

We Know Politics Project:
A Coalition for Engaging Women in Governance

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Abstract

Women’s participation in decision-making at the family, community and national levels is an undisputed fact. Political participation however raises questions around tradition, religion, ignorance, competence, effectiveness and importantly numbers. Various civil society movements have worked to engender the political space with good and bad results. From the early 1980s to date, strategies employed by individual women and groups to increase women’s voice within the political space are assessed in the paper. The paper shares the experiences of a coalition of five (5) non-profit organisations who employed innovative strategies to engage women to express their views about the 2008 elections;. The impact of the “We Know Politics Project” has been extended beyond the 2008 elections to encompass women’s voices being heard in community, district and national decision making processes. The paper explores the net effect of alliances built, relationships that have been strengthened, challenges encountered within the partnership and broader advocacy for increased participation of women in politics. Lessons learned that encourage other partnerships or coalitions to engage in the pro-poor public policy space to further strengthen good governance are outlined.

A Poem on Coalitions

From Life Prayers:

Prayers for Solidarity and Justice

Marge Piercy

Alone, you can fight,
you can refuse, you can
take what revenge you can
but they roll over you.

But two people fighting
back to back can cut through
a mob, a snake-dancing file
can break a cordon, an army
can meet an army.

Two people can keep each other
sane, can give support, conviction,
love, massage, hope, sex.

Three people are a delegation,
a committee, a wedge. With four,
you can play bridge and start
an organization. With six
you can rent a whole house,
eat pie for dinner with no seconds,
and hold a fund raising party.

A dozen make a demonstration.

A hundred fill a hall.

A thousand have solidarity and your own
newsletter;
ten thousand, power and your own paper;
a hundred thousand, your own media;
ten million, your own country.

It goes on one at a time,
it starts when you care
to act, it starts when you do
it again after they said no,
it starts when you say We
and know who you mean and
each day you mean one more.

Introduction

Historically, women have played key decision making roles in many capacities to influence decisions at many levels, subtly or overtly. Women's representation and participation in politics has been an uphill task throughout the world (International IDEA, 2004). Often, cultural and traditional differences are cited as the reasons underpinning women's exclusion from political representation and participation. Ghana has not been an exception. However, a careful study of the participation of women (at least some women) in political systems in Africa in general and Ghana in particular shows that women's political participation predates the modern political system.¹ In religious histories are evidence depicting women's role at critical historical epochs. In the Bible are stories of Sarah, Hagar, Ruth, Deborah, Esther, Mary (Mother of Jesus) and many more.² In Islam there are the Prophet Mohammed's widowed mother, the slave woman who tended him and the Bedouin woman who was his foster mother, and Khadija and Fatima who all played significant roles. In the African traditional setup, some remarkable women, including Queen Ngola Mbande of the Matamba Kingdom, from whose name Angola originates, who were pillars in the ancient civilisations of Africa³ and others of modern time such as Winnie Mandela and Graca Machel who played leading roles in the liberation struggles of South Africa and Mozambique, respectively. Here in Ghana, women have and continue to influence the social system, politically, culturally and economically (Brobbey, 2008).

There have been a significant number of women who were entrepreneurs or business women and carried out trans-border trade in salt, leather and spices. This continues today. There were warriors or revolutionists such as the great Yaa Asantewa of the Ashanti Kingdom and great politicians such as Susana Al-Hassan. There have been traditional leaders including Nana Esipon

¹ Author's emphasis

² The Old Testament contains interesting stories of women who were used in many ways by God who became heroines.

³ <http://www.amazon.com/Scimitar-Veil-Extraordinary-Women-Islam/dp/1587680203>
Accessed on 10 March 2010

and the late Nana Hima IV of the Western Region. Women continue to be the majority of farmers in food crop production who affect food security and sustenance trends. Women are mothers who procreate and nurture the population.

While we celebrate the achievement of these remarkable women who have shaped the destiny of our country and continent, their influence within political circles has been fraught with challenges so much so that women in decision making continue to be topical at home, in the community, nationally and internationally. Within decision making structures at the various levels, power dynamics between men and women only perpetuates the traditional notions of superiority and inferiority of the sexes. Yet, it is generally acknowledged that the two must complement each other if there is to be peace and development in the home, community or nation. Political participation again raises questions around tradition, religion, ignorance, competence, effectiveness and importantly numbers. It is for the confirmation of the critical role that men and women play in decision making; as well as the challenges confronting the effective participation of the two sexes in decision making positions that various efforts have been made by government and civil society to improve the situation or change the status quo.⁴ Importantly, interventions made by civil society at various levels in Ghana are not totally disconnected from efforts being made in Africa and globally. Lessons are learnt, good practices shared and innovative means of continuing to ensure equality or equity in decision making are exchanged.

Post-colonial Ghanaian politics was dominated by men, most of whom had been readied (i.e., they had gained formal education) to take over the reins of power in Ghana. Despite the recorded contribution of women to Ghana's independence struggles, women's political participation have until recently (about the last decade) been limited to behind the scenes roles with very few playing frontline roles.⁵ The demand for women's participation in the modern political system in

⁴ See generally WiLDAF Ghana 2009. Gender Analysis of 2008 Election, Accra, Uniq Image Publications

⁵ Author's emphasis

Ghana has gone through a number of different stages. Women's Organisations and the Women's Rights Movement employed various strategies including lobbying, advocacy and sensitization as well as civic education to raise awareness on the need for women's participation in decision making both on the part of political parties and the electorates, to gain some significant strides in the struggle. The achievements of years of hard work is visible today in Ghana – a female Speaker of Parliament, female Chief Justice, female Attorney General, female Vice Chancellor and women ministers.

This paper looks at specific efforts that have been made by the women's movement at independence, during periods of military rule and now under constitutional governance. Strategies that worked; those that did not work, challenges that were encountered, opportunities available depending on the particular political era and good practices are discussed in the paper. It focuses on the 2008 election-year, particularly the work of a consortium of five (5) non-governmental organisations that employed a number of strategies to involve women in the electioneering process through implementation of the *We Know Politics Project*. The paper explores the net effect of alliances built, relationships that have been strengthened, challenges encountered within the partnership and broader advocacy for increased participation of women in politics. Lessons learned that encourage other partnerships or coalitions to engage in the pro-poor public policy space to further strengthen good governance are outlined.

The Changing Phase of Women's Struggle for Inclusive Governance

Since independence women's involvement in politics has undergone changes some involving subtle interventions, others border on militarism and others yet using a hybrid form of movement building to consolidate women's spaces within different governance periods. At each point in the political history of Ghana, various groups of women have congregated to make demands for

specific interventions by the State. Whilst the movements have been largely successful in their demands, others have faced challenges (Prah, Year 2004; Tsikata, 1989).

Independence Struggle and the First Republic Era

The power of movement building by civil society could be said to be at its apex during the independence struggle. With several years of colonial domination, people were agitated for freedom and self rule. The liberation struggle for independence was fought by men, women, chiefs and queen mothers, and the youth. In 1949 a number of benevolent and mutual associations, credit unions and market voluntary groups sprang up, mobilised and supported the Convention Peoples' Party and Dr. Kwame Nkrumah.⁶ In 1951, the CPP appointed 4 women as press secretaries to mobilise women for the liberation struggle.⁷ Many young women were part of the Young Pioneers, a pressure group that struggled alongside the older politicians to achieve independence from the British (Prah, 2004).

It was in recognition of the critical role that women played in the struggle that Dr. Kwame Nkrumah created 10 non-elected seats through the Representation of Women's Bill in 1960 when Ghana attained republican status (WiLDAF, 2009).

Military Rule, Women's Participation and Politics

Acknowledging that civil society, including women's groups, played critical roles in the transition from military rule to constitutional regimes between 1966 and 1991, focus of this section will be on the pioneering role of one civil society group – the 31st December Women's Movement, which mobilized women around socio-economic empowerment. Its military character may have been what was a 'put off' to many who did not see it as part of the typical

⁶ <http://pathwaysghanablogspot.com/2009/09/how-nkrumah-empowered-women.html>
accessed on 10 March 2010

⁷ These were Letitia Quaye, Sophia Duku, Hanna Cudjoe and Ama Nkrumah

women or feminist movement at the time.⁸ If movements are understood as campaigning by groups of people towards particular goals, then the DWM was one such movement in the history of this country.⁹ Even if a military regime equates to curtailment of fundamental freedoms and human rights and shrinking of space for civil society groups, the 1980s and early 1990s presented Ghana with the opportunity for certain aspects of women's rights to be addressed by the government through policy. It was during this era that some critical laws to address discrimination against women and children at the death of partners or fathers were passed. These were the Intestate Succession Law and the Customary Marriage and Divorce Registration Law.¹⁰

The DWM mobilised thousands if not millions of women from all backgrounds and communities to support the revolution. It economically empowered many hundreds of women with micro-credit facilities. There were also gari-processing factories and bakeries that were established all over the country to enhance productivity and improve women's incomes. Additionally, the creation of day care facilities at markets and near public offices gave working mothers some breathing space to focus on their work. Within the political space the movement was visible mobilising thousands for political events. Perhaps with some women-friendly laws in place, the DWM could have done more for women's political participation particularly when the military government transitioned into a democratic one in 1992.¹¹

Despite its central role in the politics of the time, its seeming demise or hiatus occurred when there was a change of government in 2000 and when the New Patriotic Party came into power.¹²

⁸ Prah M. 2004. See also Manuh T. 1993, '*Women, State and Society under the PNDC*', in E. Gyimah-Boadi, ed., *Ghana under PNDC Rule*. London: CODESRIA Books

⁹ A women's movement is a campaign to achieve women's rights.
www.yourdictionary.com/women-s-movement accessed on 14 July 2010

¹⁰ These laws were passed in 1985 by the Provisional National Defence Council. They have been hailed as 2 very important laws in the history of women's rights.

¹¹ Emphasis on DWM is not to exclude the work of other women's groups including the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA Ghana) during that period.

¹² Some members of the 31st December Women's Movement including the former first lady Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings and Sherry Ayittey were tried in court over the purchase of certain state companies including Nsawam Canary. They were later cleared of the

The National Democratic Congress (NDC) is back in power (2008) and so is the resurrection of the DWM. With the growing awareness, and demand for advancement of women's rights, it is expected that it will not be alienated but will see itself as part of the larger women's movement to address discrimination of all forms against women.

Constitutional Government and Women's Movement

The return to constitutional rule in 1992, after several years of military rule, served as a springboard for the further mobilization of the women's movement into the political space with a keen interest in ensuring that women were involved in every facet of political life. But this was not an easy task. It is during this period that several women's rights groups were established.¹³ An enabling political environment over the years has also led to the creation of various coalitions and networks that have and continue to mobilise around specific issues. Some examples are Domestic Violence Bill Coalition, Sisters Keepers, Gender Violence and Victim Support Services, Network for Women's Rights, Women in Law and Development in Africa, International Federation of Women Lawyers and the Women's Manifesto Coalition.

Through different strategies, the women's movement has achieved successes that complement government's efforts towards gender equality and women's empowerment. Through pressure from the Movement, policies and laws have been put in place by government.¹⁴ Some customary practices against girls and women have been criminalised.¹⁵ As well, women's voices have been heard on critical policy issues such as the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy.¹⁶ The movement

charges. Many of the day care centres established also collapsed.

¹³ Examples of women's rights organisations include Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre, Women in Law and Development in Africa, The Ark Foundation, African Women Lawyers Association etc.

¹⁴ Examples include the Domestic Violence Act, Labour Act, Human Trafficking Act and Children's Act

¹⁵ Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Cruel Widowhood Rites and Trokosi are criminal offences

¹⁶ NETRIGHT openly criticised the government for excluding women in the preparation of the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS I). This led to an acknowledgment and

has been able to get political parties to publicly acknowledge that the low numbers of women in decision making is wrong and to affirm their willingness to promote women's participation in decision making. In 2004, women in Ghana galvanised around the development of a Women's Manifesto.¹⁷ Through advocacy by civil society groups, the Ghana Police Service has now established over 87 Domestic Violence Victim Support Units (DOVVSU) across the country to offer assistance to victims of domestic abuse.¹⁸

Critique of the Women's Movement

A critique of the women's movement by developing partners such as donors has been the fragmentation of efforts to achieve results.¹⁹ This is rightly so because a number of women's rights organisations (WROs) ask for money from the same donors for very similar activities aimed at the same results. This is not a criticism limited to donors. It is also a source of worry for groups within the Movement. The counter argument has been that the terrain is broad with diverse target beneficiaries therefore different groups must be able to reach different people particularly those in the rural areas. Of course for some projects such an argument is logical such as in service provision, public education or micro-credit facilities. But when it comes to research and advocacy then the argument could need a more nuanced justification to make this 'similar kind of projects' acceptable to many. While research may present perspectives of the same issue which may be different or complementary to others, advocacy for law or policy change becomes a somewhat difficult argument for a diversity justification. The issue then is on how like-minded

involvement of women's groups by government during preparations of the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS II) and the Medium Term Development Framework.

¹⁷ Women's Manifesto of Ghana, 2004 is an initiative by ABANTU for Development (an NGO).

¹⁸ Statement by Coordinator of DOVVSU, Elizabeth Dassa, at a workshop by WiLDAF on implementation of the Domestic Violence Act on 15th June 2010.

¹⁹ Conversation between WiLDAF and Ghana Research and Advocacy Programme; and Department for International Development of the UK (DFID) during bidding process for grants in 2008 and 2009.

civil society organisations could navigate this critique of the women’s movement to bring about difference, excitement and at the same time employ innovation towards meeting similar goals.

The 2008 General Elections – Taking up the Challenge of another Coalition/Partnership

The global shift in ‘donoring’ in terms of avoiding high transaction costs and increasing efficiency by moving towards financing of programmes or large-scale activities rather than small projects also underpins the critique of the Women’s Movement. In line with the principle of National Ownership, more donors are channelling funds to embassies to directly support programmes at country level.²⁰ While this shift in policy opens opportunities for more women’s organisations to access funds, there are also challenges in terms of WROs being able to align their activities to national priorities which are the benchmarks upon which embassies will provide funding.²¹ Ghana Research and Advocacy Programme (GRAP) and Rights and Voice Initiative (RAVI), which are ‘pooled funds’ that deal with civil society groups in Ghana, further support the move towards programme support.²² Particularly with women’s organisations whose annual turnovers are relatively small, albeit they have wider or more national reach, it is commendable that mergers around niche areas could be maximised for better outcomes and impact.

²⁰ The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness operates on 5 principles which are Ownership, Harmonisation, Alignment, Managing for Results and Mutual Accountability.

²¹ Association of Women’s Rights in Development (AWID) reports in ‘Where is the Money for Women’s Rights’, that there is a lot of donor money available but the changing donor landscape could be affecting funding to smaller organisations.

²² As part of efforts by government and development partners to make aid more effective, there is now budget support for government under the Multi-Donor Budget Support (MDBS) system. For civil society, the Ghana Research and Advocacy Programme (GRAP) is a fund established by a number of donors including the UK Department for International Development and the Netherlands Embassy to support work of research and advocacy organisations. Rights and Voice Initiative (RAVI) also a fund set up by the DFID which operated for 5 years support interventions on citizens and government engagement.

“We Know Politics Project” is Born

The global and national factors discussed above encouraged the creation of a partnership by five (5) civil society groups to implement the project ‘*We Know Politics: Hearing Women’s Voices in the 2008 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections*’ (hereinafter referred to as We Know Politics Project). The partners are Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre (Gender Centre), Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA Ghana), The Hunger Project, Coalition of Women in Governance (CoWIG) and Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF Ghana), which was the lead organisation.

Mandate and Selection Criteria

Concerns around mandate and criteria for selecting organisations that implemented the project have been raised by CSOs.²³ In response, partners of the WKP project acknowledge the roles that the UN and various CSOs played in shaping the project.²⁴ First, is the UNIFEM Ghana office that inspired WiLDAF by supporting a project that analyzed civil society interventions during the 2004 elections and also facilitated a meeting of CSOs to brainstorm and agree on interventions during the 2008 elections. Second, WKP partners commend CSOs who at the pre-project inception meeting agreed to give WiLDAF the mandate to develop a proposal for this project.

The criteria for the selection of the WKP partners included the following: (a) organisations must have a regional spread (b) they must work with legal literacy volunteers or similar community leaders (c) they must have strong financial and project management teams. While 4 of the partners met all three (3) criteria, COWIG met two (2) out of the three. COWIG was included due to its mobilising efforts in two (2) regions of the country. Also, it was a fairly new coalition which needed support to continue with its groundbreaking work at the district assembly level.

²³ WiLDAF Ghana quarterly network meetings in the last half of 2008 and first half of 2009

²⁴ Author’s emphasis

How the Partnership Functioned

Management Issues

There were concerns around how much funding the partnership was accessing and the capacity of the lead organisation to manage huge amounts of money. Although individual partners had annual turnovers of over \$1,000,000 the lead organisation had its 2007 turnover around \$300,000. How could it manage a portfolio that was likely to shoot up the turnover to \$1,000,000? This was indeed a scary prospect. At the same time the project could prove that a merger to implement a programme among different women's organisations/CSOs could work. The latter being the driving force, the partnership developed guiding principles that were endorsed and signed by each partner. The guiding principles outlined specific areas of operation per partner, amounts allocated, reporting requirements, time lines and importantly principles around respect, transparency and communication.

As lead organisation, WiLDAF had the responsibility of dealing with the donors on behalf of the partners through narrative and financial reporting, presentation of briefs to the donors, and participating in meetings with the donors. It provided guidance to partners in relation to challenges that were encountered in the field and brokered meetings and negotiations with political parties.

What Worked

Each of the partners kept its identity and mandate of work. Singleness of purpose worked well, that is, ensuring that women were involved in the political processes leading to and after the elections. Division of roles and responsibilities in accordance with partners' presence in the regions widened the reach of the project. The project needed a 'face' and a 'spokesperson',

WiLDAF took on those roles. The credibility of the partners was critical to the partnership. WiLDAF also improved its financial and administration systems to support the project.

Challenges

On hindsight, perhaps the lead agency took on too much. Demands by donors in the course of the project including briefing papers, meetings; demands by partners; oversight responsibilities; navigating the political environment in addition to narrative and financial reporting was too much work for one organization, with other projects to manage. . As the project progressed there were emerging demands from community people that the project could not deal with. Communities wanted more interactions; and the media from all over the country, wanted information that had to be provided immediately.

While the zealotness for a merger to access big money was an exciting prospect, some partners remained women's organisations at heart, typically doing too much with too little. Partners under-estimated the amount of work, time and human resource required for a 10-month period. Partners were unhappy about funds allocated for staff time and logistics. But we had pitched our camp, set our goals and there was no turning back.

Partners did not foresee the run-off elections and the potential risks associated with it. Positions had to be taken on matters that could compromise the neutrality of the project. While the project prided itself in reaching out to all political parties, there were instances when the project had to condemn the actions of a particular party not by letter but through public events like press statements and conferences. There were threats, insults and name-calling of individuals of the partnership. Some politicians were not happy with the project. Some saw partners to be supporting the party in government and others saw partners as supporters of the opposition party.

A Personal Testimony

“If there is one thing I regret from the WKP project, it is my personal sense of abandonment by the women’s movement. There were times that I realised I was alone. If anything happened to me, no-one would stand up for me. There were other times that I felt that I had stepped on toes of other individuals not from the partnership but from the larger women’s movement. At other times, I was made to feel the outcast ‘who was I to think I could do things differently from the status quo’. I believe the whole essence of advocacy is to break boundaries, to dare to be different. I do not wish to single out any particular group as responsible for my own emotions but permit me to highlight one particular incident that I cannot shake off. I mention this as a lesson for other individuals or women’s organisations who will want to dare to be different. When WKP partners visited President Mills on 3rd February 2009, NETRIGHT wrote to the Board of WiLDAF querying, among other things, why WiLDAF and WKP partners had gone to the President and introduced one of the people who accompanied us as a NETRIGHT member, when there had been no prior consultation with NETRIGHT. Is WiLDAF not a member of NETRIGHT? Who put a cap on what women’s organisations can do or cannot do with political governance? Why should I be singled out as the ‘key’ victim, by another women’s organisation? My Board questioned me, I responded to the best of my abilities. Have I learnt any lesson from this? Yes I have and that lesson shapes my approach to work and my relationships”.

Bernice Sam, March 2010

Testimony from a WKP Partner

A very significant landmark achievement is the partnership with WiLDAF and three women's organizations, Gender Centre, COWIG and Hunger project under the *'We Know Politics: Hearing Women's Voices Project in Ghana's 2008 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections'* to carry public education on peaceful elections and improving women's participation in politics hold presidential debates for presidential candidates

FIDA-Ghana was happy to join this coalition effort as it has been concerned about the abysmally low numbers of women in decision-making positions. Despite the disappointing results, the project connected Ghanaian women from all walks of life, aspiring parliamentary and presidential candidates, women's rights groups, non-governmental organizations and the media to ensure that issues concerning women were raised during the year's campaign.

FIDA-Ghana is hopeful that the coalition built during the "We Know Politics" project has forged a strong connection and passion around increasing the number of women in decision making positions in the next election.

It is interesting to note that that due to increased gender awareness created during implementation of the above programmes the government is committed to appointing women to decision-making positions. Instances include the speaker of parliament and six female ministers elect.

Through this collaboration, CSO's have developed the capacity and support structures of partners to continue their activities beyond the duration of the project and to create viable, self-sustaining learning systems.

Susana Ayithey, March 2010

FIDA Ghana

Project Outcomes and Effects

Over 450 women, including organized groups, queen-mothers, parliamentarians, donor community, activists and the media, were present at the project launch. Subsequent engagement with the media led to the recognition by government, donors and non-state actors that the WKP was a key women's intervention for the election year. Through the project, fifty-three (53) women and men from NGOs from the ten (10) regions of Ghana learned about the electoral cycle and entry points for civil society; elections and security; engaging with the media on elections related issues; and status of the Women's Manifesto. These trainees were the 'eyes and ears' of the Project in the cities and big towns where they trained others, spoke on radio and interacted with politicians. Dr. Kwesi Nduom, presidential candidate of the Convention People's Party spoke to participants about his party's Manifesto and his plans for women's empowerment. As one trainee said *"until this workshop, I did not know that as people we had so much power in governance"* (Uncle Ato Brown, Elmina, Central Region).

Nationwide consultations that involved more than 800 women at markets, fishing communities, farmers and formal employees provided a list of concerns that had to be addressed by presidential candidates at a Women's Dialogue and eventually, the elected government. Examples of concerns were security, unemployment, education, National Health Insurance

Scheme (NHIS), and mounting gender burdens on women. These specific regional and district concerns were compiled and presented to each of the 5 political parties.

To reach out to rural communities, 287 legal literacy volunteers/paralegals were trained on the “do’s and dont’s” of elections with the sole mandate to carry out voter education. Many of these women in rural communities are now able to speak confidently on social justice issues in their communities. Others have gone on to use their knowledge and skills in the district assemblies where they are members. The list of concerns by women and reactions by those seeking political power were discussed by media personalities such as Ben Ephson, Editor of the Daily Dispatch, talk show hosts of Happy FM, Asempa FM, Peace FM and the Woman to Woman programme of Uniqq FM.

In November 2008, the first Women’s Dialogue with the running mates (i.e. vice presidential candidates) of five (5) political parties (i.e., New Patriotic Party, National Democratic Congress, Convention Peoples Party, Democratic Freedom Party and Peoples National Convention) provided the opportunity to assess political party promises to advance women’s rights. Questions posed at the Dialogue were mainly drawn from the regional consultations as well as some on-site questions by representatives from the Federation of Disabled Women, Ghana Registered Nurses Association and a ‘kayayo’ (female porter). Further opportunity was provided during the dialogue to listen to the two (2) female running mates on gender equality; namely, Grace Ameku (DFP) and Petra Amegashie (PNC). It is expected that in the elections in 2012 advocates will use these women running mates as examples for political parties to put forward more females for presidential or vice presidential slots. Commitments made at the Dialogue coupled with those contained in political party manifestos provide a framework for measuring the performance of the winning party. An example is the reiteration of 40% representation of women for positions in government.²⁵

²⁵ See the NDC Manifesto for a Better Ghana, 2008

Seminars, durbars, door-to-door visits, radio and television discussions on voter education empowered thousands of women from diverse social, economic, political and cultural backgrounds to engage in the political processes. Ordinary people expressed their views on issues, spoke at public gathering, interacted with candidates vying for elections and spoke on radio and television. Other activities included durbars in constituencies where 19 females contested as parliamentarians. Below is a commendation by a candidate.

“Support that WiLDAF gave was very helpful. The people wanted to hear somebody else’s voice apart from my own informing them that women are important and we have to be represented in parliament by women. Every time I spoke, WiLDAF’s team also spoke and explained things to the people. I wish the team had come earlier to help with the campaign”

(Hon. Juliana Azumah-Mensah, MP Ho East, Wednesday 13.01.09.)

‘The Honourable MP’ documentary gave insight into the work and responsibilities of a Member of Parliament particularly that of female members. As well, the documentary shows a distinction between work of MPs and district assemblies. Other activities focused on analysis and a call for peaceful elections given post-election events in Kenya and Zimbabwe. Sunday is an important day for Christians in Ghana therefore how women who are the majority of church goers will vote on election-day which fell on Sunday 7th December was analyzed. The main finding was that women will vote on that day though concerned on how to juggle that with their religious and gender roles. Church services were either cancelled or hours reduced to enable people to vote. Press releases, press conferences, petition on peaceful elections presented to the 2 main political parties, advertisements and media discussions were other activities. Pursuant to a motion for injunction to stop the Electoral Commission from declaring final results filed by the NPP, women had a press conference that called on the NPP to withdraw the injunction. Women’s

concern was that the injunction could be the last straw to plunge the country into post election violence. The press conference received good media attention following which the NPP withdrew the motion in court.

Two main reasons – political party affiliation and competence - emerged from a survey of 394 persons to gauge the extent to which gender concerns were central to decisions on who and which party to vote for as president or parliamentarian (WiLDAF 2009). These reasons affected the number of women who were voted for (20) despite 103 contesting many of whom came from smaller parties.

A reception for 20 female MPs evaluated challenges and successes during the campaign period. Following a commitment to provide funds for MPs' projects by Sarah Mukasa of the African Women's Development Fund, two (2) women MPs from Jomoro and Evalue Gwira constituencies have approached WiLDAF to assist them to develop proposals. WiLDAF was in Jomoro to support MP Samia Nkrumah at a seminar on women's political participation in the Jomoro constituency in October 2009.

Some of the project impacts are that due to the relationship between partners of the project and political parties, the NDC (the ruling government) called WiLDAF to advocate for support for a woman as first speaker of parliament. Following the election of Justice Bamford Addo, project partners also did a lot of radio and television discussions on the significance of that appointment and what women would expect from her. According to women MPs, one of the significant changes in Parliament is that they are often able to catch the eye of the Speaker.

After elections, project partners and other women's groups met with the new President, Professor J.E.A. Mills on 3rd February 2009 to advocate for him to take immediate action to address women's concerns. He responded, among others that the Minister for Justice would look into the

issue of witch camps, which requires legislation. And, also see to increasing of the budget of the women's ministry. In the State of the Nation Address of 19 February 2009, the President said he would review the NDC's Affirmative Action Policy Guidelines of 1998, which will then be presented to Parliament for endorsement.

Also, a document that underscored the importance of gender equality concerns in the vetting process was prepared and submitted to all members of the Parliamentary Vetting Committee as a tool for vetting ministers designate.

A petition to the President was presented on 28th May 2009 to remind him of the 40% promise of women in public and political positions. This issue of representation has remained at the centre of the political discourse in Ghana to date.

Lessons Learned

Capacity for Bidding for Substantial Funds

Implementing the "We Know Politics" project has been beneficial to WiLDAF Ghana and partners at many levels. First WiLDAF Ghana demonstrated its capacity to manage a large fund. Second, the grant assisted the organisation to strengthen its financial systems as well as retain key staff because there was a guarantee of secured remuneration from that grant for at least one and half years following the project. Third, it bolstered implementing partners' efforts to develop longer-term grant applications. WiLDAF Ghana and FIDA Ghana have jointly developed 3 project applications for multi-year grants.

Expertise, experiences, logistics and regional spread:

Each partner has its strengths that were brought on board to collectively make the project work. Expertise as trainers, writers, advocates, media spokespersons, or as community-friendly organisations - each of these factors contributed to the overall results that were achieved. It offered an opportunity for members to harness and share their strengths and complement one another for civic engagement.

Fostering sustainability:

A project like WKP cannot be one-off. As a result, partners have put in bids to continue with WKP II, which would build on lessons learned from WKP I. The project has boosted the confidence of the staff who have remained committed to the organisations.

Recognition:

All partners have gained recognition nationally and internationally from implementing this project. Annual reports of partners for 2008 and 2009, feature success stories from the project.²⁶

Burn out:

Partners were burnt out by the end of the project. This was compounded by post project reports including an exclusive audit for the donors. Future joint projects would ensure adequate project implementation period and additional staff.

Transparency:

Clarity on project activities, regular communication among partners, WiLDAF's readiness to respond to questions from partners and donors contributed to making the partnership effective.

²⁶ See 2008 Annual Reports of WiLDAF, The Hunger Project and FIDA Ghana

Guiding principles:

Having the guiding principles was useful as it set out clearly areas of work, roles and responsibilities for all partners.

Capacity to straddle ‘ordinary women’ as well as policy makers:

Ability of partners to work with rural communities as well as policy makers was an asset for the project. The project strengthened the voices of women at the community level for their own governance engagement at various levels; and strengthened partners’ voices at the national level to push for policy.

Neutrality:

Remaining non-partisan yet political had to be managed well throughout the project. Compromising neutrality and objectivity could mar a project despite its laudable objectives. Partners of WKP managed this position satisfactorily.

Conclusion

Would the challenges and achievement of this Project make the partners do things differently? Yes, they will, but with a consciousness of the challenges and nuances of political engagement. Sustaining coalitions requires a focus that keeps members engaging with each other and policy makers. The partnership of the We Know Politics project demonstrates quite succinctly a nexus between women’s rights, the *raison d’être* of the partners; and political governance that is an essential requirement for achieving gender equality.

Inclusion of women in discussions on governance has gained momentum as a result of interventions by non-governmental organisations. The We Know Politics project added on to such inclusion and recognition by political parties and government. WiLDAF has become a formidable women's rights organisation that is called by state and non-state organisations to participate in meetings. The media has consistently contacted partners of the Project on myriad topics on women. The project's rural outreach has enlightened many men and women to the importance of participating in democratic processes. The singleness of purpose of the Project, dedication of partners and commitment to advocate for national policy at the same time ensuring rural women were not left out of discussions, were hallmarks of the Project. Examples of the impact of the project have been provided in the paper and lessons learned discussed to encourage others to look to possible mergers such as this for future work.

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