needs and aspirations of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs (WCED, 1987). This definition suits the discussion as we look at a country saddled with the challenges of gender inequality and thus, stagnates social progress. As part of a wider 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG), the SDGs were set out to tackle a whole range of issues, from gender inequality to climate change.
The Agenda, unlike the MDGs, has a stand-alone Goal on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. In addition, there are gender equality targets in other Goals, and a more consistent call for sex disaggregation of data across many indicators (UN Women 2015). The development of the SDGs by UN was a multi-year process involving civil society, governments, the private sector and academia, taking into consideration the failings of the MDGs. Goal 5 of the SDGs aims to empower women and girls to reach their full potential, which requires eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against them, including harmful practices. It seeks to ensure that they have every opportunity for sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights; receive due recognition for their unpaid work; have full access to productive resources; and enjoy equal participation with men in political, economic and public life. An analysis conducted by UN women in New York, 2015 on Women and the SDGs, indicates Women have a critical role to play in all of the SDGs, with many targets specifically recognizing women's equality and empowerment as both the objective, and as part of the solution. The following were some of the findings:

- Ending Poverty can only be achieved with the end of gender-based discrimination since gender inequality makes and keeps women poor, depriving them of basic rights and opportunities for well-being (only 20 per cent of landowners globally are women). According to Oduro et al (2011), in Ghana, total and mean value of gross wealth of women is lower than those of men for all asset categories.

- Inequities in food consumption stand in contrast to women’s significant role in agricultural production where they constituting more than 50 per cent of the labour force in parts of Asia and Africa whiles their potential contribution to food security remains constrained by unequal access to land and other productive assets.

- Education empowers individuals to increase their well-being and contributes to broader social and economic gains (accounting for about 50 per cent of economic growth), however over 60% of women are illiterate worldwide.

- Sustainable modern energy fuels development, women are often the primary energy managers and are more likely than men to conserve energy—using up to 22 per cent less. However, women are largely absent in the industries that produce modern sources of renewable energy, comprising only 20 per cent of the workforce. As primary energy managers in households, women could play powerful roles in extending sustainable modern energy.

- Gender discrimination makes women prone to deeper disparities, globally women earn 24 per cent less than men, they are also more likely than men to be in vulnerable employment, with up to 75 per cent of women’s jobs being informal or unprotected in developing countries. It is also estimated that average hourly earnings of women in Ghana is 57% of that of men and that regardless of the type of employment, education, age etc., women earn lower than men (Baah-Boateng, 2009).

Women and girls represent half of the world's population and therefore also half of its potential and their empowerment is essential to expand economic growth and promote social development. Unless women and girls are able to fully realize their rights in all spheres of life, human development will not be advanced. Advancing gender equality is critical to all areas of a healthy society, from reducing poverty to promoting the health, education, protection and the well-being of girls and boys. Ghana’s ability to maximize and sustain
the benefits of gender equality could mean achieving long term food security, reduction in housing deficit, citizenry empowerment, sustainable environment, and intergenerational equity. Hence the study, with the objectives of identifying the various gender policies / laws in the country and their impact on sustainability.

**Gender Policies in Ghana**

The Gender Policy is an integral part of the National development process and reinforces the overall development objectives in the country. It emphasizes Government’s commitment to gender responsive development. The policy complements all policies and programmes of all sectors and defines structures and key target areas for ensuring that gender concerns are routinely addressed in planning activities, as well as in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programme activities.

Gender equality consciousness dates way back in history. Since the attainment of independence in 1957, ten women were nominated and appointed to the legislature based on the introduction of the Representation of the People (Women Members) Bill in 1960 (Breatix Allah-Mensah, 2005). Also, following the first United Nations Conference on Women in 1975, Ghana set up the National Council on Women and Development (NCWD) [now known as the Department of Gender] as the national machinery. The main task of the national machinery then was to support government-wide efforts in the empowerment of women through income generation, social mobilization and social development.

Presently, Ghana’s goals towards achieving Gender Equality and Women Empowerment are guided by the 1992 Constitution, the targets in National Development Frameworks (NDF) (past and present), and the commitments to International Frameworks and Instruments on human rights, social protection, good governance and accountability for development with emphasis on the rights of women, men and children. Article 17 (1) and (2) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana stipulates that all persons are equal before the law. This provision expressly guarantees gender equality and freedom of women and men, girls and boys from discrimination on the basis of social or economic status among others. In addition to commitments to achieve targets of International Frameworks, Ghana has over the years initiated, legal, institutional, policy and administrative measures towards GE, WE and Social Development issues.

The submission of a proposal for Affirmative Action and Gender mainstreaming to the Office of the President by the NCWD after the Beijing Conference in 1995, led to the formulation of guidelines for the promotion of Gender equality, rights and opportunities for women in Ghana. It set the pace for the establishment of an improved administrative framework for addressing women’s affairs by creating Gender Desk Officers (GDOs) in most MDAs. Their role was to ensure that gender concerns are incorporated into sector policies, plans and programmes of MDAs.

**Methodology**

A range of secondary sources has been reviewed and juxtaposed in the context of sustainable Development. The study was conducted using literature search method with particular focus on selected keywords and statements that were relevant to the study.
Results were limited to policy documents on gender to help understand some of the pertinent issues in Ghana in relation to gender equality and sustainability. In all seven (7) constitutional, legislative and key National instruments for gender equality were examined as well as ten (10) National Development Plan / Policy Framework. There was an in-depth analysis of the National Gender Policy, 2015.

Findings

Ghana has made progress in the advancement of gender equality and empowerment of women in political, economic and social spheres over the past decade. The discussion follows a pattern that demonstrates national efforts and achievements of international and other targets that have implications for gender equality and women's empowerment. Table 1 shows the enactment of laws by the Government’s of Ghana as efforts at promoting the issues of women and men. Apart from the Constitutional, Legislative and key National and International Instruments for GE and WE, there are other existing national frameworks contributing to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. Notable ones are; the National Medium Term Development Plans (the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy 1 (2002); Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy II (2005); GSGDA I (2009 – 2013); GSGDA II (2014 – 2017); Affirmative Action Policy of 1998; Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2010-2020 Gender and Agricultural Development Strategy; health sector policy on handling gender equality and Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2010-2020. Table 2 outlines policy statements the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection will oversee and enforce through institutional arrangements.

Table 1: Situational Analysis in National Context

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<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Constitutional / Legislative Laws</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Achievements</th>
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| 1   | The 1992 Constitution of Ghana (Article 17) | Prohibits discrimination of persons on the basis of gender | 1. Election of women to the District Assemblies (DA) showed signs of encouragement with respect to numbers of women contestants, elected, and those appointed over the periods, particularly from 1994 although those elected declined in 2010 from 10.1% in 2006 to 6.47% in 2010. Irrespective of these, women occupy key ministerial positions with some deputized by men, reflecting a demonstration of a level of confidence in women’s leadership. Female parliamentarians have also increased from 8.7% in 2008 to 13.1% in 2016.  
2. Education continues to make progress towards achieving gender parity at all levels of formal education. the Ghana MDG report (2013) indicates that, Gender Parity in schools in Ghana is closest to being achieved at the primary level. |
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Criminal Code Amendment Act, 1998 (Act 554)</td>
<td>Prohibits and criminalizes female circumcision, harmful widowhood rites, ritual servitude and further makes enforcement more effective.</td>
<td>The law courts now interpret this law to pass judgement to such cases.</td>
</tr>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>The Domestic Violence Act, 2007 (Act 732)</td>
<td>Criminalizes all forms of violence.</td>
<td>Setting up a Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) has enabled the Police Service to respond to several cases from family abuse of individual rights to rape, defilement and violence against women.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The Labour Act, 2003 (Act 651)</td>
<td>Reiterates the right to equal pay for equal work “without distinction of any kind”.</td>
<td>The National Employment Policy ensured that every person has the right to work under satisfactory, safe and healthy conditions, and to receive equal pay for equal work without discrimination of any kind.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Human Trafficking Act, 2006 (Act 694)</td>
<td>Addresses trafficking in persons matters and provides technical advice to the Ministry to effectively respond to trafficking in persons cases.</td>
<td>This has gone a long way to support Ghana’s effort at ensuring compliance to human rights in general and women’s rights in particular.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Section 42(g) of the Criminal Offenses Act, 1960 (Act 29)</td>
<td>Repeal of the Section had permitted nonconsensual sex within marriage.</td>
<td>The Judiciary has established two Gender-based and Sexual Offences Courts to expedite the adjudication of cases of violence and abuse.</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>The Intestate Succession Law of 1985 (amended in 1991)</td>
<td>Provides a uniform intestate law.</td>
<td>This has been applicable throughout the country especially when a spouse dies intestate.</td>
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Table 2: Policy Statements and Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Women's Empowerment and Livelihoods</td>
<td>To accelerate efforts and commitments of government in empowering women</td>
<td>Organize collective action to keeping government’s ‘political will’ and increase in commitments to budgetary support; Coordinate a rigorous monitoring and evaluation system; Address and promote socio-cultural and educational issues; etc.</td>
<td>Competing government priorities and Political Will; Weak Gender mainstreaming coordinating role of the Ministry:</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Women’s Right and Access to Justice</td>
<td>To speed up enforcement and domestication of ratified International Treaties policies and strategies.</td>
<td>Facilitate acceptable processes for the enactment and implementation of the policies bills; Develop legal education programmes</td>
<td>Weak legal frameworks, poor institutional infrastructure, lack of knowledge about service delivery points, inadequate legal aid scheme and personnel worsen women’s access to justice.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Women’s leadership and Accountable Governance</td>
<td>To enhance the participation of women in Leadership, Governance, and Decision making at all levels.</td>
<td>Promote enabling political environment and commitments that reaffirm increased political will; Review workplace and common area barriers to effective participation of women; Promote political leadership mentoring for women</td>
<td>Competing government priorities and Political Will; insufficient understanding and knowledge of gender equality and gender mainstreaming.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Economic Opportunities for Women</td>
<td>To improve women’s economic opportunities including engendering macro-economic and trade policies so that the basic and strategic needs of both men and women are addressed.</td>
<td>Facilitate the provision of economic environments to promote more equitable access to income, resources and social services which accelerate poverty reduction programmes; Ensure that women entrepreneurs are involved in the processes and consensus building</td>
<td>Feminization of poverty</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Gender Roles and Relations</td>
<td>To transform inequitable gender relations in order to improve women's status relative to that of men</td>
<td>To improve the culture for understanding gender roles and relationships; Facilitate sector gender policies to transform gender norms, stereotypes, etc. to influence state policy</td>
<td>Insufficient understanding and knowledge of gender equality and gender mainstreaming.</td>
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It was also found that the government has demonstrated national efforts to achieve targets through the establishment of functional Department of Gender (DOG) with regional outfits that work under the MoGCSP. In 2001, the government established a fully-fledged sector ministry, the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWAC) with a Minister of state having Cabinet status through Executive Instrument which was later renamed the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) where social protection and welfare issues have been placed within governmental policy direction. The role of these positions focused on ensuring that gender concerns were incorporated into sector policies, plans and programmes of MDAs. The current national machinery of Ghana that oversees GE and WE issue involves twenty-seven institutions including the Office of the President, Cabinet, National Advisory Board to the MoGCSP, etc. Also through monitoring and evaluation, key actions shall be developed to facilitate annual gender policy performance review which shall involve monthly updates and six monthly monitoring and Quality Assurance visits from the MoGCSP Team.

**Conclusion**

Ghana's goals towards achieving GE and WE are guided by the 1992 Constitution, the targets in National Development Frameworks (NDF) and the commitments to International Frameworks and Instruments on human rights, social protection, good governance and accountability for development with emphasis on the rights of women, men and children. The paper considers gender equality which can bring benefits across all three pillars of SD: economic, social and environmental by reviewing seven (7) constitutional, legislative and key National instruments for gender equality as well as ten (10) National Development Plan/Policy Framework and an in-depth analysis of the National Gender Policy, 2015. Although not much had been achieved regarding the targets, there's been a decline in the poverty gap ratio, improvement in equitable access to justice, election of women to Parliament and District Assemblies, gender parity, etc. It was also revealed that the National Gender Policy focuses on mainstreaming gender equality, women empowerment and social protection concerns by strongly concentrating on the implementation plan of these policies. Systemic challenges and implementation gaps that obstructed the achievements of intended results were identified. These include competing government priorities and political will, lack of effective monitoring and evaluation systems and practice and Socio-cultural, traditional
beliefs and socialization among others. While some important strides have been made in integrating SD in national institutions, it is also clear that the country still lag behind their counterparts elsewhere across the globe in their contribution to gender equality due to financial constraints.

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