

**THE 145<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY OF THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION (IPU)  
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**THEME;**

**GENDER-EQUALITY AND GENDER SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTS AS  
DRIVERS OF CHANGE FOR A MORE RESILIENT AND PEACEFUL  
WORLD**

**Introduction**

Gender equality has been and continues to be, a fundamental developmental and sustainability imperative and not just a human rights concern. Given the current demographics of more than 50% of the global population being females, their equal participation in whatever society does is an imperative to ensure inclusive and responsive governance. Gender equality, when promoted through gender-sensitive parliaments, will be one of the most reliable and effective drivers of change for a more resilient and peaceful world.

It is against this backdrop that Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target seeks to **“ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life”**.

There is clear evidence of global efforts to achieve gender equality albeit at an epileptic and snail space. The day when women and men would enjoy the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of society, including cultural, social, political, economic participation and decision-making, a just and peaceful world would’ve been in sight. For there can be no peace without justice. The much talked about peace, prosperity and sustainable development will continue to elude the world without gender equality. Consequently, all of us must act collectively to ensure that no one is left behind in any aspects of our lives.

Inclusivity, is a prerequisite to sustainable development for it ensures the harnessing of the collective buy in, wealth and social capital of all the

people and creates harmonious relationships with its resultant sustainable development and a more resilient and peaceful world.

### **Gender-sensitive parliament**

The Legislature is the heart and life blood of democracy and good governance. It is the House of the governed, the people. And as such its composition ought to be a true reflection, a mirror of the people it represents. This means all the people must be equally represented, heard and given equal opportunities. Gender-sensitive parliaments are therefore not about equality in numbers alone but a healthy parity in all aspects and perspectives of gender. All the various and varied gender treads must find expression in the products and outcomes of society's deliberations and efforts.

A key requirement of a gender-sensitive parliament is that all aspects of parliamentary work, structures, composition, and operations are mainstreamed to ensure gender equality. Male and female quality, quantity, opportunities and resilience must synchronise at all levels.

### **The Role of Parliament in the creation of gender equality**

Parliament itself can play a significant role in the creation of a gender-sensitive institution. Through legislation, regulation and policy adaptation mechanisms Parliaments could remove barriers to the full participation of all sections of society, such as women, the youth, physically disabled and minorities. By doing this, Parliament will be offering leadership by example to the society at large.

In executing its mandate, a gender-sensitive parliament ought to ensure that policies and legislations are well scrutinised and subjected to gender analysis to include the articulation of the interest of all groups. This is to ascertain whether the gendered differentiated outcomes put women, girls, the youth, physically disabled on equal footing with boys and men. If not done, Parliament acts to ensure the inequalities are removed.

No Parliament has achieved 100% gender equality. But good examples of gender-sensitive parliaments in Africa in terms of composition include Rwanda, which has a 61.3% of women representation, and South-Africa, whose Parliament is composed of 46% women.

## **The Case of Ghana**

Ghana has been conscious of the imperative of gender equality, since 1958. The Parliament of Ghana has been and is responding and working to ensure the realisation of this goal. The need to be a driver of change through a number of policy measures has therefore not been lost on Ghana's Parliament. The efforts of Ghana towards the emancipation of women and the girl child started from the creation of a desk in the Office of the President to the setting up of a Secretariat and from the creation of a National Commission on Women and Development to the establishment a Ministry of Gender and Children. The following steps and measures have and are also being taken:

1. In 1958, Parliament passed the Representation of Peoples' (Amendment) Act to permit the selection of 10 women into the first Parliament of Independent Ghana. The resurgence of instability immediately after that, and more importantly the 1966 coup, blurred the focus of governments and Parliaments from vigorously pursuing that initiative. It was not until the early 1980s and the Beijing conference of 1995, that the initiative was brought to the front burner. Thereafter a number of legislations were made to remove social, cultural and political barriers to gender equality and women empowerment. These initiatives found expressions in the provisions of the 1992 Constitution.
2. Since 1993, legislations on women, property and spousal rights, financial inclusion and leadership gained prominence in Government and Parliament agendas and daily national discourse. Parliament is currently working on Property and Spousal Rights Bills, an Affirmative Action Bill and a complete review of the Standing Orders of the House to remove all fetters to gender equality and women empowerment.
3. The composition of the House has also seen some improvement in women representation over the years, increasing from 30 in the Fifth Parliament of the Fourth Republic out of 275, representing 11%, to 40 women representation in the Eighth Parliament representing about 14.5% of the Two Hundred and Seventy-five-member Parliament. This is definitely not much progress and unacceptable.

4. As a result, leadership of Parliament is rekindling the internal organisation of Parliament to expedite an increase in the representation of women in key leadership positions of the House. Now women representation in the leadership of the House includes 2 Deputy Chief Whips, 6 female Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons of Committees and a 40 member-women's Caucus financially well supported and visibly vibrant, articulate and effective. The composition of my delegation to this Assembly meeting clearly showcases this gender equality of 4 male and 4 female representation.
5. Again, in a bid to uphold the policy of zero tolerance towards sexism and to create a congenial working environment in the Parliament of Ghana, Parliamentary Service (Staff) Regulations (2019), CI 118, which regulates the staff of the Parliamentary Service in section 52 (j), forbids the ill-treatment or sexual harassment of an officer or visitor on the precincts of Parliament. The offence is viewed as a gross misconduct and the penalties for offenders may include dismissal, termination of appointment or a reduction in grade. There is no mention of penalties if the offender is a legislator except for referral to the Privileges Committee and the Committee is clothed with powers to make several recommendations to the House including recommending the suspension of a Member of Parliament.
6. Staff composition of the Parliamentary Service is currently 37% female and 63% male while at the Management level (Heads of Departments and Divisions), women representation constitutes about 58% of total membership.
7. Enacted legislations such as the Domestic Violence Act, Anti-Human Trafficking Act and the Criminal Code, Act 29 are some of the existing legal frameworks that enable the country to deal with sexual, physical, economic and social abuse of women in Ghana.

### **Additional Ways to promote gender sensitivity**

In a bid to close the remaining gap in gender inequality, the Parliament of Ghana commits to:

- work to intensify the sensitisation of women rights to ensure the meaningful participation of women in politics;
- advocate for the passage of the Affirmative Action Bill and train Staff and Committees of Parliament in the conduct of gender audits of policies and programmes brought before committees;
- undertake other measures including designing gender-monitoring templates for oversight Committees to assess policy implementation and institute gender budgeting in Parliament for all Select Committees;
- promote Constitutional and electoral reforms to review the first past the post, winner-take-all system to include some aspects of a hybrid proportional representation model to mandate political parties to institute quotas for women, the vulnerable and other minorities such as the disabled;
- encourage the various political parties to develop gender and elections strategic framework and action plans and to foster strategic partnerships with the Media to create space for female MPs to become champions for female candidates.
- Participate actively in the application and equal enforcement of the copious human rights and freedoms in the Constitution and to fully partner stakeholders in the compilation of the country report on human rights to UNHRC.

## **Conclusion**

Since women constitute the majority of the world's population, their interest must equally find expression in whatever we do. This is a sine qua non to ensuring a more resilient and peaceful world. The reverse produces an antithesis – a polarised, divisive, bitter, poor, unjust, undeveloped and war-prone world. The evidence in today's world speaks for itself.

In this wise, Parliamentarians, who are the representatives of the people and are the architects of the global political and economic order, have a very important role to play and must stand up and be counted.