

PROMOTING CITIZENSHIP AMONG WOMEN IN GHANA **The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations**

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ABSTRACT

In view of the call and effort of international organizations and development practitioners to promote citizenship among women, the non-governmental organization (NGO) community in Ghana has taken up the challenge to promote this cause. It is against this background that this paper sought to assess the efforts of some of these NGOs to find out how they are working to enhance women's citizenship in the country. Using desk study approach, a documentary analysis of various reports, articles and textbooks was conducted for assessing the question of women's citizenship in Ghana. The varying sources reveal that the NGOs have made a lot of progress in promoting citizenship among women in Ghana. In spite of emergent challenges, their efforts have brought to fore the issues of women's citizenship and how it could be addressed; the public platform for promoting women's citizenship has been widely set up; women's participation in all levels of governance has been improved; institutions have been set up and equipped to serve as watch dogs for women's citizenship issues at the national and grassroots level; and women's education are being promoted based on the recognition that among others education is the tool for women's empowerment. There is no doubt that if these efforts are intensified, more could be achieved for the enhancement of women's citizenship in Ghana.

KEY WORD: Citizenship, Non-Governmental Organizations, Women's Empowerment, Gender Equality

INTRODUCTION

The third of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is to 'Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women.' One of its sub-goals acknowledges that women's equal participation with men in power and decision-making is part of their fundamental right to participate in political life, which is at the core of gender equality and women's empowerment. It further observes that while globally many countries now

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grant to both women and men the right to vote and be elected, women continue to experience difficulties in exercising this right. In 2003, the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments stood at 15 percent at the global level. This constitutes a modest increase of just 6 percentage points since 1987. At the same time, the percentage of women in parliament and the changes in their parliamentary representation continues to be characterized by large differences across regions and sub-regions. Meanwhile, there have been several interventions by governmental and non-governmental organizations to change this trend of women's citizenship participation. http://www.developmentgoals.org/Gender_Equality.htm [DA: 12/26/04]

It is in this recognition that this paper sought to assess the activities of some NGOs in Ghana to find out how they are working to enhance women's citizenship in the country. To achieve this, the first part of the paper gives a background/overview of the situation of women in Ghana and then proceeds to look at the meaning of citizenship as expressed by different authors. This is followed by a discussion on various interventions by some international and local NGOs to find out how these activities are contributing to the promotion of Ghanaian women's citizenship participation and rights.

The paper has been informed by analysis of various documented sources including legal/constitutional documents, websites, programmes reports, proceedings of public fora, project documents, textbooks and journal articles. These sources provide the contextual and historical basis for the criticism and analysis raised in the following sections. The sections focus on an examination of the situation of Ghanaian women, conceptual analysis of citizenship and its links to democracy, discussion on the roles of NGOs in the promotion of women's citizenship, assessment of progress made and conclusion and recommendation.

THE SITUATION OF GHANAIAN WOMEN

Women in Ghana have been actively participating in national development processes, in spite of their many limitations. Their contributions in the political, economic and social spheres are critical for the day-to-day survival and sustainability of individuals and families. From the period of independence to date, women have contributed to national development in diverse ways. Within the international arena, women have contributed towards efforts at establishing clear principles that would lay the basis for addressing not only the concerns of women but of the society at large. In spite of these contributions by women, gender disparities are still prevalent in Ghana due to socio-cultural and economic factors. Meanwhile, closing the gender gap and enhancing women's participation in development is essential not only for building a just society, but is also a pre-requisite for achieving full political, social, economic, cultural and environmental security among people on a sustainable basis (Awumbila, 2001).

Article 6 of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, states that:

the State shall afford equality of economic opportunity to all citizens; and, in particular, the State shall take all necessary steps so as to ensure the full integration of women into the mainstream of the economic development of Ghana.

Articles 27 (3) adds that *'women shall be guaranteed equal rights to training and promotion without any impediments from any person'*.

Despite these declarations in the constitution, the participation of women in governance still remains at a very low level. The Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS, 2000) revealed that women are poorly represented at all levels of decision-making even though they represent 50.2% of the entire population. Within the household, culture and norms designate men as heads of households and therefore the principal decision-makers. At the highest level of government, women are again disadvantaged. Women constitute 9.5% of the membership in Parliament and men form 91%. At the bureau level, women constitute 32% of the entire civil service with 24% of these in local government performing secretarial and clerical responsibilities. Only 12% of the decision-influencing category – the administrative class – is female. A similar pattern is observed at the district level where only 5% of elected representatives were women. Even though a government directive in 1998 reserved 30% of the appointed membership of assemblies for women, districts have used this figure as the maximum instead of a minimum making the participation of women in top-level decision-making very low. Only 3 of the 110 Presiding Members are women, out of 110 district chief executives, twelve are women (10.9%). In the 2002 District Assembly elections, out of a total of 4,583 candidates elected, 341(7.4%) were women, while 4,241(92.5%) were men. Out of 7,700 members of the 110 District Assemblies, 38 i.e. 5% are women. All the Metropolitan and Municipal Chief Executives are men (Ofei-Aboagye, 2000; Mensah-Kutin, 2003)

Assessing the effects of women's disengagement in governance and active citizenship activities, Ofei-Aboagye (2000) observes that the lack of women's full participation in political decision-making has negative consequences for the society. It deprives women of important rights as well as responsibilities as citizens; it excludes their perspectives from policies and legislation; it prevents their input into national budgets and resource allocation, and it deprives society of women's skills, knowledge and their perspectives. To address this situation, NGOs and state organizations have been embarking on several activities to promote citizenship among women in Ghana.

RETHINKING CITIZENSHIP IN GHANA

Defining Citizenship

The word citizenship has originally been thought of in a very narrow sense, however emerging trends of development and transformation call for a review and expansion

of its meaning, most especially as it applies to women. The Encarta dictionary (2005) defines citizenship as *“legal status of being a citizen of a country.”* Similarly, T. H. Marshall (1950), a most prominent theorist of citizenship, as quoted by Werbner and Yuval – Davis (1999:5) defined citizenship as *“full membership in the community.”* In a more descriptive sense, Suad Joseph (1999) in Parrenas (2001:1130) states that *“citizenship defines who you are, where you belong, where you come from and how you understand yourself in the world.”* This notion of citizenship is implicit in Ghanaian conception of citizenship as enshrined in Chapter 3, Article 6 (2) of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana. It states that *“Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, a person born in or outside Ghana after the coming into force of this Constitution shall become a citizen of Ghana at the date of his birth if either of his parents or grandparents is or was a citizen of Ghana.”* (GoG, 1992). This implies that one becomes a citizen or member of the Ghanaian community by birth. Among the rights of these citizens as outlined in Chapter 3 are the right to own property; not be discriminated against on grounds of gender, race, color, ethnic origin, religion, creed or social or economic status; equal before the law; and personal liberty among others. This kind of definition looks restrictive and over looks crucial issues that are critical for citizens. Evelina Dagnino (1994) remarks that the contents of citizenship are not pre-defined, but are open and dynamic – not merely membership in an already given political system.

Considering the various issues faced by citizens in a state, the definition of citizenship will have to be viewed from a much broader perspective. Several writers have come to this realization. For instance, Jelin (1997: 67) observes the danger in reifying the concept and identifying citizenship rights with a group of concrete activities - voting, enjoying freedom of speech and receiving public benefits of any kind. She adds that citizenship like rights is always in the process of construction and transformation. Pettman (1999) also emphasizes that considering the changing trends in globalization and transformation citizenship has to be rethought and must be emergent.

According to Werbner and Yuval-Davis (1999) a holistic definition of citizenship goes beyond formal rights such as right to vote and be voted for or residence or birth in a country. To them citizenship should be defined in terms that are broader and wider than “formal relationship between an individual and the state” as presented by earlier liberal and political science literature. Alternatively, they define citizenship as “a more total relationship, inflected by identity, social positioning, cultural assumptions, institutional practices and a sense of belonging” (p: 4). This definition gives a comprehensive meaning to citizenship, implying that ‘citizenship’ does not only mean the legal right to be a citizen or a national of a country with the right to vote and be voted for. It goes beyond that to include a holistic integration and enhancement of all the concerns of the citizenry and responding to the dynamics or changing trends of development. It extends further to capture and to include the active participation of citizens in the governance of the state. Speaking from a gender perspective,

this calls for a total mainstreaming of gender concerns in all spheres of development in a country. This definition is therefore more meaningful and appropriate for the focus of this write up.

Werbner and Yuval – Davis (1999) further observe that it could be argued that broadening the concept of citizenship could mean overstretching it beyond conventional boundaries, which could make it over generalized and unworkable. To this, they respond that the notion of citizenship needs to be expanded to create a bigger platform to advocate transformation in formal citizenship. This is also in recognition of emerging trends in women's issues and its complex nature, which has to be viewed and addressed from a much broader perspective. Viewing the definition of citizenship from the traditional narrowing perspective, crucial issues affecting women could be largely overlooked. Thus, this definition by Werbner and Yuval-Davis (1999) helps to view and address women's issues from a broader perspective. Narrowing it down to issues of women, feminists advocate for a women-friendly state, probably a state where women's issues will be well addressed.

Thinking about the need to rethink citizenship, Pitman (1999) argues that citizenship has to be rethought as a possible tool for feminist use within a global frame. Thus, active citizenship requires conditions which support and enable women's participation in political, public/private sphere. The comprehensive nature of the definition also ushers us into the different dimensions of citizenship which include cultural citizenship, political citizenship, subordinate citizenship and democratic citizenship. Democratic citizenship which is crucial for this paper will be briefly discussed.

Citizenship and Democracy

Democratic citizenship as a social and political construct opens up spaces and arenas of freedom – full political participation and the right to be different as well. Considering the close relationship between citizenship and democracy, Hall and Held (1999) assert that related to citizenship is democracy – democracy can only exist on the basis of 'free and equal citizens.' They add that the relationship between citizenship and democracy offers a new balance between liberty and equality. Young (1990) also asserts that a democratic public should provide mechanisms for the effective recognition and representation of the distinct voices and perspectives of the oppressed and disadvantaged. This implies that citizenship and democracy are bedfellows; one cannot exist without the other. Meaning ideal citizenship could be promoted in a democratic environment or a democratic environment facilitates citizenship.

Considering the status of women in Ghana; international and governmental provisions and the call of feminist actors to enhance women's citizenship, it could be inferred that much needs to be done to promote citizenship among women in Ghana. Therefore, the next part of the paper explores the citizenship activities of some NGOs in Ghana to find out how far they are working towards this goal.

CITIZENSHIP ACTIVITIES BY NGOs IN GHANA

The national government, development organizations, NGOs and civil society groups in Ghana have worked in line with the priority to enhance women's candidature in elections to political offices as well as to encourage women to exercise their franchise at both national and local levels. Over the past five years, there has been increasing interest worldwide in promoting gender equity at the local government level. In Ghana, this was manifested primarily in the efforts by non-governmental organizations to promote women's participation in governance. Their activities have included advocacy, training, and research (Ofei-Aboagye, 2003).

Among the NGOs that have been actively involved in mounting projects to promote women's citizenship include National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana (NALAG), Abantu⁶³ for Development, Network for Women's Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT), Center for Sustainable Development Initiatives (CENSUDI), Action Aid International-Ghana, Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), IBIS-Ghana, District Assemblies Capacity Building (DISCAP), Department for International Development (DFID) and Netherlands Development Organization (SNV). Governmental institutions supporting these organizations are Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWAC), the Girls' Education Unit (GEU) of the Ghana Education Services and the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Institute of Local Government Studies (ILGS).

Objectives for Citizenship Promotion

The NGOs have several objectives for engaging in activities that seek to promote women's citizenship in Ghana. Some of the objectives gleaned and synthesized from various sources include to:

- strengthen national policy on decentralized management;
- promote women representation in all the 138 Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies in Ghana; promote the rights, privileges and interest of all member local government authorities;
- enhance knowledge and skills of gender issues at the local level;
- support grassroots organizations across the country to strengthen their own organizational efforts in promoting a culture of gender sensitivity in decision-making at the local level;
- contribute to advocacy work for increased participation of women in the district assemblies;
- promote gender sensitivity in the overall governance process;
- create a forum for dialogue on gender and politics;
- strengthen networking/coalition building efforts;

⁶³ "Abantu" means "people" in several African languages and reflects the organization's people-centered philosophy <http://www.fasngo.org/en/network/ngos/text/abantu.htm>

- empower women to play active and responsible role in the governance of their communities;
- institutional strengthening of Regional Planning and Coordination Units;
- promote dialogue between District Assemblies and Traditional Authorities and;
- improve operational system of the District Assembly for planning, coordination and accountability of poverty reduction and basic human needs.

Citizenship Activities by the NGOs

Generally, activities undertaken by the various NGOs include advocacy, research and training. Specific activities are embarked on in these areas. Some of these include programmes on Women in Leadership for the enhancement of women occupying leadership positions at organizational and national levels; series of capacity building workshops for women parliamentarians and those in District Assemblies; an initiative dubbed Public Participation in Local Governance (PPLG); institution of best gender sensitive district award scheme; advocacy, training, research, collaboration, public education; networking; publications; increasing access to job/training opportunities for female candidates; develop district institutional and governance capacity; and strengthening District monitoring and evaluation systems among others.

Target Group

In all their interventions, NGOs target women; women's groups; grass roots organizations; political party leaders; traditional rulers; opinion leaders; active and prospective women parliamentarians, Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies. These are core groups and stakeholders that are involved in governance processes and could facilitate the citizenship processes to a large extent.

Outcomes

In assessing the outcomes of the interventions, it could be observed from the project reports that much had been achieved for the enhancement of women's citizenship in Ghana. Some of the core outcomes are discussed below:

Institution of Best Gender Sensitive District Award

The District Assemblies in Ghana are responsible for promoting women's citizenship in their areas of jurisdiction. To ensure their commitment to this task, NALAG instituted this award scheme. The main objects of the scheme were to recognize and reward assemblies in their effort at improving the livelihoods of women; recognize and enhance awareness of outstanding and sustainable achievements of the assemblies at improving the lifestyle of its vulnerable groups; reward assemblies whose activities both social and legislative impact positively on the efforts at gender mainstreaming; encourage assemblies to adopt gender responsive policies at the local level; and en-

courage them to make issues of women's citizenship a priority of the District Assembly. Based on extracts of related reports, minutes, pictures, audiovisuals; newspapers, magazines publication and local government bulletin the top ten Districts are selected and given computers and printers and other office accessories. These awards help District Assemblies to explore and take stock of what they have been doing towards the enhancement of women's citizenship in the Districts. It also encourages other districts to pay attention to women's citizenship issues (Tetteh, 2003)

Regional Collaborative Efforts

Recognizing the strength in pooling resources by forming networks to check governments on their commitments to women's citizenship and following the outcomes of the Beijing plus 5, ABANTU for Development (also called Abantu) held a meeting for the development of an African Plan of Action for the implementation of the Beijing commitments by the year 2004. Collaborating with Economic Commission of Africa (ECA), ABANTU again worked on a monitoring and evaluation tool and used it to train Gender Focal Persons in the West African sub-region. This was to equip participants to utilize the tool to hold their governments accountable to the commitments made in the Plan of Action. ABANTU is also involved in another regional initiative to develop an African Gender and Development Index (AGDI), which is expected to be used as a tool to measure the extent to which governments are promoting gender equality and equity within their countries as enshrined in the Platform for Action and in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Kutin-Mensah, 2003).

Advocacy and Training

Guided by the objective of translating some of the ideas evolving from international initiatives, NGOs like Action Aid Ghana, ABANTU for Development, SNV, FIDA, IBIS and DISCAP have set their focus on enhancing knowledge and skills of gender issues at the local levels. They also work to enable grassroots organizations across the country to strengthen their own organizational efforts in promoting a culture of gender sensitivity in decision-making at the local level. The NGOs also engage in advocacy work for increased participation of women in the district assemblies and promote gender sensitivity in the overall governance process.

A number of advocacy and training activities have therefore been organised in local communities, which has helped to highlight major concerns that need to be addressed to promote women's citizenship in local governance and create a space at the local government level to engage with local leaders, women's NGOs and representatives of other civil society organisations on how to work together to promote issues of women and gender equality in all spheres of decision-making at the local level.

Among the lessons that emerged from such activities included the need to further sensitize district authorities on the need to fully incorporate gender in the work of

district assemblies; and organize programmes to educate women on the need to participate in local governance. It was also learned that women have to be well informed about the contribution they can make to the work of the assembly. Space will also have to be created for women and should be encouraged to increase their citizenship activities. Constant dialogue and consultation between district assemblies in the country and members of the community for exchanging ideas and information on how to deal effectively with problems confronting the districts, particularly on how gender issues, can be addressed at that level was also found to be crucial. (Ofei-Aboagye, 2003)

Creating the Platform for Women Candidates for Elections

One of the key challenges facing women who file for elections is mobilizing resources to get the platform for campaigning. Most of the NGOs such as FIDA, Action Aid and Abantu for Development have recognized this. During the 2002 District Assembly elections, they supported women candidates to use the space of their radio programs as a platform for their campaigns and allow the general public to phone-in for clarifications on their issues. Even though not everyone who had this chance was elected, all the candidates who had this opportunity insisted that without the space offered on the radio program, they could not have reached so many people with their campaign messages (Baatuolkuu-Obeng-Ofori, Quaye, & Kutin – Mensah, 2003)

The Women's Manifesto

NGOs and some gender advocates in Ghana, under the initiative of Abantu for Development have developed a Women's Manifesto, which has the potential of enhancing efforts at strengthening the nature of women's participation in governance and citizenship processes. In a presentation, Rose Mensah-Kutin (2003) observed that the initiative was important for a number of reasons. Women do not form one homogeneous group and therefore cannot be expected to think and agree on all issues the same way at all times. However, women share many things as far as their experience of gender inequality is concerned. The Women's Manifesto idea was therefore an attempt to explore opportunities for preparing a solid basis for the articulation of women's concerns and gender equality principles in Ghana's citizenship and governance processes. The general aim was to initiate a process of building consensus on the key issues of women's citizenship and gender relations which could be articulated in the political process towards the 2004 national elections and beyond.

The Women's Manifesto was therefore developed based on the following ten thematic areas of women's concerns:

- Women's Economic Empowerment
- Women and Land
- Women, Social Development and Social Policy

- Women in Politics and Decision-making
- Women and the Law
- Discriminatory Practices Justified in the Name of Culture
- Women and Media
- Women, Conflict and Peace
- Women with Special Needs
- Institutions mandated to promote Women's Rights (Women's Manifesto Coalition, 2004)

These issues served as the basis for women candidates' campaigns and for assessing the manifestos of other political parties to measure the extent to which they see women's issues as a priority. With this manifesto guiding them, most Ghanaian women could easily identify what was crucial for them and looked out for those concerns in any candidate they decided to vote for.

SUPPORT FROM GOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTIONS

For policy formulation, providing technical back-stopping and directives, the NGOs need the support of governmental institutions. The objectives of the institutions are to enhance women's citizenship, mainstream gender in development processes and local administration. The institutions also seek to enhance women's participation in all governance processes; bridge parity of access to education to enable girls to contribute to national development; and to develop the social capital of women.

The following are some of the activities the governmental institutions are undertaking towards the achievement of their set objectives. The institutions work to integrate gender into local level development and governance. They also identify and support the formation of gender focal persons and core groups. Other activities include micro-credit facilities for economic empowerment; technology assistance for agro processing; promotion of good governance through advocacy; improve access and participation in education. Just like the NGOs, the institutions work with different stakeholders which include District Assemblypersons, chairpersons of sub-local government structures (Urban and Town Councils), teams of Medium Term Development Plan (2002-2005); traditional authorities; women; girls and children.

Some of their listed outcomes include the formation of district core gender focal groups to monitor and oversee all women's citizenship issues at that level; and provision of economic empowerment activities that have made women more assertive, confident and proactive. The institutions have also helped to increase participation of women to 72% in the district level elections and 50% women of the District Assembly appointee members. To make information on women more accessible, a newsletter, called *Gender Matters* has been produced. In addition a gender sensitive syllabus and textbooks have been developed for schools, which have contributed to increased enrolment in schools.

There seems not to be much difference between the outcomes of the NGOs and that of the institutions. The NGOs serve as a strong support for the governmental institutions in achieving their objectives by providing a lot of material and financial resources. One could observe that comparatively, the NGOs are doing so much in promoting women's citizenship in Ghana. However, the major challenges reported by the governmental institutions are lack of adequate resources and an effective means for monitoring and measuring output.

THE WAY FORWARD – CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Considering the level of gender stereotyping that was prevalent in the country, the gender disparities that existed and socio-cultural factors that were affecting women one could say that the efforts made have not been without challenges. The various reports reveal the following challenges which offer significant lessons for subsequent interventions:

- That issues affecting women's citizenship cannot be discussed in isolation from broader national issues. It is more appropriate and effective to address women's citizenship issues based on a clear understanding of broad national issues and drawing out their gender dimensions. This draws from the strengths in gender mainstreaming.
- Activities on women's citizenship constitute a political process of which various interest groups should take interest and lend support. To be successful, one needs to identify parties that are interested in such interventions and draw on their energies. Working in isolation for the purpose of gaining credit or recognition cannot lead to fundamental change for women. This calls more collaborative efforts.
- Similarly, there is the need for effective collaboration and networking of all activities among the various organizations and institutions to ensure that interventions are evenly distributed in the country. Probably an indexing of all the interventions could help minimize duplication and facilitate collaboration and partnership building as well.
- Much as it can be appreciated that much has been achieved in enhancing women's citizenship in Ghana, especially in the area of awareness creation, the impact has not been up to expectation considering the fact that tradition die hard. There is therefore the need for a long term vision in this direction.
- Traditional leaders wield a lot of power in society. This potential should be harnessed to get their support in promoting citizenship among women.
- Women who get the chance to be voted for face a number of challenges while in office. It will be helpful to follow up on such women while in office and

give them the necessary support for successful performance which could pave the way for other women.

- Women groups form a large constituency of community-based associations at the grassroots level. These groups could be a good playing ground for promoting citizenship among women. Capacity building for them should therefore not only target the general citizenship issues but other technical areas like financial management to expose them to other managerial, administrative and governance skills
- There appears to be a high level of donor dependence which affects sustainability and effectiveness. An innovative approach for raising resources at the country level could be more helpful and facilitate a higher level of commitment. (Ofei-Aboagy; Mensah – Kutin & Baatuolkuu-Obeng-Ofori, 2003)

CONCLUSION

The discussion indicates that the NGOs have made a lot of progress in promoting citizenship among women in Ghana. In spite of emergent challenges, their efforts have brought to fore the issues of women's citizenship and how they could be addressed. The public platform for promoting women's citizenship has also been widely set up; women's participation in all levels of governance has been improved, institutions have been set up and equipped to serve as watchdogs for women's citizenship issues at the national and grassroots level; and women's education are being promoted based on the recognition that education is the tool for women's empowerment among others. There is no doubt that if these efforts are intensified, more could be achieved for the enhancement of women's citizenship in Ghana.

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