

Major Sources and Effects of Women's Rights Violations in Ghana and Innovative Ways of Dealing with Them

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Abstract

This article addresses the major sources and effects of women's rights violations in Ghana and it also suggests some innovative ways of dealing with them. It revisits the various causes and nature of human rights abuse perpetuated against women in Africa and notes that within the context of women's right violations, the Ghanaian constitution and other domestic laws are joined with International Humanitarian Law to establish protection for women. It concludes on the note that violence against women is so entrenched in the society that even the victims condone such violations of their rights, some women claiming it is a sign of love. Africa must accede to the minimal standards of engagement for protection of women's rights and possibly support this with the infusion of the African values of sense of community and dignity of the human person in the existing legal regime.

Keywords: women, abuses, rights, culture, violations

Introduction

In June 26 2015, a striking story stole the headlines of newspapers and media outlets all across Ghana. President **John Mahama** has, in accordance with Article 70(2) of the 1992 Constitution, appointed Mrs. **Charlotte Kesson-Smith Osei** as Chairperson of the Electoral Commission (EC) of Ghana. A statement signed by Chief of Staff **Julius Debrah** said Mrs. Osei who replaces Dr. **Kwadwo Afari Gyan** was until her appointment the Chairperson of the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE). She was appointed as Chairperson for NCCE with a strong track record in public service management, institutional reform and transformation. The appointment was lauded as a giant leap forward in women's political participation within Ghana and was rich in symbolism. (www.pulse.com.gh/news/).

During the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985), women from many geographical, racial, religious, cultural, and class backgrounds took up made great efforts to improve their status. The United Nations-sponsored women's conferences, which took place in Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, and Nairobi in 1985, were convened to evaluate the status of women and to formulate strategies for women's advancement. These conferences were critical venues at which women came together, debated their differences and discovered their commonalities, and gradually began learning to bridge differences to create a global movement. In the late eighties and early nineties, women in diverse countries took up the human rights framework and began developing the analytic and political tools that together constitute the ideas and practices of women's human rights (Henkin, 1990).

When people utilize the human rights framework to articulate the vast array of human rights abuses that women face, they bring clarifying analyses and powerful tools to bear on women's experiences. This strategy has been pivotal in efforts to draw attention to human rights that are specific to women that heretofore have been seen as women's rights but not recognized as "human" rights. Take, for example, the issue of violence against women. The Universal Declaration states: *"No one shall be subject to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."*

According to Mukundi, (2008) this formulation provides a vocabulary for women to define and articulate experiences of violence such as rape, sexual terrorism and domestic violence as violations of the human right not to be subject to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The recognition of such issues as human rights abuses raises the level of expectation about what can and should be done about them (Ebobrah, 2009). This definition of violence against women in terms of human rights establishes unequivocally that states are responsible for such abuse. It also raises questions about how to hold governments accountable for their indifference in such situations and what sorts of mechanisms are needed to expedite the process of redress.

In this essay the following areas will be covered: The human rights situation (Challenges) of women in Africa, Causes of Human Rights Abuses on Women in Africa, Regional Instruments that Promote and protect women's rights, Current, Initiatives for Legal Reform in Ghana and Current Initiatives for Social Reform in

Ghana.

The Human Rights Situation of Women in Africa

Women in Africa, like their counterparts the world over, suffer domestic violence irrespective of class, age, religion or social status. Incidents of domestic violence include battery, beatings, torture, acid baths, rape, and even death through honor killing. It is estimated that one in every three women suffers domestic violence from the hands of those who claim to love and protect them. Many of the victims do not speak out about violations of their rights due to lack of positive response from the society. Domestic violence is so entrenched in the society that even the victims condone such violations of their rights, some claiming it is a sign of love (Henkin, 1990). According to (Assimeng, 1999) due to poverty and economic dependence on men, many victims suffer in silence for fear of losing the economic support of the male perpetrator—where a victim summons the courage to report to law enforcement agents, the issue is trivialized and termed a “private matter.”

Many African countries do not have specific laws prohibiting domestic violence and punishing perpetrators of domestic violence. Current laws do not adequately protect victims of domestic violence. In fact, some existing laws encourage and condone domestic violence (Ebobrah, 2009).

This is further evidence of the rules of procedures in courts are not friendly to victims of domestic violence especially, when it is in the form of sexual assault. Judicial officers and law enforcement officers, like officials of other institutions, are not sensitized to issues of domestic violence or trained on how to respond to this issue. Many of them likely also operate from the prejudices and stereotypes of the male dominated society. The combined factors of economic vulnerability and financial dependence of the woman on the man, social and cultural practices that condone domestic violence, and lack of prosecution or punishment of perpetrators discourage victims from speaking out and seeking redress. The widespread poverty and the political, cultural, and religious marginalization of women in Africa make the African woman more vulnerable to domestic violence (Henkin, 1990).

In recent years, there have been increased efforts to enhance the protection and promotion of women’s rights through the international, regional, and national enactment of laws and policies. Such efforts have resulted in standard setting documents like the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action at the international level Barney, (2004). Some countries have passed laws and policies incorporating such international standards into their domestic laws. For example, Ghana has incorporated the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law. The African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights has also been incorporated (Henkin, 1990).

In Ghana, women and girls are subjected to multiple forms of violence in the homes. However, the most common form of violence is wife battery ranging from slapping, kicking, verbal abuse, denial of financial resources, rape, and death. Due to a dearth of official statistics, it is difficult to establish the extent of domestic violence. However, it is believed that gender based violence is of “epidemic proportions,” and is “seldom reported because of fear of reprisal and lack of response from law enforcement officials statistics relating to this problem would not be available until women are motivated to report domestic and other forms of violence.” (Barney, 2004).

Non-governmental organizations rely on media reports and the number of victims who come to them for assistance for statistics. For example, “Amnesty International report (2011) on Women in Ghana, reports a total of 170 cases based on media reports covering the period from December 2010 to November 2011.

These do not include incidents reported to the police or to civil society organizations. Obviously, this is just the tip of the iceberg, as hundreds of cases go unreported and undocumented. Domestic violence cuts across all communities in Ghana and at times is excused by a woman’s actions or inaction (Henkin, 1990).

When a woman suffers violence due to failure to meet some socially accepted standard of behavior, such failure is usually an accepted excuse for the violence she suffers, especially within the family context. A woman could suffer violence for refusing sex, nagging, or challenging the man’s behavior; for example, if he took a second wife or is an alcoholic. She could be subjected to violence for not preparing meals on time, having, or being under suspicion of having, a sexual relationship outside the marriage, or being accused of witchcraft (Heyns, 2010).

Interestingly, under certain circumstances, women, more than men, tend to justify the infliction of violence. In a survey conducted in 1999, a higher proportion of female than male respondents justified “wife beating,” and this proportion was found to be higher in the northern central zone and lowest in the southwestern zone (Assimeng, 1999).

A recent form of violence against women in Ghana is the use of acids, which are corrosive chemicals usually used in laboratories and factories, and cause permanent disfigurement of the victims. The most

commonly available acids, which can be bought on the street, include sulphuric acid, hydrochloric acid, hydrofluoric acid, and phosphoric acid. Acid baths first gained public attention when, in 1990, a woman in Takoradi was permanently disfigured by her boyfriend when she refused to renew their relationship. Many cases of acid baths are a result of the refusal of the woman to renew, or at times submit to, a relationship with the perpetrator (www.ghanaweb.com/news/)

For Heyns, (2010) another aspect of human rights abuse women suffer which is often ignored is abuse of domestic servants, especially female domestic servants. Some of these domestic servants are as young as twelve to thirteen years old and are expected to serve as nannies and carry out general cleaning in the house. They are usually the last to go to bed and the first to wake up in the morning, taking care of kids who may be their age or just a few years younger. They are denied access to education and are physically abused. In many instances, the police are reluctant to act and protect the domestic servant.

Many female domestic servants are also sexually abused by the male members of the house, especially their employer's husbands. The Ghanaweb.com (2013) also reported the case of thirteen-year-old Hannah, who was living with her aunt. According to Hannah, her aunt's husband frequently abused her sexually at night while her aunt was on permanent night duty. When her mum visited, she told her mum and asked to be taken away from the house. Her mum promised to return for her. However, when her mum did not appear for a long time, she decided to leave the house by herself. With no place to go, she roamed the streets until she was picked up and taken to the department of Social Welfare in Offinso –Ashanti www.ghanaweb.com/news/

Many of these young women become pregnant as a result of which they are thrown out of the house on to the streets. Some are sent back to their parents who in many instances also drive them out for dishonoring the family name.

Causes of Human Rights Abuses on Women in Africa

Cultural norms

Culture can be defined as the norms and values of a particular group that have developed over time in a community. The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity regards culture as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of society or a social group, and it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions, and beliefs. Culture therefore includes beliefs and norms, which regulate power relations and decision making within the community at large and the family. According to Heyns, (2010) based on these norms and beliefs, societies assign their expected characteristics to each sex. Mothers bring up their daughters with specific instructions on what a girl is expected to do in the society and how she is expected to behave. While a male child is expected to be strong and fearless, a female child is expected to be weak and submissive. In school, young children are taught gender constructions through both formal and informal curriculum (Assimeng, 1999).

Worsening economic situation in Africa

The worsening economic situation in Africa especially Ghana is often an excuse given for abuse of women's right particularly domestic violence. As a man becomes unable to provide for the family, the woman is left to support the family economically. In order to compensate for their own feelings of weakness or insecurity, many men resort to hitting the woman, become abusive, unnecessarily possessive and suspicious of the woman (Heyns, 2010).

The man may resorts to domestic violence in order to stamp his mark of authority over the woman and members of his family. He sees this kind of power as the guarantee of his manhood. In most case, abuse is perpetrated after excessive amounts of alcohol have been consumed, the abuser's drunkenness being a smokescreen for his intentions (Assimeng, 1999).

In a case reported by Amnesty International (2011), envy of a woman's financial ability appeared to be the reason for the beating of a teacher by her medical doctor husband. In addition, many children grow up witnessing or directly experiencing domestic violence. Many witness their mothers being beaten, and grow up to believe that this is what men are supposed to do. In many instances, these boys repeat the circle of abusing women, believing that violence is the only way of getting things done or proving their manhood.

Lack of Access to Justice

Access to justice requires that citizens are aware of their rights and have access to institutions that can remedy violations of such rights. It includes, among other things, awareness of legal rights and duties, and accessibility to the justice administration mechanisms and institutions that have the power to remedy injustice. Many women in Nigeria are not aware of their rights. For instance, majority of the women interviewed in Dunkwa-on –Offin (73%, n=73/100) stated that they were not aware of the laws protecting women's rights whether in Muslim or customary law. A major reason for this lack of awareness is the high level of illiteracy among Ghanaian women.

Regional Instruments and Women's Rights

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (the African Charter) entered into force on October 21, 1986. It has been ratified by Ghana, and is now part of the domestic law. The African Charter recognizes women's

rights in three clear provisions.

Article 18 (3) ensures the elimination of every discrimination against women and ensures protection of women.

Article 2 contains a non-discrimination clause, providing that the rights enshrined in the Charter shall be enjoyed by all irrespective of race, ethnic group, color, sex, language, political or any other opinion, national or social origin, fortune, birth or other status. The equal protection clause in Article 3 provides for equality before the law and equal protection before the law.

This Charter, however, was inadequate in protecting the rights of women in Africa. It did not take into consideration critical issues such as custom and marriage. Within the marital relationship, there was no provision on the age of marriage and equality of spouses. More importantly, the Charter promoted African traditional values and traditions without due consideration to the harmful effects of some traditional values on women.

Because of these and other issues, there was a heightened agitation by women's rights advocates for a regional instrument on women's human rights that resulted in the African Women Protocol discussed below:

Violence against women was first highlighted within the African context in the Dakar Declaration of 1994, (African Platform for Action and the Dakar Declaration of 1994) as widespread in most African countries (Ebobrah, 2009).

The Dakar Declaration acknowledged that violence deprives women of their ability to achieve their full potential and threatens their safety, freedom and autonomy. It also acknowledged that violence is often unreported, as the majority of women do not speak out or report to the court but keep silent out of fear, shame or misplaced feeling that they are somehow responsible.

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, which was ratified by the required fifteen member states, including Ghana, and came into force on November 26, 2005, places an obligation on state parties to take measures to address not only violence against women, but also other aspects of women's rights (Ebobrah, 2009).

Article 1 defines violence against women as:

All acts perpetrated against women which cause or could cause them physical, sexual, psychological and economic harm, including the threat to take such acts, or to undertake the imposition of arbitrary restrictions on or deprivation of fundamental freedoms in private or public life, in peace time and during situations of armed conflict or of war.

Interestingly, unlike many Constitutions and laws of African states, this definition of abuses against women widens the scope of sexual violence to include marital rape. Prohibition of marital rape is further emphasized in Article 4, which requires states parties to prohibit, prevent, and punish "*all forms of violence against women including unwanted or forced sex whether the violence takes place in private or public.*"

Other key provisions of the Protocol include Article 1(f), which guarantees the enjoyment of women's rights regardless of marital status in all spheres of life. This provision implies that national laws and constitutions that discriminate against married women are in conflict with the Protocol and violate its non-discrimination principles.

Article 1(g) defines harmful practices as practices that "negatively affect the fundamental rights of women and girls such as their rights to life, health, dignity, education, and physical integrity."

Article 3 imposes an obligation on all parties to the Charter to combat all forms of discrimination against women through appropriate legislative, institutional, and other measures. States should, among other things, include in their constitutions and other legislative instruments the principle of equality between men and women and ensure its effective implementation. Article 3 reaffirms women's rights to dignity inherent in a human being and the recognition and protection of her human and legal rights. It obligates state parties to adopt and implement appropriate measures to ensure the protection of every woman's right and protection from all forms of violence, particularly sexual and verbal violence. Having already defined harmful traditional practices,

Article 5 focuses on measures to be taken by the government to eliminate them such as public awareness, legislative measures, provision of necessary support to victims, etc.

In Article 10 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, women are also fully guaranteed the right to Right to Peace: the protocol says: Women have the right to a peaceful existence and the right to participate in the promotion and maintenance of peace. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the increased participation of women:

a) In programs of education for peace and a culture of peace;

b) in the structures and processes for conflict prevention, management and resolution at local, national, regional, continental and international levels; in the local, national, regional, continental and international decision making structures to ensure physical, psychological, social and legal protection of asylum seekers, refugees, returnees and displaced persons, in particular women; in all levels of the structures established for the

management of camps and settlements for asylum seekers, refugees, returnees and displaced persons, in particular, women; in all aspects of planning, formulation and implementation of post conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation.

States Parties shall take the necessary measures to reduce military expenditure significantly in favour of spending on social development in general, and the promotion of women in particular.

Article 22 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa Specially Protect of Elderly Women. The protocol says: The States Parties undertake to: a) provide protection to elderly women and take specific measures commensurate with their physical, economic and social needs as well as their access to employment and professional training; b) ensure the right of elderly women to freedom from violence, including sexual abuse, discrimination based on age and the right to be treated with dignity.

Article 23 also provides Special Protection of Women with Disabilities. It says; the States Parties undertake to: a) ensure the protection of women with disabilities and take specific measures commensurate with their physical, economic and social needs to facilitate their access to employment, professional and vocational training as well as their participation in decision- making; b) ensure the right of women with disabilities to freedom from violence, including sexual abuse, discrimination based on disability and the right to be treated with dignity.

Again, Article 24 provides Special Protection of Women in Distress. The protocol says States Parties undertake to: a) ensure the protection of poor women and women heads of families including women from marginalized population groups and provide the an environment suitable to their condition and their special physical, economic and social needs; b) ensure the right of pregnant or nursing women or women in detention by providing them with an environment which is suitable to their condition and the right to be treated with dignity.

Current Initiatives for Legal Reform in Ghana

Initiatives for legal reforms have come mainly from civil society organizations and human rights activists. Such initiatives include the following:

The 1992 constitution of Ghana

Many articles in the 1992 constitution of Ghana protect and promote women's right. Article 27 (1) says special care shall be accorded to mothers during a reasonable period before and after childbirth; and during those periods, working mothers shall be accorded paid leave.

(2) Facilities shall be provided for the care of children below school –going age to enable women, who have the traditional care for children, realize their full potential.

(3) Women shall be guaranteed equal rights to training and promotion without any impediments from any person.

Intestate succession law (PNDCL III)

Section 16(A) This law seeks to protect women from abuses. Prohibition of Ejection of Spouses under Certain Circumstances is guaranteed in this law. The law says:

(1) No person shall before the distribution of the estate of a deceased person whether testate or intestate eject a surviving spouse or child from the matrimonial home (a) where the matrimonial home is the self-acquired property of the deceased; (b) where the matrimonial home is rented property, unless the ejection is pursuant to a court order; (c) where the matrimonial home is the family house of the deceased, unless a period of six months has expired from the date of the death of the deceased; or (d) where the matrimonial home is public property unless a period of three months has expired from the date of the death of the deceased. The law made it a criminal offence for any person to subject women to inhuman treatment after the death of their spouses.

Domestic Violence Law (2007)

Many countries in Africa have passed domestic violence bills into law to protect women from abuses they suffer in homes. The Domestic Violence Law is an initiative of a coalition of non- governmental organizations involved in law reform advocacy as well as provisions of services to victims and survivors of violence against women. In addition to drafting a comprehensive bill on violence against women, the coalition aims at creating awareness that will promote attitudinal changes in the society that are necessary for the laws successful implementation. The Bill was first submitted to the parliament in 2003, but did not see the light of day until the end of that legislative session in 2007.

The Domestic Violence Law aims at addressing obstacles to the practice of constitutional principles arising from all forms of gender based violence. Section 1 of the Bill prohibits certain acts that constitute violence against women, including willfully placing or attempting to place a woman or girl in fear of physical injury, coercing a woman or girl by force or threat to engage in any act sexual or otherwise to the detriment of her physical or psychological wellbeing, mutilating, attempting or aiding the mutilation of a woman's or girl child's genitals, indecently assaulting a woman or girl, raping a woman or girl, committing incest with a woman or girl, marrying or giving an under-aged girl into marriage, sexually harassing a woman or girl, sexually

assaulting a woman or girl, sexually exploiting or enslaving a woman or girl, sexually abusing a woman or girl, forcing a woman or girl into prostitution, slavery or trafficking, depriving a woman of her liberty, denying a woman of economic benefit without just cause, exposing any woman or girl to forced labor, forcing any woman to isolate herself from family and friends, inflicting any emotional abuse on a woman, abandoning wife or children without any means of subsistence, stalking or intimidating any woman or girl and inflicting any domestic violence on a woman (Barney, 2004).

Any person who attempts to commit any of the offenses listed there or any person who aids, incites or counsels another person to commit any of these offenses is deemed to have taken part in committing the offence. If the court finds that person guilty, such a person will be liable on conviction to imprisonment for a minimum of two years or pay a fine or both fine and imprisonment. The State High Court is designated as the court of competent jurisdiction to hear cases of violence against women brought pursuant to the provisions of the proposed bill. The Bill empowers police officers to use their discretion to arrest any person whom they suspect of having committed any of the offenses under Section 1.

A police officer may also arrest any person against whom a complaint of having committed any of the offenses listed in the bill has been made. Such arrest can be made without a court order or warrant of arrest. The Bill stipulates conditions for issuing a Protection Order for survivors of violence and provides that an application for a protection order may be made before any High Court following a complaint of violence against a woman as defined under Section 1.

According to Section 6 (1) (a)–(g), only certain persons or agencies may apply for a Protection Order at the State’s High Court, namely, the complainant, the Commission on violence against women, the police, a relative of the victim, a social worker or health worker, a representative of a relevant civil society organization, or any person who witnesses the act of violence.

Unique Provisions of the Domestic Violence Bill

The law provides a quasi–criminal, quasi–civil procedure in that the legal process under the law does not involve arrest, or trial or punishment of the perpetrator but only aims at protecting the survivor from violence within the home. It is only when the perpetrator violates the court order that he can be arrested. Under the Bill, a survivor of domestic violence or third party who is qualified to do so may approach any court in the state and ask for a protective order against the perpetrator for a certain period of time, within which also the perpetrator undergoes counseling. If the perpetrator continues with the violence despite the protective order against him or her, the court may make an order to protect the woman’s insecurity with respect to her subsistence, shelter, and maintenance of the children while the perpetrator is compelled to comply with the protective order (Human Rights Watch, 2003).

The law enjoins the court to hear complaints under the bill in strict confidence and in chambers. This is to protect the social, psychological and personal integrity of the parties, especially the survivor. It also aims at protecting the children from undue attention and publicity. A third party, usually a relative, welfare officer, community health, social or welfare worker, the community itself, or such other person as defined by the bill may intervene to obtain a protective order in favor of the survivor who has refused or is unable to seek legal remedy.

The law is cited as the Domestic Violence, the interpretation clause contains definition of terms and phrases used in the law. Under the law, a police officer is bound to assist a complainant of domestic violence at the scene of the incident or when it is reported, either to find a suitable shelter and obtain medical treatment, or to explain to the complainant the remedies available to the complainant and the right to lodge a criminal complaint if necessary.

Current Initiatives for Social Reform in Ghana

Economic Empowerment Grows Despite Persistent Challenges

According to Human Rights Watch, (2003) due to their abundant natural resources, most African countries have experienced unprecedented growth and development of late, and are currently undergoing an economic and cultural metamorphosis. The effects of these changes on women and their rights cannot go unnoticed.

In nearly all countries in West Africa, women today are better represented in the labor force and play a more prominent role in the workplace than was the case five years ago. In Ghana, the

2012 elections saw 24 women winning their seat to parliament which is an improvement over the last which was 19. Similarly, the proportion of working women has grown by 4 percent in Ghana in 2012. Compared with male employment, however, these figures remain glaringly low (www.ghanaweb.com/news/)

Academic Opportunities Expand Women’s Prospects

Education has been a prime area of progress for women in the region, and it is an important avenue for their advancement toward broader equality. Since the 1990s, women in all African countries have made gains in access to education, literacy, university enrollment, and the variety of subjects of study available to them. That trend has continued, for the most part, over the past five years. The primary school completion rate for girls has

grown by 15 percent in the Ghana. Although women are generally encouraged to study in traditionally female disciplines such as education and health care, they have started entering new fields, including engineering and science. For example, in Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), women outnumber for the first time in 2012 in the fields of chemical engineering. (www.knust.edu.gh/news)

One could easily assume that women are fast gaining in the political sphere in Ghana and West Africa. A number of women hold some of the most prominent leadership positions in the region and on the continent. Liberia is home to two female Nobel Peace Prize winners and Africa's first woman president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who is in her second term. The former managing director of the World Bank Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala who currently holds one of the most powerful political positions in Nigeria, as the Minister of Finance, and Fatou Bensouda, of Gambia is now the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. Just to mention a few. *The Need for Affirmative Action*

To promote women's rights, affirmative action should be practiced in Africa. Women's rights groups and leaders of women's wings in both major political parties argue that an affirmative action policy is the only way forward if women are to have a real influence in the political sphere (Assimeng, 1999).

Rwanda's Affirmative Action Policy demands 30 percent of parliamentary seats be reserved for women and saw 56 percent of seats won by women in the 2008 elections, making Rwanda the nation with the highest number of women parliamentarians in the world. This success has inspired women's rights campaigners in Ghana. The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs has been conducting public consultations across the country in recent months and is looking at developing Ghana's own affirmative action policy to ensure that more women have a greater chance of being elected in 2016. Affirmative action is controversial in most parts of the world because it challenges the notion of a merit-based system. Within the framework of representative democracy it is seen to pose limits and restrictions on the ability of the demos to elect their own leaders. But in a game where women are not given support within their own parties, nor offered sufficient financing and the means to campaign and make themselves visible, they are losers before the match starts. When the playing field is tilted in favour of a dominant group, namely men, measures need to be taken until the field levels and both parties can compete on equal footing. According to Assimeng, (1999) in a culture where many people still cannot understand why female leaders might be desirable or necessary, or even imagine them in leadership roles, society and the government must be compelled through law to make this a reality. The notion of representative democracy is underpinned by an idea that politicians represent our needs desires and aspirations. With women, or any group absent from the picture, the democracy becomes hollow and simply a reflection of the will of the dominant group.

Pro-Poor Policies

Some African countries have decided to implement the Millennium Development Goals to promote the rights of women through the National Health Insurance Scheme so that women could have the full package of ante-natal, deliveries and post-natal care as well as all medical costs for the year. In Ghana it was estimated that there would be about 940,000 pregnancies this year. This is expected to increase to 1,030,000 by 2014. He said out of a total of 50,924 registered pregnant women recorded since July, Ashanti Region has the highest number of 12,164 while Volta Region has the lowest number of 1,589 (www.Ghanaweb.com/news/)

All pregnant women who are not currently registered with the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) would be exempted from paying the NHIS premium and the registration charge. Again, any woman who delivered at home or in an unaccredited health facility and who subsequently presents at an accredited health facility with post-partum complications during the six week post-natal period would be registered.

Conclusion

Extending the idea of human development to encompass women's empowerment and gender justice puts social transformation at the center of the agenda for human development and progress of women, choices for women, especially poor women, cannot be enlarged without a change in relations between women and men as well as in the ideologies and institutions that preserve and reproduce inequality. This does not mean reversing position, so that men become subordinate and women dominant. Rather, it means negotiating new kinds of relationship that are based not on power over others but on a mutual development of creative human energy. It also means negotiating new kinds of institutions, incorporating new norms and rules that support egalitarian and just relations between women and men.

All over the world, the law remains a vital tool for promoting the rights of women either in the public, private, or domestic sphere. It serves the purpose of ensuring that abusers are held accountable for their actions and gives the victims a sense of safety and justice. The law also assists victims to protect themselves from further abuse and to move on with their lives. In Ghana, there is need for a complete overhaul of the legal system to protect women's rights and make it victims friendly. All discriminatory laws and practices as well as rules of procedures should be abolished and new ones put in place. The Domestic Violence Bill in the National Assembly, which provides for confidentiality of proceedings, third party proceedings, and Protection Order,

should be passed by the National Assembly without further delay. There is need for training of law enforcement agents from the junior rank up to the higher levels on women's rights issues. However, enactment of laws alone cannot effectively promote women's rights. The need for creating awareness on women's rights issues cannot be over emphasized. Cultural biases, beliefs, and ways of socialization affect the way laws are enforced which often violates the rights of women. Without a change of attitudes and beliefs, the law alone cannot effectively promote or protect the rights of women.

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