

**Perspectives of Ghanaian Women
and Current Discourse on the
STATUS OF WOMEN IN
GHANA**



**STAR GHANA
FOUNDATION**

**MAY
2020**

BACKGROUND

In November 2018, the STAR Ghana Foundation, in partnership with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and selected regional civil society organisations (CSOs), convened zonal dialogues on the status of Ghanaian women. The zonal dialogues were followed by a national convening in March 2019.

The objective of the convenings was to hear from women and men from all walks of life (including formal and informal sectors, rural and urban communities, young and old, as well as with different levels of education) about the status of Ghanaian women, looking at areas progress have been made, and areas that require further efforts and better outcomes. The dialogues focused three areas-political rights, economic rights, and social rights (access to opportunities and services). Over 1,500 women participated. The zonal meeting format was standardised across convenings; presentations on the status of women in each zone were followed by participatory group work, in which participants discussed the various topics. Each topic was dealt with independently, elaborating on the current situation, barriers to women's equality with recommendations proposed.

This paper presents an overview of the voiced perspectives and the status of Ghanaian women as compiled from that process and an undertaken literature review of current discourse, indicating where progress has been made, and remaining challenges. Notably, while the limited sampling means obtained insights are not representative of the broader population, there is great value in considering what the provided first-hand perspectives can tell us.

OVERVIEW

Ghana has seen efforts towards gender equality and improvements for women's empowerment over the years: The Ghanaian government has committed to international conventions and goals to improve women's rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW) and the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol); and civil society actors have actively been working towards the passing of supportive legislation such as the Affirmative Action Bill. At the legislative and judiciary level, there has been significant progress in women's representation, with female representatives having been nominated for and taken on leadership roles as Chief Justice, Speaker of Parliament, Chair of Ghana's Electoral Commission, and Chair of the National Commission for Civic Education.¹ However, it emerged from the zonal dialogues that there is a consensus that there is still room for improvement regarding the status of women, particularly as efforts at the Executive level seem to be nascent, despite a vibrant civil society working towards further progress.² Women across all of the consulted regions agreed that Ghanaian women remain under-represented in decision-making processes at all levels, starting at home and reaching the highest levels.³ While women's participation in Ghanaian politics has seen improvement, progress has been incremental, with some reversal of progress observed more recently by zonal dialogue participants, particularly in the Northern Region.⁴

¹ Dawuni and Kang (2015)

² STAR Ghana Foundation (2018c) and (2018d)

³ STAR Ghana Foundation (2018a); (2018b); (2018c); (2018d) and (2018e)

⁴ STAR Ghana Foundation (2018d)

Ghana ranked 89 out of 149 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index in 2018, and 142 out of 189 on the Gender Inequality Index in 2019, with a score of 0.538, indicating there is a significant amount of potential human development loss due to gender inequality.⁵

Although the Ghanaian Constitution and existing legislation protects women's equal legal status in terms of family, labour, property, nationality, and inheritance laws, this is weakened by legal loopholes, customary practices and discrimination in social institutions.⁶ A number of key pieces of legislation or amendments which would enhance women's rights in Ghana are still outstanding, including a now-withdrawn 'Spousal Bill' which would have spelled out partners' equal entitlement to property acquired during marriage in case of divorce. The Affirmative Action Bill (which would address inequalities that have hampered women's greater inclusion in many key decision-making positions, and influence efforts to reduce societal inequalities) has been withdrawn; with a fresh lobbying process being started after 2016, following the coming into office of a new Parliament and government.⁷ The Disability Act does not include specific provisions for women (and children) living with disabilities; however, there are active civil society efforts to amend this.⁸

Women continue to face inequalities regarding access to services and opportunities, including in terms of health, education, and economic participation and employment in Ghana's patriarchal society.⁹ Varying capacity and effectiveness of gender desks at the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies influence girls and women's access to social services.¹⁰ Women also experience greater barriers regarding access to resources, such as land, bank services or mobile technology. Disparities between men and women, as well as between women in rural and urban areas and across different regions of Ghana, are prevalent and seem to be increasing.¹¹ Gender-based violence in a myriad of forms is widespread, and is perceived to be increasing in parts of Ghana, such as in Upper West Region.¹² While there is a history of a strong women's rights movement, with civil society organisations (CSOs) and groups actively advocating for gender equality across a spectrum of socio-economic and political rights and empowerment issues, their presence has been further increasing in recent years.¹³

Women with disabilities are reportedly not sufficiently included in women's rights groups' activities.¹⁴ Although the National Gender Policy (2015) is a key reference document for activists, it is reportedly not widely accessible.¹⁵

There is scope for more zonal and national level dialogue to better represent women's interests and amplify their voices on a more regular basis, and a need for more visibility of female role models.¹⁶

⁵ World Economic Forum (2018) and UNDP (2017). The Global Gender Gap Index aims to benchmark countries against a range of measures of their state of gender equality, such as economic participation, educational attainment, health and political empowerment. The Gender Inequality Index is a metric which illustrates the proportion of potential human development loss due to gender inequality (with a score of 0 representing no lost opportunity to 1 representing absolute opportunity loss) and ranking countries based on their score.

⁶ US Department of State (2018); STAR Ghana Foundation (2018d)

⁷ Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (2019); STAR Ghana Foundation (2018c) and (2018d)

⁸ Ocran (2019); STAR Ghana 2020 Strategic Learning Event insights

⁹ This was reflected across all of the STAR Ghana Foundation regional consultations conducted in Ashanti and Brong Ahafo Region, Central and Western Regions, Eastern Region, Northern Region, and Upper West Region in November 2018. The Zonal Dialogues included a range of institutions and individuals, such as from the private and public sector, traditional authorities, religious leaders, academia, and civil society, including women's and youth groups.

¹⁰ STAR Ghana Foundation (2018c)

¹¹ STAR Ghana Foundation (2018c) and (2018d); Oxfam (2019)

¹² STAR Ghana Foundation (2018e)

¹³ STAR Ghana Foundation (2018d)

¹⁴ STAR Ghana Foundation (2018a)

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

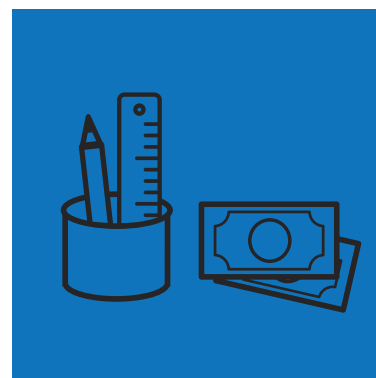
THEMATIC INSIGHTS



Social norms and traditional practices



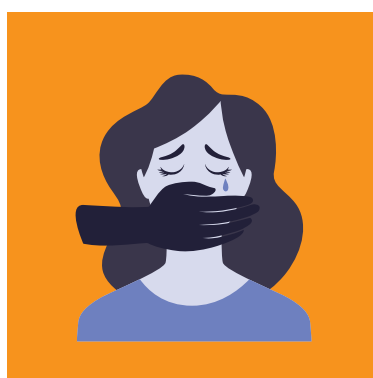
Health



Education and economic participation



Political participation and decision-making



Gender-based violence



Security and justice



01 SOCIAL NORMS & TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

Widowhood can constitute a 'social death,' with women often losing their social status after the husband's death, being abandoned by their in-laws and/or subjected to harmful traditional widowhood rites.¹⁷ Many widows are vulnerable to severe discrimination and stigma; harassment and physical, sexual and mental abuse; exploitation and denial of their property rights (including being expelled from their marital home), with many lacking the rights awareness or means to take up their case in court, elevating their risk to become destitute.¹⁸ Widows may also be accused of being a witch.¹⁹ Women with disabilities experience shame and stigma, and can experience social neglect, including from their own families, as disability is often interpreted as a 'misfortune' that has befallen a family, which further perpetuates negative perceptions about disability.²⁰

77%
of Ghanaians
believe in
witchcraft

Source:
Gallup Poll (2015)

This placed Ghana in the top 10 globally for strong personal beliefs in witchcraft.

¹⁷ Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (2018); STAR Ghana Foundation (2018c)

¹⁸ Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (2018); STAR Ghana Foundation (2018e); US Department of State (2018)

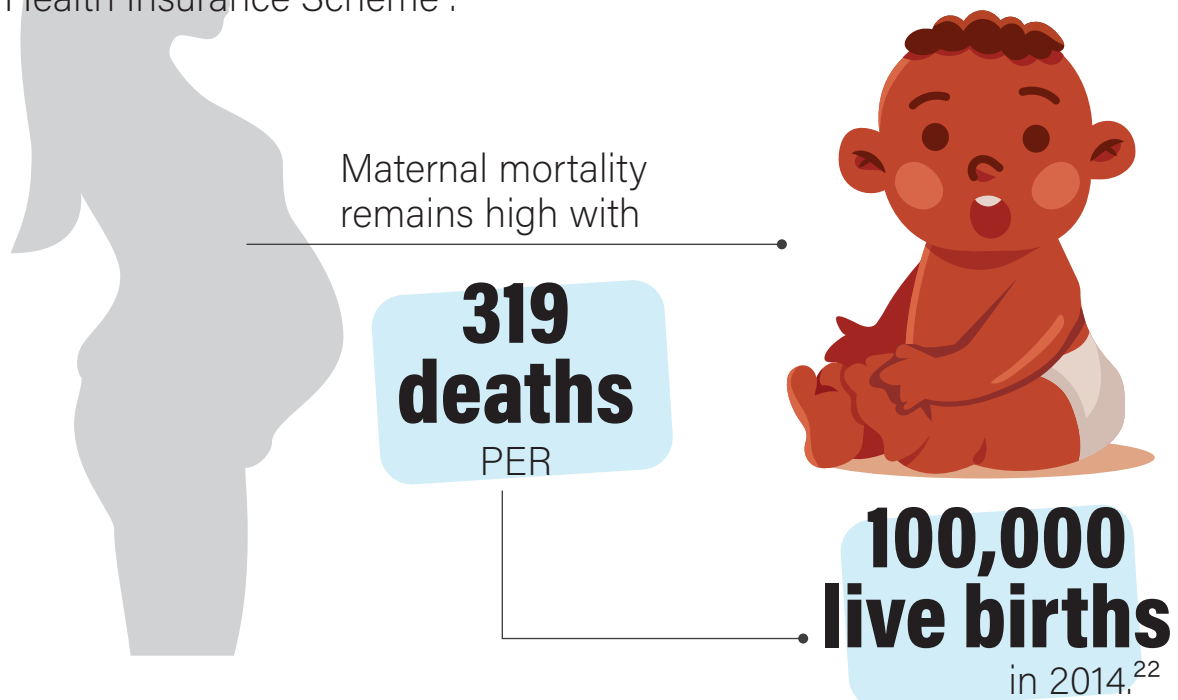
¹⁹ Ghana News Agency (2019)

²⁰ STAR Ghana Foundation (2018a); McConkey et al. (2016), cited in Rohwerder (2018)

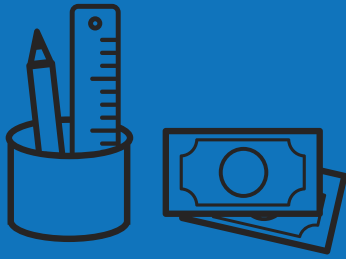


02 HEALTH

A qualitative study of rural communities in Upper West Region indicates that gender inequality results in a lack of women's autonomy regarding their own reproductive health, often having to seek permission from spouses or male relatives to obtain any health care, including antenatal care; while fears of reprisal also cause crucial delays in care uptake.²¹ Women's access to and uptake of healthcare is affected by a number of factors, namely: insufficient health education; lack of locally available healthcare services; financial constraints; inaccessibility of physical health facilities by women with disabilities; negative attitudes of some healthcare workers; and inability to register under the National Health Insurance Scheme .



²¹ Haruna et al. (2019); STAR Ghana Foundation (2018c)
²² UNFPA (2019); STAR Ghana Foundation (2018e)



03 EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

Gender parity for has been reached, with a net enrolment rate of 86% for girls and 84% for boys at primary level, and 57% for girls and 56% for boys at secondary level.²² This trend reverses for tertiary education, where gross enrolment rates are 13% of women and 19% for men.²³ The literacy rate among adult women is 65% compared with 78% for men.²⁴

While 23.4% of (or, 6.8 million) Ghanaians live in poverty, more women are poor: 63% of women compared to 60% of men are considered to be 'very poor'.²⁵ However, fewer female-headed households (18%) live in poverty compared to male-headed households (26%).²⁶ Women spend over three times as much time as men on unpaid care work, contributing to poverty levels and a reported financial over-reliance on men, in part due to less opportunity to partake in employment and other economic activities.²⁷



In Western Region,
29% of women
had never been to school (compared to 12% of men)



92% of women
work in low-paid informal employment (compared to 79% of men)



In Central Region,
7.6% of women
hold roles in professional work (compared to 18.4% of men)

²² UNFPA (2019)

²³ World Bank (2017)

²⁴ World Economic Forum (2018)

²⁵ Ghana Statistical Service et al. (2018)

²⁶ OECD Development Centre (2019); STAR Ghana Foundation (2018c) and (2018e)

²⁷ STAR Ghana Foundation (2018b)



04 POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND DECISION MAKING

Women remain underrepresented in Ghanaian politics and governance, despite the Constitution guaranteeing women political participation rights.²⁸ At the regional level, women are represented even less, for example in Central and Western regions, only 29 of 572 assembly members are women (constituting only 5%).²⁹ In 2019, the Ghanaian President expressed the view that in order for more women to take up leadership roles in Parliament and political parties, more 'dynamism and activism' was required by them.³⁰ It must be noted that while there have been a number of prominent Ghanaian female leaders who have shown such dynamism, there is evidence from aspiring female candidates that the experience of political discrimination is commonplace; and the perception of politics as a 'dirty game' acts as a deterrent for many women's involvement.³¹



Women's representation in
Ghanaian politics and governance

**13% of
Parliament
members**

**25% of
ministerial
positions**

28 STAR Ghana Foundation (2018c); STAR Ghana Foundation (2018d)

29 Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women (2019); Tawiah (2018)

30 STAR Ghana Foundation (2018b)

31 STAR Ghana Foundation (2018c)



05 GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Many Ghanaians are, at least to some extent, socialized to believe that women should not hold opinions of their own, and that they must obtain the permission of their husbands for things such as leaving the house or accessing health care – with some women reporting a common acceptance of punishments for acts such as refusing sex in some regions.³² The most common forms of GBV are intimate partner violence (IPV) and violence perpetrated by family members.³³ Sexual harassment and abuse of female students by schoolmasters, teachers and male peers is common, including at secondary and tertiary level.³⁴ A recent documentary exposed University of Ghana professors seemingly offering admission to female students in exchange for sexual favours; since then, #SexForGrades has trended in Ghana, with thousands of tweets detailing women’s own experiences.³⁵ Sexual harassment is common in places of employment: women working in male-dominated spaces have to deal with ‘rampant sexual harassment’.³⁶

one quarter of all women (24%) reportedly experience domestic violence in their lifetime



Rape of women and defilement of children remains a serious problem.

32 STAR Ghana Foundation (2018c) and (2018d)

33 ISSER, Ipsos MORI, ICRW and NUI Galway (2019)

34 Ahorney (2019); STAR Ghana Foundation (2018c); Khoo-Dzisi (2018)

35 Abraham (2019)

36 US Department of State (2018); STAR Ghana Foundation (2018c)



06 SECURITY AND JUSTICE

There are challenges regarding security and justice. The most common forms of GBV are intimate partner violence (IPV) and violence perpetrated by family members.³⁷ While the 2007 Domestic Violence Act intends to assure provision of strong protection for survivors of domestic abuse (entitling them to police assistance and a free medical examination and report), a chronic lack of resources means this is often not implemented, affecting rates of disclosure and the support provided to survivors.³⁸ In March 2019, the Coalition on Domestic Violence Legislation called on the President to fully implement the Act, including through instructing relevant institutions to establish sexual harassment policies in schools and workplaces.³⁹ Although rape is criminalised, few cases – even where suspects have been identified and arrested – reach the courts or result in a conviction, often due to witnesses being unavailable, a lack of adequate resources and training on investigations, mismanagement of cases by police prosecutors, and a lack of funds among survivors.⁴⁰

40% of Ghanaian women expressed lack of confidence in Ghana's justice system.



37 OECD Development Centre (2019)

38 Menon (2019)

39 Ahorney (2019)

40 US Department of State (2018)

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. CSOs should strengthen advocacy, education and sensitisation efforts on women's empowerment among government and civil society.
2. The State, through relevant ministries and agencies, should ensure sufficient funding for women's empowerment by Municipal and District Chief Executives in order to build women's capacity across different sectors, taking into consideration structural barriers. This must be supported by sufficient resourcing of Gender Desks at the Local Assemblies to cater to needs of women and girls.
3. The Presidency and sector Ministry must strive for comprehensive, integrated approaches across sectors, e.g. gender responsive budgeting, gender mainstreaming and gender transformative programming efforts (including capacity building of women and girls, and supporting their access to assets and opportunities). Current programming approaches should shift from siloed, duplicated implementation to building synergies with other stakeholders for greater impact and ensuring collaboration, e.g. between chiefs, CSOs/NGOs, media and government.



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The STAR-Ghana Foundation has an established network across civil society, media and government, we have experience of galvanising change which addresses pressing development and social challenges. We are non-partisan and work to the highest standards of transparency in our management systems and reporting. We uphold the highest standards for our work, with strong technical expertise, robust financial and programme management, and quality administration systems.