

# Enhancing Women's Political Fortunes in Ghana: Is a 50/50 Campaign Realistic?

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## **Abstract**

*The 50/50 Campaign as a tool for enhancing women's political participation has gained currency in recent time. Its call for equal participation of women and men in politics and public office has reinvigorated various activisms globally. This paper examines the Campaign within the context of Ghanaian women's political fortunes. Contesting its feasibility against a background of women's poor performance at national elections and political appointments, it argues that the success stories in countries such as Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Uganda and South Africa are inspirational. Historically, Ghana has shown some leadership in promoting women's political participation such as the landmark People's Representation Bill of 1960. Yet today, women are severely under-represented in Ghana's legislature with only 37 women, forming a paltry 13.5% of the 275-member Parliament. Such persistently grave inequalities have called for more drastic initiatives as the 50/50 Campaign. Although the initiative has spread globally, Ghana has been slow to act. However, the launch of the Planet 50:50 agenda during the 2017 World's Women's Day signals some renewed interest. This paper provides an overview of the Campaign by highlighting its origins, intents and progress. Narrowing down on the Ghanaian context, it examines how women have fared in national elections and political appointments since the Fourth Republic. It finds that although women have done poorly in the past, thus casting doubt on the feasibility of a 50/50 Campaign, there is still great promise in light of the various commitments aimed at promoting women's political participation. It finds that those African countries that have embraced the Campaign have made significant progress in democratic participation and thus offer useful lessons for Ghana. It concludes that like such countries, Ghana can benefit from the Campaign but only if it renews its commitments and pursues a rigorous action agenda backed with resources.*

**Keywords:** 50/50 Campaign, Women in Politics, Gender Parity, Affirmative Action, Democracy

## **Introduction**

In an increasingly democratizing world, electoral politics permissive of citizen right to vote and be voted for has become widespread. The privileging of electoral over imposed systems have come as part of maintaining constitutional rule and democratic governance. While this universal right is thrust on all citizens, male or female, electoral trends show that that right has not been fully enjoyed by all. Factors such as class, gender/sex, race/ethnicity, sexuality and ability, among others, have played various roles in privileging some while under-privileging others thus placing them in a seemingly sub-citizen status. For the purposes of this paper, which takes issue with gender inequalities in electoral politics, diverse literature examined point to the widespread and persistent marginalization of women (Obamamoye, 2016; Shiraz, 2015; Myenzi, 2007). Myenzi (2007) has said that the growing scholarly interest in the subject has been driven by the persistently pervasive nature of the issue. Globally, women continue to suffer various forms of political marginalization. Shiraz (2015) notes, however, that although globally there has been a historic trend toward the exclusion of women in electoral politics, regional and national data point otherwise. Undoubtedly, some inroads have been made. Movement-building and advocacy dating back to the 1970s around the United Nations system and regional and national advocacies and education/training have resulted in increases in the number of women offering themselves for appointed and elected political positions. There have even been increases in the number of women serving as heads of states and governments and in key positions in multilateral and bilateral agencies. However, these episodic successes have not been sufficient in bridging the gaps.

While agreeing with Shiraz (2015) that the situation is improving, Obamamoye (2016:1) explains that:

*Contrary to the assertion regarding general exponential increase in women's political representation in Africa, alarming political marginalization of women in the West African sub-region continues, where women manage to occupy marginal percentage of the elected parliamentarians and subsequently maintain relative inarticulacy in the decision making process of their respective states.*

By inference, although in recent times women's ability to lead has been recognized and acknowledged, this has not been translated into electoral successes. More worrying is that women are yet to obtain due complement of political appointments to such decision-making structures as public boards, cabinets and councils of state. Myenzi (2007) attributes the marginal numbers of women in electoral politics to the mix of cultural and historical imbalances in power sharing which have generated and been

reinforced by a multiplicity of such social institutions as families, schools, colleges, work places, religious entities and political parties. These create and reinforce the imbalances that prescribe women's marginalization.

As Hamah (2015) observes, contemporary global debates have been very much focused on achieving equality and equity for all citizens including women. As such, issues concerning women's rights, for instance, have progressively gained prominence in governmental policy discourses, civil society advocacies and academic literature. Hamah explains that the growing wave of consciousness toward women's participation in electoral political governance worldwide is hinged on some legal and policy frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979. Ghana signed the CEDAW in 1980 and ratified it in 1986 (Shiraz, 2015; CWMG, 2004).

Article 7 of the CEDAW on women in electoral politics declares:

*States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right: (a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies; (b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government; (c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.*

Thus, the CEDAW enjoins governments and relevant stakeholders to make electoral processes free and fair for all. It makes a clarion call for the inclusion of women in not just electoral processes but also appointments to public offices, thus giving credence to the 50/50 Campaign.

Both the Nairobi Forward Looking Principles of 1985 and the Beijing Platform for Action (PFA), a decade later, prioritize gender equality as a means to effective women's empowerment and democratic governance. As Shiraz (2015: 56) explains:

*The PFA identified inequality between women and men in the sharing of power and decision making at all levels as one of the twelve critical areas of concern. The Platform recognizes that the equal participation of women and men in public life and decision making provides a more balanced reflection of the composition of society, while strengthening democracy, and ensuring that women's interests and perspectives are incorporated into government policies. The PFA calls for an increase to 50% of women in national legislatures.*

The dramatic shift from 30% critical mass to 50% was phenomenal. Inarguably, the PFA recognized that gender equal opportunities in electoral processes and political appointments were key to reducing and eventually eliminating the gapping democratic deficits. Like Hegelsen (2010) and drawing from the Beijing processes, Shiraz (2015) pointed out that women's full participation in politics and decision-making was not only requisite for sustainable democracy but also a necessary condition for development.

Despite all these efforts, there is considerable evidence that in both advanced and emerging democracies the challenge remains (IPU, 2015; Shiraz, 2015; Hammah, 2015). Undoubtedly, significant progress has been made but not without the challenges. In both the American Congress and British Parliament, women are yet to achieve equity. Similarly, in the emerging democracies of Africa, Asia and South Africa, gender-based discriminations persist in limiting women's political fortunes. As Shiraz (2015) notes, 20 years after the BPfA, progress has been slow.

It is in light of such failure, among others, that the European Women Lobby launched the "50/50 Campaign for Democracy." The Campaign has sought to secure the equal representation of men and women in the European Union Parliament starting with the June 2009 elections. The Campaign has noted that the under-representation of women in the EU's decision-making bodies challenges its democratic legitimacy (IPU, 2015).

Since the launch of the 50/50 Campaign, various initiatives have been undertaken by global and regional bodies at various levels in support of its agenda. These have taken the form of endorsements, petitions, celebrations and, education and training as well as country level and sectoral campaigns. There is even now a 50/50 campaign on the Silver Screens.

As a country, Ghana is yet to mount a strong 50/50 Campaign. Yet, its women suffer the political marginalizations driving the 50/50 Campaign. The Coalition of the Women's Manifesto for Ghana – CWMG – (2016: 32) laments that: "in 2016 women still account for less than 15 per cent of people in public office. While the membership of Parliament has increased to 275 before the 2012 general elections, women occupy only 29 seats making up 10% of the House." Later that same year, the general elections confirmed the concerns of the Coalition. The number of women increased only marginally from 29 to 37. This is far from the 30% critical mass for making an impact in governance. Since the 1990s, the women's movement has pushed for 40% women political participation and various governments appear to endorse that push. Also, the 2003 Local Government Act makes provisions for a 30% quota for women in government appointments. So far, no government or political party has been able to make it a reality. In March this year, 2017, following the global declaration, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) marked the International Women's Day celebrations by, among

others, launching the Planet 50/50. That groundbreaking event offers hope for women's rights and gender equality advocacy. At the same time, it raises concerns regarding its feasibility in a political context where women are severely marginalized, the motivation of this paper.

The following analyses draw mainly from existing literature and statistical data. These have been useful for examining both the conceptual and contextual basis of the 50/50 campaign as a tool for enhancing women's political participation and for determining its feasibility in Ghana. It starts off with a situational analysis of women in electoral processes and the 50/50 Campaign in the global context. This is followed by an examination of women's electoral fortunes in the context of the Campaign and then Ghana's take on it by looking at women in Ghanaian Electoral Politics resulting in the question: Is 50/50 possible?

## **Women and Elections**

It has been globally and regionally acknowledged that the full participation of men and women in electoral processes is not only a prerequisite for the advancement of democratic governance and sustainable development but also a signification of commitment to social justice; gender equality and citizen rights (Women's Democratic Group, 2016). Yet, several studies (Adatuu, 2015; Shiraz, 2015; Amoako, 2011; King and Leigh, 2010; Hamah, 2015) point to the underrepresentation of women in national legislatures due to their poor showing in electoral processes and political appointments. Bhalotra, Clots-Figueras and Iyer (n.d.) find that women are underrepresented in political office worldwide accounting for only 23% of national parliaments. They reveal that in 2015, women comprised only 12% of India's national legislators, 19% of the United States Congress and 29% of the United Kingdom's (UK) House of Commons. On the Pacific Island states, Fraenkel (n.d.) indicates that women form 4.1 per cent of parliaments, well below the world average.

On the African continent, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU, 2015) has noted that women have gained key milestones on the right to vote and measurable success on the right to be voted for public office. In agreement, the Ugandan Women's Democratic Group (2016) points to the increase in women's interest in political participation as voters, candidates, election officials, party agents and voter mobilisers. However, as the IPU (2015) has asserted, the interest and participation of women in electoral processes have not translated into good fortunes at the polls and for that matter their representation in parliaments continent-wide. The proportion of women in parliaments in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) remains a paltry 23.1% just slightly above the global average of 22.7%.

Obamamoye (2016:1) has observed in line with the above that SSA women are marginal among elected parliamentarians resulting in their relative inarticulacy in the decision-making processes of their respective states. He notes further that:

*Compared to their men counterparts, the level of women's participation in decision-making and representation as the members of national parliaments is uninspiring and debilitating. It remains an enduring and pervasive experience in the 21st century, to the extent that political decision-making in some states in the international system is stereotypically assigned to men, while women concentrate their attention on issues of low politics. Where they are not totally hindered, democratic institutions through which the representatives are elected could not sustain persistently the incremental level of women's political emancipation or fast track the proportional level of women's political representation without implementation of affirmative action.*

The persistent marginalization of women who form more than one half of the world population stirs concerns for not only women's rights and gender equality activists but also governments, researchers and well-meaning citizens resulting in fresh efforts such as the 50/50 Campaign.

## **The 50/50 Campaign for Democracy**

### **Nature/Form**

From its name, the 50/50 Campaign's main agenda has been to canvass for the equal representation of women and men in politics and public life. Its recent roots in Europe is from the September 2008 campaign to increase women's representation in parliaments, especially the European Union (EU) Parliament. However, this has grown to include elections or nominations to councils and public boards. While the EU was the main target from start, currently it has been extended to individual countries.

The Women's Lobby (2009) has observed that the under-representation of women in EU institutions is a serious obstacle to its democratic legitimacy while undermining attempts at promoting inclusive and participatory governance. They argue that political parties and governments are important gatekeepers who have the power to make decisions about who are on electoral lists and who are appointed and as such should commit to turning general agreements on women's rights to equal participation into women's equal representation in European decision-making bodies.

Scott, Sanders and Graham (2016:2) capture the rationale of the 50/50 Campaign as:

*To draw upon the widest possible pool of talent and experience both, men and women, running the country together. Secondly, Parliament is meant to be a representative body and representation shapes. It should be properly representative of the 32 million UK women, the diverse majority of the population. A diverse Parliament would ensure more informed policy-making on all issues and particularly those concerning reproductive rights, domestic violence, equal pay, pensions, sexism, discrimination, inclusion, maternity care, family life, caring and parenting. Thirdly, Parliament should be leading the way in demonstrating respect for women, their opinions, talents and skills. Parliament should be acting as role model for society. Lastly, tackling the issues that make participation difficult for women will make Parliament more inclusive generally. In the name of justice, it is only right that women and other under-represented groups are able to play an equal part in Parliament, forging the future of society.*

The goals of the 50/50 Campaign are: to mobilize high level and grassroots support for the 50/50 Campaign; mobilize European women; ensure 50/50 in the European Parliament in 2009 and beyond; ensure 50/50 in the European Commission in 2009 and beyond; ensure the equal representation of women for top EU positions; and ensure long lasting democracy and equal representation (European Women's Lobby, 2009). The Women's Lobby targets women voters and voters in general; national political parties and the European governments.

The 50/50 makes an important shift in agenda. As Dahlerup (2005) explains the new gender equality agenda is no longer one of 'more women in politics' but 'equal participants and the equitable distribution of power and decision-making' at all levels of decision-making and political opportunity. Thus, the 50/50 Campaign moves beyond the BPF's "critical mass" of 30% representation to a 50/50 representation in parliaments and other decision-making structures.

In recent time, within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Planet 50/50 has fired up a global campaign championed by the UN aimed at addressing challenges to women's and girls' advancement toward equality. Planet 50/50 extends beyond politics. As explained by UN Women (n.d.):

Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality" asks governments to make national commitments to address the challenges that are holding women and girls back from reaching their full potential. Step It Up comes at a critical moment in time. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a comprehensive roadmap for the future of people and planet. Empowering women and girls is central to achieving

the Sustainable Development Goals. Passing new laws or strengthening existing ones is one way to Step It Up. Other actions might include creating programmes to eradicate violence against women and girls, encouraging women's participation in decision-making, investing in national action plans or policies for gender equality, creating public education campaigns to promote gender equality, and many more. Everyone has a role to play to make gender equality a lived reality by 2030. (unwomen.org)

On the African continent, the Campaign predates the 2008 European activism. The earliest formal efforts could be traced to Sierra Leone, when in 1997, then Nemata Eshun-Baden<sup>1</sup> started the 50/50 Group, which was eventually launched in 2001 with a strong demand for the equal representation of women and men in government (50/50 Group, 2016). In Ghana, the CWMG had made a similar demand in 2004 (CWMG, 2004).

On a larger scale, the African Union through its Agenda 2063 had offered what a UN Special Representative on Africa considers a more ambitious vision than the SDG demand. Paying glowing tribute to the AU initiative, he asserts:

Agenda 2063, the transformational framework of the AU, not only complements the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development but is more ambitious. It aims to provide gender parity in all pan-African organizations and ensure at least 20 per cent of rural women have access to and control of productive assets by 2023. The AU Agenda 2063 also aims to provide equal economic rights for women by 2025, including the rights to own and inherit property. The African region has made significant strides towards achieving increased and equal representation of women, especially in political leadership. In particular, 15 African countries are listed among the top 37 countries where women make up more than 30 per cent of national parliamentarians. Africa has stepped up to the challenge and has shown strong commitment to putting the human rights of women at the centre of its implementation of Agenda 2063, and to ensuring the full and equal participation of women and girls in all spheres of society. Africa is also the first continent to underscore the importance of monitoring and accountability efforts — including through such measures as the recently launched African Gender Scorecard — for measuring progress and accelerating implementation of the continent's ambitious gender parity commitments. (Office of the Special Advisor on Africa, 2016)

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<sup>1</sup> Now Nemata Majeks-Walker

Africa has stepped its game up by going beyond policy prescriptions to initiate specific actions which its sub-regional unions and member countries could emulate. To show exemplary leadership, membership of the AU Commission is guided by a 50/50 principle with a just exited president, Dr. Dlamini-Zuma, as its first female head. Indeed, the well-toasted East and Southern African success stories can be attributed to downstream actions by sub-regional unions and national governments.

The GenderLinks (n.d.) has attributed the Southern African success, in part, to the Southern African Development Programme of the Southern African Development Cooperation (SADC). The GenderLinks initiative was designed in line with SADC's 2008 Protocol on Gender and Development which has aimed at achieving gender parity in all areas of decision-making by 2030. The Initiative targets Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, South Africa, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Mauritius and Tanzania. Although success rates have differed, many of the SADC countries have hit the 30% threshold. According to GenderLinks, countries which adopted affirmative action such as proportional representation electoral systems and quotas gained the most. In the case of East Africa, Uganda and Rwanda have been the most successful with Rwanda achieving the global best with over 50% women's representation.

In West Africa, the ECOWAS has also shown some leadership. Article 2(3) of the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance states:

*Member States shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that women have equal rights with men to vote and be voted for in elections, to participate in the formulation of government policies and the implementation thereof and to hold public offices and perform public functions at all levels of governance.*

At the country level, the Ghana and Sierra Leone example above but also Nigeria, Liberia and Senegal, are exemplary. For instance, the 50/50 Group of Sierra Leone envisages the possibility of a female president for the country; 50% representation of women in Parliament, Local Government and decision-making positions at all levels and; the existence of a critical mass of capable women who serve as a resource pool for recruitment into public and political office and support net to other women aspiring for leadership positions. In terms of its strategy, the 50/50 Group works mainly through its members and targets organized groups such as networks of women NGOs, media organizations, community-based women's groups, traditional and religious leaders, and local government structures at the community level.

From the above, globally, regionally and nationally, efforts to promote gender parity in politics and public office have been reinvigorated by the 50/50 Campaign. The question is whether these efforts have been effectively translated in practice, globally, regionally and nationally.

## **Effects Globally and Regionally**

The IPU (2015) reports in line with the Campaign that globally women's average share of parliamentary membership nearly doubled between 1995 and 2015, from 11.3% in 1995 to 22.1% in 2015. Over the same period, the number of single and lower houses with more than 30% women parliamentarians grew from five to 42, and those with more than 40% from one to 13. By 2015, four houses of parliament had surpassed the 50% threshold with one moving beyond 60%.

The world's highest ranking countries have become more diverse: the top 10, dominated by eight European countries in 1995, now include four in SSA and three each in the Americas and Europe. Far fewer single and lower houses have elected less than 10% women, dropping from 109 in 1995 to 38 in 2015. The number of all-male single and lower houses fell from 10 to five. In addition to shifting political circumstances, a crucial factor driving these changes has been the adoption of electoral gender quotas, which have spread from a small number of states in 1995 to more than 120 in 2015. After notable increases in recent years, growth in women's average share of parliaments worldwide leveled off in 2014, rising only 0.3 points to 22.1% (IPU, 2015).

Regionally, in the Americas, the share of women in parliaments (all Houses combined) more than doubled between 1995 and 2015, reaching an average of 26.4% and registering the greatest progress among all regions over the past 20 years. In the EU, many States have also made substantial progress (IPU, 2015). Odoom, Opoku and Ntiakoh-Ayipah (2017) note that equality between women and men in politics in developed democracies has grown considerably in the past fifty years and that more women are now running for and being elected to national parliaments. A record number of women equally hold executive positions within their national governments.

Africa as a region has achieved some of the most dramatic breakthroughs in the last 20 years. Bauer (2014) has noted that across SSA the use of electoral gender quotas to achieve gender parity in parliaments and lower level decision-making structures has dramatically transformed national legislatures in just under three decades, such that Rwanda leads the world in women's representation in a single or lower House of parliament, with 64% women in its Chamber of Deputies following the 2013 election. Also, other SSA countries such as Senegal and South Africa top the world list (IPU, 2015).

Similarly, the IPU (2015) has confirmed that in the Arab States, women's political rights and opportunities have expanded although the Arab "revolutions" have not fully translated into desired gender equity results. Also, in the Pacific, there is an improvement in women's participation as patterns in Australia and New Zealand have driven up the regional average, although progress among other Pacific Island States has been limited. It states further that it is only the Asian region that has fallen behind many

others; its rate of change in women's representation has been far slower than elsewhere in the world. Table 1 shows the Regional averages of women in parliaments.

**Table 1: Regional averages of women in parliaments**

Year	Region average over the years							Region	Percentage point increase
	Americas	SSA	Europe	Arab States	Pacific	Asia	Nordic States		
1995	12.7	9.8	13.2	4.3	6.3	13.2	36.4	America	13.7
2000	15.4	11.2	14.5	3.4	14.1	14.6	38.9	SSA	12.5
2005	18.6	14.8	18.4	6.5	13.2	15.0	40.1	Europe	11.8
2010	22.7	18.7	21.4	9.5	15.3	18.5	42.1	Arab States	11.8
2015	26.4	22.3	25.0	16.1	15.7	18.5	41.1	Pacific	9.4
								Asia	5.3
								Nordic States	5.1

Source: Adopted and modified from IPU (2015)

Table 1 above indicates that over the 20-year period, the Americas have had the highest percentage point increase in women's representation in parliaments at 13.7, up from 12.7 in 1995; followed by Africa at 12.5, up from 9.8 in 1995. Europe and the Arab States are at 11.8. However, while Europe rose from 13.2 in 1995, the Arab States rose from only 4.3. Thus, the Arab States compared to Europe had made more gains. The Pacific follows with 9.4, up from 6.3 in 1995 while Asia and the Nordic States have 5.3 and 5.1 respectively. This implies that over the period, the Nordic States had made the least gain compared to the other regions. Yet, the Nordic States maintain the highest rate of 41.1, as of 2015. Their correlates, the Americas lag woefully behind at 26.4 with Europe at 25.0. Surprisingly, Africa holds its own among Europe and America at 22.3.

## Ghana's Take on the 50/50 Campaign

### Context of the Campaign

The 1992 Republican Constitution of Ghana provides sweeping basic human rights, including gender equality. The UNDP (2014) has observed that the Ghanaian Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender and gives equality to both men and women. The creation of a national machinery, currently, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) demonstrates some commitment of the government of Ghana on gender issues. Ghana has been part of the regional and international agenda aimed at raising the status of women in politics, administration,

and other spheres of public life. Apart from its own localized efforts, Ghana has ratified several international and regional protocols, conventions, declarations and initiatives such as the BPfA, the CEDAW, Protocol on the Rights of African Women, the African Women's Decade, the MDGs and now SDGs (CWMG, 2004; 2016).

In 1998, the Cabinet of Ghana endorsed an Affirmative Action Framework which provided for 40% quota of women's representation in formal decision-making structures (Quansah and Essien, 2014). In practice, however, this is far from realization. Also, earlier this year in 2017, as part of the International Women's Day celebrations, the MoGCSP in collaboration with the Centre for Legal Advocacy Research Education and Training (CLARiT), launched the Planet 50/50 by 2030 agenda in line with SDG5. The goal of the Planet 50/50 is above all, to forge a Global Alliance for Sustainable Development based on world solidarity, the particular needs of most vulnerable populations and participation of all women, men, girls and boys (United Nations Development Group, n.d.). Given that historically the scales have weighed heavily against women, this landmark initiative is refreshing. It is expected to rekindle action toward gender equality and women's rights.

Shiraz (2015) says that the history of women's participation in politics in Ghana predates its independence. Women were very active during the independence struggles. They mobilized mass actions for national liberation. It was in recognition of their singular contributions that the first nationalist government initiated the first affirmative action policy with the view to boost women's formal representation in the legislature. The Representation of the People (Women Members) Act (1960), resulted in the election of 10 women regional representatives to the National Assembly (Allah-Mensah, 2005; Tsikata, 2001). Yet, 60 years on, women's representation remains a grave issue.

The ECOWAS Observer Mission (EOM) to Ghana during the 2012 General Elections reported that while women's participation as voters in the electoral process was massively impressive, their aspirations for elective positions in the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections were severely limited. There were no women among the seven candidates in the Presidential election. This was also the case in 2016. The two women aspirants, Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings and Akua Donkor fell out. There was also only one woman running mate, to the PPP candidate, which placed third in the final race.

Regarding the parliamentary elections, of the 1,332 candidates vying for the 275 seats in 2012, only 133 were women, constituting a paltry 10%. Out of the 133 women who contested the parliamentary elections, only 29 were elected (EOM, 2012). There was only a feeble improvement in the 2016 elections when 37 women were elected constituting 13.5% which was far less than the 30% critical mass. See Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Number of women in parliament by election year**

Year	1960	1965	1969	1979	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016
No. of Seats	104	104	140	140	200	200	200	230	230	275	275
Women	10	19	1	5	15	18	19	25	20*	29	37
% of total	9.6	18.2	0.7	3.5	8	9	9.5	10.9	9	10.5	13.5

Source: Adapted and updated from Allah-Mensah (2005) and Myjoyonline.com (2012, 2016).

\*The number was reduced to 19 when the female MP for Chereponi died and the seat was won by a man.

From Table 2 above, one finds a steady increase in elected women from the onset of the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic in 1992. It would appear, however, that women made the greatest gains in times when the number of contested seats had expanded such as in 2012 and 2016. Currently, we are very far from even the BPfA 30% threshold. At this slow pace, it would appear that the 50/50 Campaign is very far from reach.

On the challenges that women face, Deku (2005:120) explains that:

*Women seem to be caught in a dependency triad where they are dependent on men in formal politics at the local, national and international levels which have become increasingly interrelated. They are ravaged by illiteracy, fertility and environmental crisis leading to poverty, diseases and malnutrition. It is more than three decades since the United Nations Development Decade was launched and more than a decade since the declaration of the Women's Year but the plight of women in the country seems to be deteriorating. This reflects to some extent, the multifaceted transformation that is taking place along the various cultural, social, economic and political dimensions. The situation is further worsened by the rapid population growth and its attendant consequences in both the urban and rural areas.*

Explaining further, Deku (2005:120) says that the time has come when the concept that “every woman is inferior to any man” must change. Right from birth, the Ghanaian society instills the idea of male superiority and female inferiority in children. Thus, values that are empowering are instilled on the male while values that are disempowering are instilled in the female. Even women themselves have been brainwashed into accepting this situation and sometimes mistake absolute male protection as a privilege. In fact, when in 2016, the NPP announced sweeping affirmative action reforms aimed at promoting gender and social inclusion, the avid resisters comprised both men and women. The situation continues to reflect on the low numbers of women in decision-making even when the opportunity presents itself for the nomination or appointment of women into public office. Table 3 below is informative.

**Table 3: Ministers in the parliaments of the fourth republic in Ghana by sex**

Election Year	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
2016	89 (80.1)	21 (19.9)	110 (100)
2012*	50 (72.5)	19 (27.5)	69 (100)
2008	48 (77.4)	14 (22.6)	62 (100)
2004	89 (89.9)	10 (10.1%)	99 (100)
2000**	69 (86.25)	11 (13.75)	80 (100)
1992	81 (90)	9 (10)	90 (100)

Source: Adopted and modified from Myjonline.com (2016) and Ampofo and Darkwah (n.d.)

\*The figures presented above come from the June, 2016 updated list following a ministerial reshuffle. \*\* List of Ministers as of 27th March, 2003

Table 3 shows that in terms of gender/sex of ministers in the Fourth Republican Parliaments, more men than women were in ministerial positions. In the current year, 2017 the situation has not changed much. Of the 110 ministers and deputies, the largest for any government, there are only 21 women. Of the 10 regional ministers, there is no woman. Of the 10 deputy regional ministers, there are only three (3) women. In the case of the Council of State, there are only four (4) women. This persistently low level of representation in our elective and appointive political governance systems provide compelling need for change and the call for a 50/50 Campaign.

### **Is 50/50 Possible?**

Available evidence from countries in Africa that have embraced the 50/50 Campaign such as Rwanda, Mozambique, Swaziland and South Africa show that at least one third of their parliamentarians are women (Hamah, 2015). It is also evident that more women were elected to Parliament in the aftermath of the first post-conflict national elections held in Sierra Leone in 2002. The reason attributed to this was because Sierra Leone had employed the proportional representation regime in contrast to the traditional majority system of elections (Hamah, 2015).

Ghana has over the years recognized the important contribution of women to politics and development and has made some considerable efforts, especially in the area of

policy, to have gender parity in parliament and public office. These include globally, the ratification and/or endorsement of the CEDAW, BPfA and MDGs and SDGs; regionally, the adoption of the African Charter's Protocol on Women's Rights and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality and; nationally, establishment of the 1960 Women Members Act, 1998 Affirmative Action Framework and National Gender Policy as well as provisions in the 1992 Constitution and 2003 Local Government Act (Shiraz, 2015; Hamah, 2015).

At the political parties' level, at least since 2008, quotas for women have been topical on the agenda. The 2008 campaign manifesto of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) promised 40% representation of women in all government, political and public positions. However, only 29 women out of the 72 ministers and deputies were appointed into the various ministries between the years 2009 to 2012. Equally, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) sought to protect its women parliamentarians during the 2016 General Elections by pushing a policy to bar men from contesting in constituencies where its members of parliament are women. Unfortunately, this policy was immediately withdrawn after stiff opposition by some concerned members of the party including women (Hamah, 2015). Hence, at the political party level, policies have failed to translate into practice.

Various factors and forces such as insider opposition (Male members in the case of the 1960 Women's Member Act and members of the NPP in 2016), failed promises, socio-cultural and economic burdens and capacity limitations, among others, have been cited. That notwithstanding, the policy efforts are indicative of a favorable political environment which can be harnessed and reinvigorated for a 50/50 Campaign. After all, from the BPfA, the women's movement was able to get the then government to grant a 40% in 1998 Affirmative Action Framework although reduced to 30% in the case of government appointments to Assemblies. Also, that the numbers of aspiring women for elected offices, especially for parliament, has been rising is a good sign of women's increased interest which could be harnessed and supported very early at the primary level into wins rather than losses.

Although such opportunities have been created in the past, the outcomes have been disappointing because of the lack of the requisite support. They however demonstrate possibility, which can be harnessed and materialized through sustained, strategic and concentrated advocacy and education. The 50/50 Group of Sierra Leone have shown the way. Rwanda, Uganda and South Africa are exemplary but these have learned from post-conflict experiences to be more inclusive. Hence, one might argue that their austere conditions under war and conflict had influenced their post-conflict reconstruction agenda and thus driven their success. But, there is also the case of Tanzania, a close compatriot and even Senegal, a close enough neighbour, who have made change happen under normal conditions.

Thus, it is apt to say that the 50/50 Campaign can materialize with renewed committed action. It can be done through the strategic mobilization of various stakeholders committed to take action toward its achievement. Its key objectives outlined above fall within the policy and legislative formulations around the promotion of gender equitable politics. No doubt given the requisite push it can make some gains. The bigger question, however, is whether 50/50 is an appropriate agenda to push in a context where there are more women than men? The current population estimates for Ghana is at 28.3 million of which women form about 52%. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (2012:2), the 2010 Population and Housing Census revealed an increase in female population with a “sex ratio (number of males to 100 females) of 95.2 compared to 97.7 in 2000.” With the current rate, the proportion of women is definitely growing and so naturally, logically and justifiably one should expect a consistent proportionate increase that is equitable rather than equal. On that score, the 50/50 split middle campaign becomes contestable.

Naturally, the framing of the Campaign is questionable because women make up more than half of the population. Ideally, women's representation should be proportionate to their population. Canvassing on a split middle thus shortchanges women. Logically, women are known to be good leaders and have frantically worked towards the achievement of independence in Ghana. After independence, their contributions to national development have been enormous. Thus, it is simple arithmetic to have not only more women, but fair representation in politics and public life. Justifiably, women as citizens have rights that should be exercised wholly and fully. Various conventions, treaties, constitutions and acts give them such entitlements as citizens and as human beings.

On such a score, the 50/50 Campaign is contestable but more than realistic. In its current form it even shortchanges women, but given the reality of the forces and factors that weigh against women, it is a realistic agenda to pursue. One cannot afford to neglect the fact that Ghanaian women compared to men are challenged in several ways and that such challenges have served to limit their political participation. Consequently, a 50/50 Campaign might seem ambitious yet not impossible. It might seem ambitious for reasons that the playing field is not level in relation to political culture, education and training and gendered socio-cultural, histo-political and socio-economic factors. There is however possibility for change because of the many examples pointed to above. Above all, with commitment; goodwill and resources, the challenges can be surmounted.

## **Conclusion**

From the analyses above, it can be concluded that the 50/50 Parliament Campaign holds promise for advancing women's political participation. If effectively harnessed, it can

change women's political fortunes by opening grounds for better electoral success. The commitments of governments and people and openness to change can motivate more women to aspire for and thus increase their electoral wins and political appointments to public office. It is also evident that even under the current situation, electoral reforms can be effective if they include affirmative action provisions such as proportionate representation and quotas instead of simple majority as showcased by successful countries especially those in SSA.

Although Parliamentary representations across the globe are elective, such affirmative action initiatives as has been the case for Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda and Tanzania combined with targeted education and advocacy in the case of the 50/50 Group of Sierra Leone and perhaps the CWMG and Netright of Ghana offer hope for change. Such initiatives have worked in many cases. Such experiences can be harnessed as learning for action on the 50/50 Campaign and, especially within the context of Planet 50/50. While state level actions are critical for effective change, it is equally important to act at the non-state, civil society level. Both levels of action are critical. Countries such as Rwanda, Mozambique, South Africa and Sierra Leone which have effectively combined party level and constitutional reforms based on proportional representation in parliaments have achieved tremendously positive results.

In Ghana, the NPP attempt in 2016 failed due to alleged leadership failure, however, the CPP succeeded in 1960 amid grave resistance because of instrumental leadership. Thus, for Ghana as the first country in SSA to gain independence, glowing democratic credentials and bold efforts at affirmative action dating back to the 1960, the 50/50 Campaign becomes an imperative. The policy discourse and programming efforts by both state and non-state actors offer glimmers of possibility for hoping. For such to translate into the successes achieved elsewhere, there will be the need to re/dedicate efforts and resources to sustained action on national electoral policy reforms, initiative and enforcement of affirmative action regulation and political party commitment and action for gender equality. In recent time, efforts at policy development for advancing gender equality including the affirmative action policy have faced several snags. Yet, activism rages on and serves as important critical boost and incentive for state effort and response. Above all, within context of the Planet 50/50, Ghana has to step up its game and commitment.

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