

# **THE NETWORK FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN GHANA (NETRIGHT)**



**(Mobilising for Women's Rights in Ghana)**

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**COMPILATION OF A YEARLY REVIEW ON THE STATUS OF  
WOMEN IN GHANA  
2003 - 2008**

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*Since the year 2003, The Network for Women's Rights In Ghana (NETRIGHT) organises an End of Year Event to assess the extent to which women's concerns have gained attention in the public space during the year.*

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## **2 Extent of Women's Rights Promotion in Ghana in 2003**

Prof. Akosua Adomako Ampofo

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When I was asked to prepare some thoughts on what the year had meant for women I intended to share something that would reflect the thoughts of NETRIGHT members. Hence I sent round an e-mail asking for comments on specific issues. However, only a couple of members sent me their thoughts. These reflections thus incorporate those comments, thoughts gathered from discussions with a few others, and my own views.

### ***The questions I asked were:***

1. For you personally, what has 2004 meant for you as a woman; what has been most significant that has been a direct or indirect offshoot of local or global changes/actions?
2. What do you think have been the most significant achievements of the 'women's movement' or any particular organization that acts on behalf of or for women?
3. What have been the most significant actions or non-actions by our own government that have been particularly positive or deleterious for women?

### ***Responses to these questions are incorporated in the ensuing account:***

#### **1. Local or Global Actions that have had a Significant impact for Women**

Ms. Amina Lawal was convicted of adultery by a Sharia court, in Nigeria's Northern state of Katsina for having a child out of wedlock. Her sentence was to be death by stoning. As a result of the work of Nigerian human rights organisations, especially women's organisations such as Baobab, Ms. Lawal was able to successfully appeal this decision. The ruling in the Amina Lawal case reflects not only the power behind the work of Baobab and other Nigerian Women's coalitions but also the strength of international Solidarity. What is particularly exciting about the Amina Lawal case is not that she received a pardon, but that a four-to-one majority of the full five panel of judges upheld every single one of the grounds of the appeal. The Sharia court held that Ms Lawal's alleged confession was no confession in law and that her rights of defense had not been properly recognized in the lower courts, and that she should not have been charged, much less convicted. Further, the ruling offers hope for all other cases in the Sharia courts, indicating that victims of rights abuses under Sharia can successfully fight for their rights under Sharia.

- The fact that the Rwandan parliament has a 48 % female representation is cause for celebration. If this can be achieved in a country that has been torn by war and genocide, then it offers hope of what might be achieved here in Ghana if we increase our activism (more grease to the elbows of Abantu).

- A woman, Elinor Sisulu was awarded the prestigious Noma Prize, for the best African book this year! The book: 'In Our Lifetime: A Biography of Walter and Albertina Sisulu is a unique book which breaks with the conventions of 'Great Man-Alone' biographies, to give a detailed account of the Sisulus lives, and the liberation movement which they so profoundly shaped, even as it shaped them. That the book looks at the lives of Albertina as well as Walter, and that it is authored by woman provides double cause for celebration.

## **2. Significant Achievements of the 'Women's Movement'**

- A major achievement of the women's movement and particular organisations within it has been the greater seriousness paid to gender violence by a growing number of Ghanaians and within different sectors of Ghanaian society such as traditional leaders.
- Further, many of the discussions around the DV bill have been positive. Consultations by the National Coalition on DV legislation in Ghana have proved that this is an issue that concerns all women and children irrespective of educational background, location, ethnicity or class. This means that the issue of DV is being demystified – “ordinary” people are seeing this as a gender issue, and are persuaded that specific laws are needed.
- In all of this the Government's response has generally been positive; the bill was drafted by the AG's department and received the support of both the former (Nana Addo) and current Attorney General's (Papa Owusu Akomah). In principle cabinet has also given the bill the nod and this is most reassuring.
- The number of groups and organizations carrying out research and advocacy around issues of violence is also testimony to the commitment of activists within the movement, hence the need for the work of the GVSS network.
- We can also laud the work of organisations such as The Ark Foundation and WISE for creating safe spaces for survivors of violence, however limited.
- The pro-activism of WAJU staff has been evident throughout 2003 as they have worked with the coalition to promote the DV bill.
- While the issue of domestic violence has received a lot of attention, an area of equal concern is female representation in decision making and moves to ensure that issues that affect women are addressed by political parties. To this end the work being carried out by Abantu on a 'women's manifesto' will go some way to make political parties realize that 1) women are a constituency to deal with and 2) that women's concerns are specific and require attention.

***More on the PLUS side locally:***

- NETRIGHT has been revived with a new Convenor, a new Programme Officer and a revamped steering committee. I think that NETRIGHT continues to remain relevant and legitimate. At the first meeting following the ‘revamping’ it was rewarding, for me, to see a very diverse group of women represented, who gave voice to varying ‘practical’ concerns around the GPRS process. Those present also emphasised the importance of the educational fora NETRIGHT has instituted.
- The NCWD, which has been seen much as being toothless and irrelevant by some for a long time, spoke up this year – even if only in a restricted self-interested fashion when the MOWAC Minister appointed a non-NCWD representative to the Media commission. However, for me this is an indication, whatever the motivation may be, that NCWD can have a fruitful role in issues of concern to the women of Ghana, and it behoves on us to figure out what this might be and how it could be achieved.
- This past year a few appointments of women on to boards and corporations were made and while still meagre it is an indication that with some lobbying and ‘complaining’ someone will take note.
- **What have been the most significant actions or non-actions by our own government that have been particularly positive or deleterious for women?**
- The lack of consultation with women's organisations to come up with a national gender policy was seen by some as sad, and a reflection of the fact that the government may not really be committed to changes in the status of women.
- Related to this is a continuing neglect and narrow conception of gender issues around some of the more obvious ‘practical’ needs of *women*, hence a focus on micro-credit for example. That unequal gender relations underlie many women’s limited access to resources (such as credit) has not entered the discourse.
- One person noted that for her the year 2003 has seen a backsliding in terms of some of the superficial gains that were made over the years in the interest of Ghanaian women. Some of the responses to spousal murders or abuse that occurred this year have been chilling, indicating that controlling, and even abusive masculinity, is still legitimated by many.
- A general concern is reflected about the present debate generated by the Minister for Women’s and Children’s affairs around the DV bill. It was recognized that the Minister is important and wields a lot of influence, clout and support. Thus:
  - ✓ Her comments that there is ‘no child slavery in Ghana’ vis-à-vis the release of child abductees and workers was unfortunate in that it clouded the issues.

- ✓ Her comments in early December, in Koforidua – where she had gone, purportedly to raise support for the bill - that centered around ‘marital rape’ and the need for us to find culturally-appropriate solutions did many things. 1) It reduced the bill on violence in a variety of domestic situations to a discussion around marital rape (which, in fact does not appear in the bill) thereby trivializing it. 2) It showed her lack of knowledge about the bill and raises new questions about her actual support for the bill. 3) It re-emphasizes her lack of understanding about how gender and power are implicated in domestic violence. 4) It prompts new questions for us on how to strategize on improving women’s well being when our minister is unclear about the central issues of power.

***Other issues of concern this year have emerged:***

- Some of my own work on the sexual exploitation of children in Accra has brought up the concept of ‘gala’ – serial rape to subjugate or tame a girl at its crudest level. Along with this has come a realization that young people on the streets have an understanding of ‘exploitation’ that does not necessarily include choice preferences. If there is some form of exchange in the sexual encounter – the provision of money, accommodation or other financial rewards – then sex is not considered exploitative, even if it was entered into by force.
- Turning the lens internationally, in Uganda, the Buganda Kingdom's Minister of Health, Mr. Nelson Kawalya, has resurrected the controversial issue of "virgin brides". This has a lot of resonance with the so-called “virgin clubs” and talk of AIDS and virginity tests in Ghana. While these practices essentially violate the females’ rights to bodily integrity, not to mention their right to privacy, they also perpetuate the idea of female chastity while neglecting any discussion of male culpability and responsibility. They also potentially set up these ‘virgins’ as targets for predatory males looking for ‘clean’ partners.
- A recent rape of a four year old girl now in Nairobi Women’s Hospital. A young girl was taken from her bed at night by a 40 yrs old neighbour who viciously raped her all night in a forest and left her for dead. The girl's private organs were terribly damaged and she was bleeding all over and seriously traumatized.

**Challenges**

The challenges are several. When I asked if people had any other thoughts on the year 2004 for women several wished that the Domestic Violence Bill would be passed. Others

added that they hope the Ministry of Women's Affairs would expand its horizons and move with the times to see gender relations and power as fundamental to women's well-being.

For NETRIGHT the biggest challenge is around membership commitment and interest. In 2004 therefore we should work at (1) building a strong and credible women's movement in Ghana. (2) As this government works towards getting itself re-elected we should think about what demands we should make. What space do we have to educate people who might get selected to represent our interests about real gender issues? Someone pointed out that we should also address the question of the IFIs, asking ourselves what their demands will be and hence the implications for the women of Ghana. Knowing how eager our government is to "please" the IFIs, and to ensure that it reaches completion point in the HIPC trajectory so that it can access much needed funds to encourage the electorate to vote for them, what concessions will they grant? How much of the nation's resources and sovereignty will they give up? And what are the implications for all Ghanaians and women in particular?

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### **3 Reflection of Women in 2004: Some Critical Issues for Policy Making - Prof. Takyiwaa Manuh**

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It is time to take stock of what this year has meant for women and begin to think about how to confront our challenges in order to move forward to advance the cause of women.

#### **The Women's Movement**

The year has not been easy for the Women's Movement in Ghana but in spite of the challenges there has been appreciable progress. One can recollect some of the activities that were carried out during the year:

- ABANTU initiated and oversaw the writing of the Women's Manifesto for Ghana between 2003 and 2004. This action, which brought together a wide range of organisations to work together on a laudable project, has never been seen before in the history of women's groups in Ghana. The Women's Manifesto provides a platform for women in Ghana to work to comprehensively address their concerns about the economic, social and political situation of women. It is a political document which analyses our problems and makes demands for solutions, mostly to government and to the various agencies entrusted with our well being and development as citizens of Ghana. The Women's Manifesto was successfully launched to great acclamation. What is left to be done is to get all stakeholders on board to ensure that the manifesto becomes a living document.
- The Domestic Violence Bill Coalition spearheaded public education, lobbying and advocacy to push the Bill from the drafting rooms to Parliament though we have not succeeded yet and the odds are immense, the Coalition has worked to keep the issues alive and succeeded in bringing the sensitive issue of domestic violence out of the closet and our society as a whole stands to benefit from this.
- We can also laud the work of organisations such as The Ark Foundation and WISE for creating safe spaces for survivors of violence, however limited.
- The coordination and participation in Beijing+10 processes and the production of the Ghana NGO Alternative Report (B+10 Review)) by NETRIGHT. NETRIGHT has brought together a group of gender activists and advocates to begin the drafting processes for the production of the Status of Women in Ghana Report. The network is gradually establishing its presence in the national space and continues to work as a collective to promote women's rights in Ghana through critical analysis of the gender



dimensions of national processes and policies and advocacy for policy change.

- 2004 Elections: A number of women and gender-oriented NGOs organised programmes to support aspiring women parliamentarians. Out of the 230 parliamentary seats contested, 25 seats were won by women. This reflects an increase from 9% to 11% (the number of women in Parliament is grossly insubstantial)

### **ON THE NATIONAL FRONT**

- The following positions are occupied by women:
  1. General Secretary - Ghana National Association of Teachers
  2. Executive Director - Ghana Employers Association
  3. Commissioner - Internal Revenue Service
  4. Deputy IGP (Admin) - Ghana Police Service
  5. Director General - Ghana Broadcasting Corporation
  6. Commissioner - Immigration Service
  7. Commandant - Police College
  8. Principal - Banking College
  9. The Editor - Ghanaian Times
  10. Registrar-General

(Source MOWAC, 2004)

- Award of National Best Farmer for the first time to a woman, Madam Efua Frimpomaa

### **On the downside -**

- Women are still concentrated in low-paid and low-skilled jobs and their livelihood of engaging in part-time or casual employment leaves them more susceptible to poverty and social exclusion than their male counterparts.
- Majority of Ghanaian women work in the informal sector either as small scale producers, farmers or traders and have no social protection.
- MOWAC places more emphasis on women's economic empowerment through micro-credit schemes than formulation of policies. MOWAC lacks human resources - people who can work to implement policies developed by MOWAC. The institution is not focusing on their mandate of developing policies. Rather focusing on income generating activities.
- Relationship between MOWAC and some women and gender-oriented NGOs has been hostile especially MOWAC's attitude towards the DV Bill Coalition.

- The launch of a National Gender Policy by MOWAC. The policy which was launched in September is still not in the public domain. As to whether it addresses critical issues of concern to women, is yet to be known due to lack of access to the document.
- Perception of prosecution of domestic violence, particularly, spousal violence is quite minimal. No specific legislation on domestic violence yet. The government's draft domestic violence bill unlike many other legislative bills is being subjected to unending nationwide consultations. MOWAC has reduced the DV Bill to marital rape.
- The commitment and political will of government to pass and enforce appropriate laws and put adequate financial and human resources in place to promote women's human rights and eliminate Violence Against Women is still a challenge.
- Need for the government to take steps to engender state institutions such as CHRAJ, the Courts, Social Welfare and the Police through training and capacity building; and adequate resource allocation.

#### **INTERNATIONAL SCENE**

- Award of Nobel Peace Prize for the first time to an African Woman - Wangari Maathai, a Kenyan.

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## **4 Ghanaian Women in the Year 2005 Review: A Review of Actions and Experiences - Dr. Esther Ofei-Aboagye**

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### **Introduction**

Thank you for the opportunity to reflect on 2005. I had a choice between doing a scholarly appreciation with statistics and rates of change and qualitative evidence. However, most of the people gathered here have those statistics. And between 2004 (when a good paper on the Status of Women which stimulated much discussion was presented) and now, there has not been statistically significant changes in the proportions of women's participation in public life, their education and their health. What I do propose to do is this. I am going to ramble through various events that attracted me, set me thinking and I thought had implications beyond individual women to reflect on the issues Ghanaian women lived with.

The list is certainly not exhaustive. However, I have clustered these under seven (7) sections:

1. The Gains for Women in Public Life and Politics
2. Events
3. Images of Women in the News
4. Processes, Studies and Publications
5. Transitions
6. Random Issues That Provided Food For Thought
7. Conclusions and Prospects for 2006

### **The Gains for Women in Public Life and Politics**

The year 2005 was a landmark year for the world's women in politics attaining the highest votes for presidential elections in Chile and Liberia.

The year 2005 had some pleasant gains for Ghanaian women as well as some disappointments. We began the year with the increase in the number of women in Parliament, from eighteen (18) to twenty-five (25). There were also very important landmark events.

Three appointees to public office by the Kufuor administration in 2005 were interesting for stakeholders in the non-governmental (NGO) sector. They were the following:

- Frema Osei Opare ,former Country Director of Action Aid Ghana and formerly of the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV) was elected Member of Parliament for Ayawaso West Wuogon and subsequently appointed Deputy Minister of Manpower Development, Employment and Youth.
- Gifty Ohene-Konadu, formerly of the National Council on Women and Development (NCWD) was elected Member of Parliament for Asante Akim South and subsequently appointed Deputy Minister for Trade, Industry and President's Special Initiatives.
- Hajia Alima Mahama, former Deputy Minister for Local Government and then Trade, Industry and President's Special Initiatives, won the Nalerigu-Gambaga seat and was appointed Minister for Women and Children's Affairs, a cabinet position.
- At the Council of State Level, all the women members were appointed. None was elected. Mrs. Gifty Affenyi-Dadzie was appointed at a relatively young age (under 50 years and surely, a record) alongside the older Madam Ama Bame Busia and Mrs. Cecilia Bannerman.
- At the Deputy Minister Level, considerably more women were nominated. Sophia Horner Sam was retained in the Western Region; and Susanna Mensah and Patricia Apiagyei appointed in the Eastern and Ashanti Regions respectively.
- At the district assembly level, only two women from the old batch of district chief executives (DCEs) were retained: Joyce Aidoo of Gomoa and Cate Aglah of South Tongu. We gained new women DCEs in South Dayi, Assin South, Wassa Amenfi, Jaman North, Wenchi, Sene, Bole, West Gonja and Bunkprugu amongst others. While the appointment of DCEs is not complete, the proportion of women appointed so far does not constitute 10%, in spite of the increase in the number of districts.
- Up until 2005, women had not been nominated to prestigious districts (for instance, metropolitan and municipal assemblies). However, this year, Madam Patricia Apiagyei (currently Deputy Regional Minister

for Ashanti) has been nominated for the position of Chief Executive of Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly.

Other important technical appointments were made:

- Dr. Grace Bediako became the Government Statistician.
- Dr. Regina Adutwum became Acting Director of the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC).
- At the Congress of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), women won two key positions as 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> National Vice Chairpersons. A woman beat a man to the position of National Treasurer. Did it signal changes in the ways women participated in political organizations, life beyond “women’s wings”, perhaps?

## Events

- Two meetings were held in July 2005 inviting women in local government to reflect on issues concerning their participation as well as to strategize for the 2006 district level elections. The meetings, one organized by Abantu for Development and its partners; and the other, by the National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana (NALAG) attracted at least three hundred and fifty (350) participants each. Interestingly, the emerging issues were remarkably similar: non-partisan funding for women’s campaigns; enshrining the 50% quota of appointed memberships in law rather than leaving it to administrative discretion; activating the unit committees were a few of the commonalities. However, one clear lesson was the need to coordinate events and share information more.
- Sixteen Days of Activism against Gender Violence was celebrated by many of the member organizations of NETRIGHT. Worthy of note was WILDAF’s effective visual campaign with a gruesome case study of a woman terribly disfigured by her husband which sent an unforgettable message.
- The lesson there was in what we could do together if we shared information on upcoming events more effectively. We could harmonize resources, and piggy-back on each other’s efforts and

gains. We need a lot more co-ordination and collaboration for resource mobilization.

- A woman police constable showed considerable bravery, outwitting armed robbers single-handedly.
- Various events celebrating the successes of women were organized. Women achievers, entrepreneurs and inventors were feted.
- Ghana participated in the meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women March, 2005 and presented reports – on both the government side as well as non-governmental commentaries – giving us a snapshot of our performances as a nation.
- FIDA-Ghana chalked and celebrated twenty years (20) of active legal and human rights support for women.

### **Images of Women in the News**

- 2005 threw up some interesting advertisements with implications for the changing roles of women. For instance, the advertisement for Western Union has a Ghanaian woman presumably a nurse abroad, being the donor. Women as migrants, breadwinners and supporters of families. This was in direct contrast of the adverts from Merchant Bank (Vigo Money Transfer) and other financial institutions amongst others which showed women as recipients.
- The former Women's Organiser of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) was in the media in a very public fracas with her party. She was given the front page of one edition of *The Mirror*. The reactions against her, the castigation, accusations and the efforts to impugn her character and her integrity were considerable and one wondered what had stimulated such strong responses. Was it her person? Was it because she was a woman? Would the same thing happen to another woman, irrespective of her political party, age, ethnic group and other characteristics?
- An incident involving Mz. Bell, a popular artiste, where some young men were reported to have tried to sexually assault her and her team at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology

(KNUST) also generated considerable debate. Reactions in the media were largely of the category of “blame the victim”, “women are their own worst enemies”, “she had it coming” and very few adopting the “her right to free choice” position.

- Ms Ghana, other pageants as well as all the other celebrations of young womanhood were organized in 2005, as in other years. However, the Ms Ghana event caught my attention because of a spot of difficulty the new managers of the event – Sparrow Productions - found themselves in. Sparrow Productions led by a young, female entrepreneur fell foul of the Honourable Minister of Tourism by attributing a publicity quote to him which he vigorously denied. No public reaction had been made by Sparrow Productions as at the time of writing this paper. The debate for me this time was not in the appropriateness (or otherwise of the event for depicting womanhood). I wondered what would make a female entrepreneur take such a risk (if that was what it was). Would a man do the same? What kinds of publicity did women favour in trying to promote their initiatives?

### **Processes, Studies and Publications**

- In 2005, there was an indication that effective advocacy could bring results in policy and plan formulation. This related to the formulation of the national poverty reduction strategy, the GPRS II. The lessons that had been learnt in the GPRS I Process, which was handicapped by insufficient planning and attention to gender, had evidently been well conveyed. NETRIGHT made its objection clear and the latter part of 2004 and early 2005 witnessed a flurry of emails inviting the participation of gender activists to reflect on the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy II (GPRS II). A number of interesting reflections emerged from these processes.
- Sadly, the invitation did not extend to the formulation of the District Medium Term Development Plan Guidelines. Local level development certainly has gender considerations and it was important that the planning guidelines (which emanated from the same source as the invitations related to the GPRS II) provided an opportunity for gender-sensitivity in district level planning.

- MOWAC facilitated the passage of the Human Trafficking Bill through Parliament.
- Beatrix Allah-Mensah's work on "Women in Public Life and Political Affairs" was published by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.
- Frances Azumah undertook a Status of Ghanaian Women Report commissioned by the Canadian International Development Agency.
- The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWAC) prepared a Strategic Implementation Plan which drew on (a) the NPP Government's indicated priorities of good governance, private sector development and human resources development (b) insights from the Women's Manifesto and (c) Gender and Children's Policy. A truly fascinating process of a balancing act: between documents, interest groups and stakeholders. It undertook some amount of consultation including one with Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) at Dodowa in April; another with NGOs at Madina in May; and with women's groups in June, 2005. We await further dissemination and periodic updates on the Progress of Implementation from MOWAC.
- The Women's Manifesto was translated into local languages and disseminated to the regions. That made a significant contribution to making this agenda widely available to support advocacy.
- However, the year did not witness any significant publication of databases of women in public life that would facilitate advocacy. We should move forward on that.

## **Transitions**

- We lost Hajia Meri, the chairperson of the Coalition on the Women's Manifesto. She was elegant, erudite and hardworking. Some of us had looked forward to learning from her; collaborating with her.
- We also lost Patience Addow, educationist, home scientist and former Eastern Regional Minister in the last decade. In our quest to understand the experiences and coping capacities of women in public life, she would have been a good resource.



- Significantly, both Hajia Meri and Ms. Addow died in traffic-accident related events. The influence of both women had been very effectively felt through the service they had provided the faith-based organizations they were affiliated with.

### **Random Issues That Provided Food For Thought**

- The efforts at dispersing the hawkers from the Central Business District. While a lot of people hailed the move at “beautification” because they considered hawkers as nuisances, it had considerable implications for the women’s livelihoods. Certainly, hawking cannot be an easy option. What were the implications of the beautification? What were the women’s options? I was strongly reminded of an article published in the eighties written by Claire Robertson “The Death of Makola and Other Tragedies” in a Canadian journal of development studies.
- *Cook Art*, an event that celebrates Ghanaian cooking was diversified considerably this year, growing from strength to strength. Celebrities cooked at some of these events, including the Honourable Hajia Alima Mahama (Minister for Women and Children and Member of Parliament) and one of the Tagoe Twins (a gospel artiste). One message came through clearly: successful career women or women in public life could also cook and enjoy their families.
- At the individual level, more middle-aged women with families went off to pursue further education, trying to harmonize academic work with motherhood, home-making and economic undertakings.
- Many NETRIGHT members could count individual achievements – interesting victories in education, new research, articles and new projects as well as the establishment and sustenance of businesses, centres, schools and institutions.

### **Conclusions and Prospects for 2006**

The year 2005 has almost ended. At the individual level, we are all a year older with implications for our health and well-being. Some of us are going

to bring out New Year Resolutions concerning these and dust them off for 2006. However, as women's rights organisations and interested parties in the progress and advancement of women there are some issues that we should be concerned with in 2006, arising from the experiences of 2005.

In spite of the wind of change presented by the entry of the new government, opportunities to increase the participation of women through appointment quotas were missed at the Council of State and Cabinet levels and with ministerial appointments and District Chief Executives.

In spite of the increase in numbers of parliamentarians, it cannot be argued convincingly that these gains were commensurate with the efforts at education, advocacy, training and other resources that NGOs, other civil society and government agencies invested. Remember, the number of parliamentary seats increased from 200 to 230.

While interventions had been made by various NGOs, government agencies, development partners and local authorities for rural women, it is difficult to establish a substantial event or initiative that made a sustainable difference to the majority of them. Therefore, my wish-list for 2006 includes the following.

- We should lobby the key ministerial actors whose appointments indicated earlier for the following:
  - The passage of the Disability and the NGO Bills (with the Deputy Minister of Manpower, Development, Employment and Youth);
  - The passage of the Domestic Violence Bill (with the Minister of Women and Children);
  - More industries for women's groups in rural areas established with transparency and equity, following their priority concerns (with the Minister of Women and Children and the Deputy Minister for Trade, Industry and President's Special Initiatives).
- We should work assiduously to assist in the dissemination of the Women's Manifesto to the district and community levels, targeting both government agencies and civil society. We should also work towards stimulating further local activism around the issues as well as skills-building to exact results.

- We should engage in a reflection as NETRIGHT on the GPRS II, the 2006 National Budget and MOWAC's Strategic Implementation Plan. For the latter document, we could contribute insights for monitoring performance and adherence.
- We should take further action on outstanding commitments to women in our Constitution as well as on emerging concerns.

ON THIS NOTE, I WISH YOU THE VERY BEST OF THE SEASON AND THE BEST OF THE NEW YEAR. THANK YOU.

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## 5 A Review of the Year 2006: Issues, Challenges and Prospects : Dr. Dzodzi Tsikata

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### 1. Introduction

The end of year review is one of NETRIGHT's flagship events. It is a good opportunity for us as women's rights activists to take stock of the year just gone by, identify events which were positive for women and those that made the goal of gender equity even more difficult. It is also to review our own efforts to promote gender equity - our triumphs, failures and continuing challenges. Doing this allows us to set agenda for the next year. The event affords the opportunity to celebrate women who have lifted the image of women in the year and to also honour men and women who have worked tirelessly to promote the cause of transforming gender relations. [Last but not least, it is for us to unwind and have some fun to usher in the holiday season. I do hope we are able to honour all these aims and objectives of this event.]\* **DELETE?**

2006 has been an important year in all sorts of ways. In the international political arena, a number of developments point to the fact that things can and must change to pull the whole world back from the brink. While all around us, we continued to experience the rise of religious extremism of all kinds, unrelenting poverty and hardships and the continuous widening of inequalities, a number of events took place which gave us hope. The most dramatic of these was that Hezbollah stood up to the Israel army and the Democrats won midterm elections in the US. These events have created conditions for a review of Western policy in the Middle East. We hope that the outcome of all these would be the end to the culture of violence, cycles of war, pointless sanction, and to murderous bullying and murders of defenceless civilians. We hope that all these would lead to significant improvements in the lives of all the suffering people in all of the Middle East, but particularly, Palestinian, Lebanese and Iraqi civilians.

Around us, we saw other countries achieve what we are striving for and we have derived hope from this – India now has domestic violence legislation. In 2001, the BBC reported that it had taken 7 years to get the bill to the status of a draft. That it was passed this year

meant that it took an additional five years to pass. The law also bans harassment by way of dowry demands.

We saw women elected as presidents of Liberia and Chile, facing all manner of challenges and trying to make a difference. Michele Bachelet and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf took office early in the year after run off elections. Bachelet went on to create a cabinet which had an equal number of men and women. This brought euphoria and hope to many women. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's inauguration showcased a 'who's who' of African feminism who fought tooth and nail to be there to endorse a very auspicious occasion. Not only had Liberia finally emerged from war, but at its helm is a woman. As a footnote to this story, Charles Taylor, the war lord who ruled Liberia during some of the critical years of war and was engaged in nameless atrocities was arrested and handed over to the war crimes tribunal in The Hague. Unfortunately for Chile, General Pinochet, who ruled Chile in the 70s and 80s after a bloody coup d'etat and whose reign of terror saw the murder, torture and disappearances of thousands of Chilean citizens could not be brought to justice which he cheated with ill health and finally death. While it may give us hope about due process and justice being done in the Taylor case, there are no guarantees. But more importantly, we need to ponder how to prevent these civil wars in the first place, and how not to give space to the countless potential Charles Taylors stalking our continent. We only have to look at the suffering of our brothers and sisters in Darfur, Chad and Somalia to understand that there is much to do to bring peace to our continent and relieve the suffering of civilians, especially the women who populate refugee camps and lead lives of desperation. Cote d'Ivoire continues to be divided into two by civil war. The AU and UN have been unable to address these problems.

But to continue with some of the glimmers of hope, I want to mention CODE pink, a small group of women in the US who worked together with some mothers of American soldiers who had died in Iraq to wage a brave and colourful campaign of picketing, sit ins, letter campaigns, travel to the Middle East – against the war in Iraq and other conflicts in the Middle East. They kept all of us informed electronically with inspiring reports. We were greatly awed by their campaign which showed us that while numbers

are important, equally important is dedication and tenacity. In spite of these inspiring moments, we were reminded again and again that the more things change, the more they remain the same.

A UN report found that 60% of Ethiopian women were subjected to sexual violence including marital rape and almost 50% of Zambian women said they had been attacked by a partner. On average, 1 in 3 women had been subjected to intimate partner violence. The report also noted that 100 countries did not have DV Laws and another 50 did not have laws under which marital rape could be prosecuted. Thus the report concluded that in spite of progress, violence against women had not yet received the priority required to enable significant change (BBC News 2006). I am sure we are not surprised by this given our own local struggles. South Africa which had domestic violence legislation since 1999 is also a country with some of the highest statistics of violence. In Zimbabwe, a WHO study found that women have a lower life expectancy than in any country of the world-34. The figure was 40 in Afghanistan.

Here in Ghana, the year has been no less momentous. We had District Level elections which have taught us several things about challenges of improving women's participation in decision making. The Domestic Violence Bill law has made its painfully slow progress to Parliament and has not been settled yet in spite of the fact that all around us, there is evidence of why a law such as this is so urgent. Our movement for gender equity continues to make strides. This year, Ghana hosted the first meeting of African feminists, which brought together a few hundred women to deliberate on all matters affecting the African continent and hampering the transformation of gender relations. This meeting was a sign of the maturation of feminism in Africa and hopefully, the movement borne from this event will grow in strength. The host of the meeting, the African Women's Development Fund continues to anchor our efforts by funding some of our important initiatives. But it is more than that, in that it is a fund by African women and for African women.

## 2. views Of Women in Politics

I would like at this stage to share with you the views of women and men from all the political parties in Ghana who gathered at Swedru to deliberate on how to strengthen their women's wings. I asked them two questions – one significant achievement of women in Ghana this year and one significant failure. Some gave me more than one of each. This is not a poll in any sense of the word, but it represents the views of a very engaged constituency on our achievements and failures this year as a country.

For high points the following came up for a lot of mention:

1. The Domestic Violence Bill went to Parliament. This signifies that if some force is put behind a bill on affirmative action, it will get to Parliament (3)
2. District Assembly Elections shows that women are coming up (2) However, women failed to gain more seats. Awareness was created, but preparations were poor.
3. The work which has been done over the years has made women bold, and empowered them. These days they are interested in politics and promotion at work
4. Micro finance programmes. Some women have been given loans to start their businesses – any amount from 2 – 5 million.
5. Capitation grants being implemented. Teenage mothers are finding something to do. The problem is the fact that sometimes, it is not accompanied by the school feeding programme. For this reason, children close early from school and this disturbs their learning and creates risks because parents are not at home when they close. There are challenges around the feeding programme. One of these is the question of how to pay for the cooking of the food. Schools are reluctant to ask for money so they are not considered as sabotaging the programme or penalized for collecting extra money. The capitation grant might be bringing more children to school, but it is not addressing their other needs such as writing materials and food.

For low points

1. Rape cases (5), especially armed robbers raping women on the increase. Family violence is also increasing. There is also not a clear sense that the accused are being tried and that good judgements are being given and that the courts are protecting women. It is not clear if rape cases are on the increase or that there is more reporting.
  2. Advocacy on gender equity issues seems to have gone down a little.
  3. We are not really using the Women's Manifesto to influence policy directions. It is just gathering dust on the shelves. By now, we should have a women's budget.
  4. A broad women's front is needed to make progress in the fight for gender equity.
  5. Poverty among women is growing. Many women cannot get three square meals. Men can go to someone for money, but women cannot go for fear of sexual harassment.
  6. Economic hardships, women cannot cater for their families; high prices – even the price for refuse collection is high. Landlords and ladies have increased their rents.
  7. Reports of mothers and babies detained in hospital for not paying bills after delivering babies.
  8. Men continue to suppress women
  9. The loans being given to women by the government are too small and the fact that they are collecting part payment from them every week is difficult for women. The loans are known as 'whitlow-ofornonyo' i.e. you won't sleep. Every week, you have to pay something. Many women put their loans into selling on table tops in the Somanya area and so are not making that much profit.
  10. Resources promised women for the District Assembly elections backfired on them.
  11. Youth employment facing problems. Three pupil teachers under the youth programme in a school in Somanya have not been given allowances all semester.
3. Achievements, failures and continuing challenges

Out of the several things they mentioned, I would like to focus on the Domestic Violence Bill in parliament and the district level elections for further comments. I would also like



to discuss the GPRS 2 process and also discuss the state of gender equity activism in Ghana.

That the Domestic Violence Bill is finally in Parliament is of course great progress and a testimony to the work of the DV Bill Coalition. The positive statements from Parliament and the population and the fact that the women polled for their views mostly mentioned domestic violence and rape is testimony to the growing consciousness about the problem in Ghana. The negative statements about the bill emanating from Parliament and the desire of a minority to bring women activists to book for disrespect to Parliament point to the fragility of our democratic dispensation. The intolerance displayed by a minority of law makers shows a misunderstanding of their representative function, the freedom we have as citizens to put pressure on office holders and the need to hold them to account at all times. That they wanted to choose how we should make demands was unfortunate. One's person's claim that women were terrorizing men in the home was not the kind of statement we might expect from an MP. The statistics show clearly that women are predominantly the victims of domestic violence and not the perpetrators. As well, the law aims to protect all victims of domestic violence regardless of whether they are men or women. But women's groups regard Parliament as an important partner in the struggle for women's full citizenship and will continue to work with parliament to pass the Bill. We were heartened when Esther Ofei Aboagye was invited to the Speaker's Breakfast Meeting to discuss the pros and cons of affirmative action with the House. We hope that what this means is that the House is preparing for when it would be called upon to consider affirmative action legislation – Women in Ghana are watching.

a. The District Assembly Elections.

The Assembly elections and their outcomes show progress in the effort to promote women's decision-making in the public arena. However, this progress has been slow and arduous. First that women constituted 12.3% - 1741 of candidates in the recent district level elections is progress, in that it was an increase from 1998 (547 women, 3.5% of candidates) and 2002 (965 – 6.8%). As well, their percentage of successful candidates has gone up from 4% in 1998, 7.4% in 2002 to 9.6% in 2006. However, there has been

deterioration in the percentage of women who won in relation to women who stood – from 35.8% in 1998 to 35.2% in 2002 to 26.7% in 2006. This is even more disappointing because men have overtaken women in this regard. From 31% in both 1998 and 2002, 35.2% of male candidates won as opposed to 26.7% of female candidates. What this tells us is that progress is slow and arduous. In terms of appointees, only 6 Districts out of 97 surveyed made the 50% of women as appointees target. Another 27 had 40%. Few women are DCEs, District Coordinating Directors, presiding members and budget officers.

In 2001, there were 7 female DCEs, since 2006, the number increased to 12 female DCEs (8%), including one for a metro assembly. Women presiding members are not even 10%. Even more importantly, appointments are only one aspect of achieving gender equity. As Ofei Aboagye has pointed out, other important areas for action are service delivery, economic support and opportunity and participation in public decisions of the District. This is because women's relationship with the Assembly has several facets. They are providers of local services and employees and service providers of the District Assembly. They are also citizens who have rights to the services and resources of the District. They are also members of the Assembly and are also political actors as voters and as aspirants. Lastly, women's groups serve as accountability mechanisms (Ofei-Aboagye, 2006). Reports though about intimidation and misinformation raise fundamental challenges about the District Assemblies. The most disturbing was the GNA report on August 8<sup>th</sup> that a husband had assaulted his wife for collecting nomination forms to contest the September elections in the Garu Tempene District, and that this had discouraged other women from returning their forms. The report noted that out of 16 women who collected nomination forms, only 8 returned the forms. This was attributed to the incident. Thus out of 73 persons contesting; only 8 were women. The Upper West Regional Minister, Mr Ambrose Dery, also expressed concern about various acts of frustration being meted out to female candidates by their male counterparts to prevent them from winning. He mentioned acts such as defacing campaign posters, putting pressure on them to step down in favour of male candidates or face the wrath of family members. These reports are only the tip of the iceberg, and Mr Ambrose Dery is to be commended for raising this issue although it was a speech read for him.

Another issue which surfaced in this report was the concern that the campaign in the Upper West Region had in some cases become heavily partisan. Cate Bob Millar, Regional Director for the Department of Women who raised this concern made the correct assessment that this did not favour women. The GNA also reported some candidates in Accra complaining that their MP was supporting a particular candidate in a partisan effort. The G-CDD has since then called on the Electoral Commission to adapt clear guidelines on what constitutes partisanship in the District Level Elections in order to reduce its incidence. This is a welcome call which echoes what women's organizations such as Abantu have been saying for a long time, that the non partisan character of the District Assembly ought to be maintained and strengthened to promote the participation of disadvantaged social groups such as women in politics.

A third issue which became topical this year as a result of the elections has been the role of the chiefs. This issue was put into sharp relief by the announcement that the government had set up a committee to review the local government act, Act 462. The over ten person committee has two females – one representing the Institute of Local Government Studies and one from the Attorney General's Department. What is interesting is that the Chairman of the National House of Chiefs is represented on this committee which is mostly made up of reps of institutions with direct functions under decentralization and is chaired by the deputy minister in charge of local government. The announcement of the committee accompanied by a report that the Minister had said that chieftaincy was an integral part of decentralization and this was not negotiable. It is my considered view that this statement was premature. As well, the National House of Chiefs membership of the committee was giving the chiefs an unfair advantage in a discussion which should many other interest groups. While it has been said that chiefs have to have a stronger voice in local government because of their historical links with the local government system, their control of natural resources and their role in the mobilization of communities for development, there are equally strong reasons for keeping chiefs out of local government. One of these is that chieftaincy with its basis in blood and ethnicity is neither democratic nor inclusive as an institution. While it may serve many valuable

functions, it has also been at the centre of many of the conflicts within the local government system. Some explanations are in order.

Chieftaincy has been at the centre of local government since the colonial period. British indirect rule provided the statutory basis for local government run by chiefs and their elders. Their functions included administration, the management of socio-economic services and tax collection, legislation (passing bye laws), law enforcement and dispute settlement and politics (Asibuo, 1992; Yankson, 2000). The Native Authority Ordinance marked a shift from a chieftaincy based system of local government to a system of democratically elected local government based on citizenship (Yankson, 2000). The local government system constructed by the first republican government of the Convention People's Party (CPP) effected a complete separation between chieftaincy and local government. This was reversed after the 1966 coup d'état and reflected in the local government laws of 1970s. While the current local government system does not have any formal representation of chiefs, chiefs are involved either in their personal capacities or through relations forged between chieftaincy institutions and the District Assemblies. Thus chiefs can be elected to assemblies or appointed by the president to serve on the assemblies.

This history is relevant because it points to the contradictions in the republican citizenship basis of the District Assemblies. Chiefs whether inside or outside assemblies have long positioned themselves as indispensable for the realisation of the development goals of the constituent communities of the District and to the District Assemblies themselves, and are increasing their influence and powers steadily. This process is buttressed by the fact that "traditional areas" led by chiefs are the bedrock of the Districts. Thus one, two or three can constitute one District. This approach has not always been adopted. In one of the petitions to the president, some communities had argued that their development had been hampered by not being together in one district. Perhaps, it is in response to such complaints that the Districts are now structured in this way. However, it has given chiefs leverage over certain decentralisation matters, which may not have been intended.

Chiefs see an opportunity in the present dispensation to complain about their marginalisation from decentralisation structures. In some cases, their resistance of the power of unit committees has led to conflicts over issues such as who has the right to beat the gong-gong to invite people to participate in communal labour and who has the right to settle inter-personal and group conflicts (Ayee, 2000; Tsikata, 2003). Chiefs are also aggrieved about the loss of royalties and other revenues related to natural resources within their areas of jurisdiction to the District Assemblies. This is because with decentralization, most of the resources of the District are now within the control of the DCE, while chiefs complain that they do not even find the resources to perform customary duties. A study found that chiefs were demanding back many of the functions and powers they had had under past local government programmes such as tax collection, dispute settlement, civic education and social control. They also wanted a clause in the District Assemblies law that their views should be sought with regard to government nominees to the Assembly honoured. Furthermore, they demanded that as has been done with other key players in the decentralization process, their responsibilities and powers be clarified and legitimised by statute (Yankson, 2000).

Some researchers endorse the desire of chiefs to have a stronger role in local government, arguing that they are agents of development in that they mobilise human and material resources and ensure peace and tranquillity in the area of authority and note that Assemblies often give traditional councils financial support to enable them perform their functions (2000).

The value of chiefs and their importance to development is more contextual and specific than a necessary or coherent characteristic of chieftaincy. Societies without leaders whose claim to legitimacy is the accident of blood and ethnicity have not been shown to be less developed than those with such institutions. Even more fundamentally, it challenges the principles of constitutional citizenship on which the decentralisation programme is based. District Assemblies are being required to accommodate chieftaincy which has different basis and logic. Chieftaincy also strengthens the influence and ethnic

politics in the District Assemblies, which in certain instances, has resulted in conflicts (Tsikata and Seini, 2004). However, having multiple traditional areas within a District is a factor which has tended to be more immediate to Decentralisation conflicts, the Adaklu Anyigbe and Assin South Districts, being two cases in point. In the long term, more chieftaincy centred decentralisation conflicts can be expected.

The problem between DCEs and chiefs is not an objective one. Its salience in this period had more to do with a policy of accommodating chiefs and giving them more importance in this period. Without national consensus and in response to the agitation of chiefs for the control of resources and for a larger role within the decentralisation process, the Decentralisation secretariat of the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development has instituted a new initiative to work out how chiefs can be involved and how to bridge the contradictions between them and the DCEs. The orientation programme for DCEs also had on its agenda cooperation between DCEs and traditional authorities (OB, 2005). Depending on what powers devolve to chiefs under decentralisation, the republican citizenship agenda of constitutional rule can be undermined. On the empirical evidence, chieftaincy has been a destabilising factor in the life of several District Assemblies.

These developments if they are realised will result in the squeezing out of women and those groups marginalized in decision making. In any case, there is the continuing challenge of the real decision making powers of the district assemblies in the planning process and in local development; the challenges of personnel which all have to be resolved. We in Ghana face a challenge of building a multi-ethnic society in peace and harmony. Women are the biggest losers in war, so we have to be extra vigilant. In these days when rape has become a weapon of war, woe is the country which falls into civil war.

## B. The Economy

The front page of the *Daily Graphic* (**which edition?**) said it all. ‘2006 has been good – Bank of Ghana boss’. His assessment was that 2006 had been a good year for the national economy in spite of shocks the country experienced as a result of high crude oil prices.

Major exports did well – cocoa, gold and non traditional commodities exceeded the \$ 1 billion mark. All other exports excluding the traditional saw an increase of 62% in earnings over the year before. GDP was estimated at about 6.2% and inflation was going down and pointing to a single digit figure. Bank credit to the private sector and public institution increased by 44%. The governor was optimistic that prospects for the continuation of the current macro-economic performance were bright and robust. There was however a small caveat that the undercurrents of demands for appropriate wage and living conditions and cost measures from load shedding and the energy sector would need to be managed to preserve competitiveness and minimize output loss.

In my view, this caveat is the most critical but down played aspect of the report. Women's activists have argued time and again that macro-economic policies and indicators are only a partial indication of what is happening in an economy. That the real story is how it is affecting people. That real story continues to be troubling the majority of people in the economy. Those who talked about the continuing challenges of making a living have to be listened to and the government needs to take seriously its admission in the GPRS 2 document that macro-economic policies have different impacts on the population. It would be an understatement to say that the government's wage policy for public sector workers is in crisis. While many take the easy path and blame NAGRAT, National Association of Graduate Teachers, for their strike, its roots lie in the piecemeal approach to public sector wages. Those huge increases giving to doctors while justified by living conditions have to be extended across the public sector. Education may not show in dramatic fashion the consequences of its deterioration, but they are long lasting. If focus on human capital development in the GPRS 2 is to work, we need a comprehensive and equitable review of wage policy across all sectors of the public services. In these connections, gender inequalities in wages require serious attention to ensure that women's predominance among the poor is addressed.

With regard to the GPRS, the processes continue to be too bureaucratic. GPRS – business as usual in spite of populism in introduction.

Overall, we need to address the energy crisis, agree to the need to transform the economy from its commodity dependence and to create decent and sustainable employment. Should anything happen to commodity prices, should the drought deepen, the governor of the Bank of Ghana would be singing a different tune. As activists, we should strengthen our capacity to ask and answer the question of what women can expect from these economic policies and conditions. What does the energy crisis mean for women? How is graduate unemployment affecting women? How is the growth in insecurity affecting women?

The Social (?..missing word) continues to be marginal and this must change. There are many scattered social policies in different sectors – children, women, education, health etc. these need to be consolidated and deepened into one social policy document with equal status to the GPRS 2.

C. The state of the Ghanaian women's movement – growth; stagnation and the need to move forward differently.

The feminist gathering and the challenges of organisation

Preparing for 2008 – District Elections and how to turn them into positives

**What we look forward to next year:**

Ghana @ 50

We must not be sidelined in the independence celebrations; our contributions to the anti-colonial struggle and to Ghana's development have to be properly recognised.

Government and society have to make an important gesture to women in Ghana. We need Affirmative Action legislation backed by a Commission on gender equality and equity. A properly resourced and reoriented MOWAC.



Above all, a return to Nkrumah's vision of building a dynamic and confident nation with both men and women having a place at the table.

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## **6 The Year 2007 in Perspective: Critical National Issues and their Implications for Gender Justice: Dr. Audrey Gadzekpo**

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### **Critical international, regional and national issues**

This year is special in the annals of the nation because it is our Golden Jubilee. And as we all know a whole secretariat was set up to draw up a national programme to celebrate the country's achievements within the period, assess the challenges and decide on the way forward. Disappointingly there were huge omissions and obvious lapses in the national memory. The nation remembered, recalled and honoured the memory of certain key figures and various social groups in the independence struggle. Missing were the significant contributions women had made in the founding of Ghana, especially through the CPP. The contributions of the Leticia Quaye's, Hanna Cudjoe's, Ama Nkrumah's Sophia Doku's, Mabel Dove's, Akua Asabea Ayisi's were forgotten, even though they too had sacrificed, including some of them being put in jail for their part in the anti-colonial struggle.

Some of these women leaders, as the coalition statement noted and I quote "recruited into the party, established women's sections, collected contributions and informed people about the policies of the party. The women's section of the Asikasu branch of the CPP organised a singing band to perform at CPP rallies and women served free water at rallies."

Before us were other trailblazers such as Dr. Evelyn Amarteifio, who together with others founded the National Federation of Gold Coast Women. They sent many petitions to the Governor and the Joint Provincial Council about discriminatory practices in employment, marriage, inheritance and social life which were affecting women.

We also acknowledge the 10 women in the First Parliament who were elected to special women's seats. Susanna Alhassan, Ayanori Bukari and Victoria Nyarku, who represented the Northern Region, Sophia Doku and Mary Koranteng from the Eastern Region, Lucy Anin - Brong Ahafo, Regina Asamany - Volta Region, Comfort Asamoah- Ashanti Region, Grace Ayensu - Western Region and Christiana Wilmot- Western Region.

So we start this evening's presentation by inserting these women firmly into our country's history and affirming their significant contributions. We salute our unsung heroines many of whom we don't even know by name because they were rendered invisible by the early constructors of history. Nonetheless we recognize their contributions and acknowledge the fact that they sowed seeds that are still yielding fruit today.

We are happy that gender activist groups such as Netright, Women's Manifesto and Domestic Violence coalitions took steps to address the marginalization of

women in the Ghana @50 narratives. Jointly they drew up a comprehensive program which culminated in a special **Mmaankommo Talk Show** which was aired on March 6 and 13 on GTV, aired by TV Africa and OBE TV (for Europe audience). The Talk Show highlighted on 3 key themes – Women’s Contributions to the Anti-Colonial Struggles; Women’s Contributions to Socio-Economic Development and Policy gaps in achieving the Total Advancement of the Ghanaian Woman. The resource persons for the Talk Show were Mrs Ametor-Williams, Akosua Adomako-Ampofo, Rita Coker, Elizabeth Aryeetey and Rosaline B.O. Ofori

**They also gave a Press Conference** at the International Press Centre on February 28, 2007, organized a **Route March and Public Fora in both the southern and northern sectors of the country in April and in November, respectively.** A total of over 1500 people, made up of market women, assemblywomen, hairdressers, women with disabilities, workers and students actively participated in the Southern sector program.

**There was also the women’s Fair held in July**, which was aimed at creating the opportunity for women from diverse professional backgrounds to showcase their work. Poetry recitals by Prof. Ama Ata Aidoo

Following this, Public Agenda published an article on the lack of access to market chalks produced by the Ghana Federation of the Disabled (GFD) and this generated public debate on the issue and culminated in an agreement between the Ghana Education Service (GES) and Ghana Federation of the Disabled. The GFD has been given a quota by the GES to supply.

Finally a documentary is being produced to celebrate achievements of women.

### **Celebrating Achievements of Women today**

We celebrate also the appointment of Chief Justice Georgina Wood, as the first female chief justice of Ghana and also internationally the appointment of Prof. Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu as second in command of the UN in Liberia, joining that formidable force of women working to help reconstruct that war-torn country, including our own Joanna Forster.

University of Ghana elected its first woman SRC President, Ms. Louise Carol Serwaa Donkor breaking with a gender based tradition of electing women only as treasurers of the SRC.

While I am at it let me congratulate Mrs. Angela Naa Sakua Okai, who won 7 prizes during the call to the bar in October, having combined school with work as Branch Manager of Standard Chartered Bank Ghana Limited, Liberia Road We also want to salute Anna Bossman, Ag. CHRAJ commissioner, for her boldness in investigating high political figures and forcing a national debate on

corruptive behaviours of those entrusted to positions of power. CHRAJ under her leadership has published a code of conduct for public office holders. We hope that she is confirmed in her position soon.

We also salute the head of immigration, Mrs. Elizabeth Adjei as we acknowledge also the role that Nana Oye Lithur's column in the Daily Graphic is playing in gender advocacy.

In business as elsewhere women continue to make important inroads and worthy of note is Mrs Ann Myers, CEO of GIA and also manager of the country's Rugby team.

Mrs. Essie Anno-Sackey, after ably heading British Airways operations in Ghana for many years has now taken up the important national assignment of MD Ghana Airports Company Limited.

Other visible examples of breaking the pink ceiling include the MD of Barclays Bank-Ghana Margaret Mwanakatwe

We salute Victoria Mensah, the President of the Tema station food sellers association and her able executives who have led the cause of the AMA's demolition exercise.

We also salute women farmers whose role in farming is increasingly being recognized. In many districts and municipalities women farmers won awards for their work on farmer's day and we want to congratulate them.

### **National, Regional and International Developments**

There have been some significant developments nationally, regionally and internationally that I would like to touch on. Nationally the most significant positive development was the passage of the DV bill on 21<sup>st</sup> of February 2007, six years after the then attorney general, Nana Akufo Addo, had introduced a draft bill. It has been a long journey of agitation, education and advocacy and the law has been made possible only through the perseverance of gender activists, particularly the DV Bill Coalition. We now have a law but the debate is far from over about rape within marriage. The kinds of public utterances that we heard during discussions on the bill suggest that there are too many powerful (and also not so powerful) people in society who have difficulty accepting that violence against women is simply not permissible under any circumstances, including marriage. Marriage does not give a license to abuse and we are exceedingly glad that after the passage of the law the obnoxious Section 42 (g) of the Criminal Code, which justified the use of force in marriage has been repealed. The task ahead is to push for the institutionalization and implementation of the law.

Institutions such as Domestic violence and victim support unit of the police service are key partners in this. We urge the NPP government and other subsequent governments herein that the Unit is strengthened and resourced to continue to do the great job that they are doing.

We also had cause to celebrate the appointment of the country's first female Chief Justice, Justice Georgina Wood. Complaints and murmurings that criticised women's groups for being over jubilant and acting as though they were responsible for the appointment obviously did not understand why we were happy. The Judiciary is one of the three key pillars of governance in this country. The judiciary service is beset with a lot of challenges that have implications for women's access to justice. So as we congratulate Chief Justice Georgina Wood in her appointment, we also need to engage her and the entire judiciary more closely on the importance of judicial reforms, which the judiciary is undertaking, with a particular view of highlighting and addressing those issues that discriminate against women in particular.

In terms of policy we note also the drafting of the Property rights of Spouses Bill currently underway. In the middle of this year the Minister for Women and Children's Affairs, Hon. Hajia Alima Mahama was quoted as promising to work vigorously together with the A.G's office on it to ensure early enactment. Discussions have been initiated with various women's groups and hopefully this would result in the enactment of a law that would achieve what the bill sets out to achieve, that is clarify women's property rights in and out of marriage. Highlights of the proposed bill include recognizing the unpaid work of women in distribution of property at divorce.

On the Eve of AU meeting Ghana finally ratified the Protocol on the rights of women in Africa, which came into force in 2005 following ratification of at least 15 countries.

We note the role the Ministry for Women and Children's Affairs (Mowac) is playing in drawing attention to important issues of trafficking and child labour. And we urge that they continue to take concrete steps to stop human trafficking especially of women and children and protect children from being sold and or forced into labour.

We also urge MOWAC to translate more assiduously its structures to District Assemblies by including gender focal persons as part of structures of DAs and to deepen gender mainstreaming and all for the equipping of MOWAC to do gender-responsive budgets.

On the regional level Ghana played host to the AU in June and as you know there was a grand debate on African unity. With the help of Netright which organized an NGO forum, women successfully inserted their voice into the debate to deliberate on women's rights issues and social justice in Africa.

In terms of addressing gender justice on the regional level, it is important to also note the seventh World Social Forum which took place in Kenya at a very critical time in the world, a time when there are moves towards a second scramble for Africa. And also a time when poverty is on the increase in Africa and where internal conflicts are still wrecking havoc in the lives of women and children.

The Nairobi World Social Forum, themed, '**Another World is Possible,**' provided an opportunity to highlight African perspectives on global problems such as resource plundering, new unfair economic arrangements (EPAs), militarism, religious and cultural fundamentalism, gender and sexual discrimination.

Women in the developing world continue to make important gains despite the odds against them and this year South America elected another woman president to join Chile's Michelle Bachelet, breaking the male monopoly on power in S. America. Christina Fernandez de Kirchner replaced her husband as President last October. May Africa do the same by electing another woman to replace President Ellen Sirleaf Johnson in Liberia.

In South Africa, the recent election of Jacob Zuma as Head of the governing ANC party amidst controversy overshadowed important issues that came out in those elections, especially for women. Significantly, the National Executive Committee of the ANC, adopted a resolution on a 50-50 representation of women and men on the NEC – equal; 50-50. The Speaker of the S.A. parliament, Baleka Mbete, was also elected as Chair of the Party after the nominated chair stepped down for her, saying they wanted to promote gender equity in the power. There are lessons here for us. We don't just say we believe in gender equity, we must demonstrate it by making hard sacrifices. We know, and so we are not saying that simply raising quotas solves all the gender equity problems of a nation. But we are saying that if we are serious about including women in governance in any meaningful way in this country then we should be guided by some of these more progressive initiatives that actually ensure that women are truly included. We salute our brothers and sisters in South Africa for continuing to show the way.

On a more down note, women continue to be victimised all over the world. Of particular concern is the plight of women in conflict zones. As information emerging about the war in Liberia has shockingly indicated as many as 75% of women surveyed in six Liberian counties by the WHO were raped during the conflict in that country. Unfortunately rape remains a weapon of war in other civil wars and conflicts on our continent. Currently in the DRC conflict and in Sudan, particularly in Darfur, and in Northern Uganda, women are being systematically raped and brutalized. Depressingly not enough steps are being taken to stop this outrage.

Not only that, it seems that women's victimization continues post-conflict. A recent BBC report accused Angolan security forces for raping and victimizing Congolese women refugees in Angola before deporting them.

Finally, in terms of regional events we cannot ignore the controversial elections in Nigeria; elections marred by massive fraud, intimidation and violence. Flawed election processes as witnessed in Nigeria not only undermine democracy and the will of the people but they contribute in turning women off to contested power and thereby make it even more difficult to achieve any kind of gender parity in this area. At the same time I feel compelled to comment on the ugly battle which ousted the first female speaker of the Nigerian House of Representatives, Patricia Etteh in October this year over allegations of corruption involving the misappropriation of 638 million naira (about 4 million us dollars) . It is instructive on the fact that even as we advocate for more women in politics we must be concerned about the bad institutional cultures that prevail in power centres and seek to change it or risk undermining our own agendas. The assumption that women are incorruptible should be examined more closely. As one Nigerian told me women in Nigeria political office are daughters, wives or concubines of political godfathers. A mark of the maturity of our movement will be when we become more discerning and critical about the quality of women's leadership and when we can firmly refuse to support women who we adjudge to be unsuitable for leadership.

### **National Setbacks and Challenges**

Even as we celebrated victories and gains we also suffered setbacks and challenges which we must recall. One of our greatest losses was the death of a great champion of women's rights in Ghana and Africa, the death of Hon. Hawa Yakubu Ogede who fought a valiant battle against cancer and lost. We salute her memory as one of two and by far the most effective independent and therefore oppositional voice in the de facto 1993 parliament. And recall with respect her many contributions to the cause of social and gender justice.

The devastating Northern floods shocked the nation and exposed the weaknesses in our emergency response systems as well as the vulnerability of the northern and upper east and west regions of the country. The floods were especially devastating for the poorest of the poor of which women constitute a greater portion, making more challenging what modest gains that had been made in the past to address their deprivation.

In November this year the AMA stunned us with the demolitions of stalls and shops of small traders across different parts of Accra, without prior notice to them. This act compelled condemnation and action by gender activists, notably Netright which issued a statement on Nov. 14. The mostly women small-scale traders, form a substantial section of the working poor in Ghana and the destructions amounted to a destruction of their livelihoods. Netright in its

statement condemned the misuse of state power and pointed out that it sharply contradicted the government's stated concern for the urban working poor. The demolitions also contradict the government's concern to support small women traders to break the cycle of self-perpetuating and soul-destroying poverty and exposed the superficiality of the government's concern about the poor.

Following intervention by netright, in which they demanded compensation, relocation and halting of the demolition exercise there appears to be some progress. After a meeting with Mowac on Nov 23 it was agreed that the traders' grievances were legitimate and that a list of destroyed things be brought for costs to be computed. Also AMA has agreed to relocate them.

We have enacted laws against certain harmful traditional practices but unfortunately they still persist. Forced marriages are still being practised as evidenced by two particular disturbing news reports this year. One about the young lady that was abducted from Accra, chained in the bus en route to her village to get married and the other of a primary 6 pupil whose father forced her into marriage. We are happy the law is dealing with the perpetrators and urge that they continue with the vigilance.

A demonstration by the wives of the murdered Ya Na this year also drew attention to the fact that this crime remains unresolved and thus is still a source of conflict in Dagbon and also highlighted the plight of widows in our country.

### **Role media have played**

In all of these events - good, bad, ugly – the media has and continues to play contradictory roles, supportive and undermining at the same time. Of course diversity and plurality means that different media organisations have different agendas.

We are happy that the media continue to report on and highlight VAW: High incidence of spousal abuse and deaths as chronicled means that we must double our efforts.

But we are also concerned about the manner and coverage and framing of issues of gender justice. Women defined as witches is still a major problem and this year a couple of news reports and the manner of coverage suggest that the media have been advertently and inadvertently at the forefront of, forgive my pun, witch-hunt.

Journalists still display a tendency to victimize victims in the manner they frame violence against women, including in cases of spousal murder, by for example, headlines that say things like Woman killed after refusing sex to husband.



Important issues relating to women are still marginalized and do not make it on the frontpages or lead newscasts. As we move into 2008, we hope that the media can set a new news agenda in their coverage of gender justice.

### **Agenda for 2008**

The agenda for 2008 is a tall one for we have many miles to go before we sleep. But I shall focus on only a couple of key ones in the interest of politics. Considering that politics has dominated our lives in the last couple of weeks especially and is guaranteed to do so in the coming year, let me start by pointing out our disappointment that of the five presidential candidates fielded by the CPP there was no woman.

Even more glaring is the absence of any women in the crowded NPP race of 17 that will be decided tomorrow. This means that unlike our neighbours in Liberia, or more recently Latin America the chances of Ghana being led by a woman is non-existent.

There may be hope yet that sensibly one or more of the contesting parties would nominate a woman vice from this very vibrant field. More importantly as we prepare for 2008 elections we need to double our efforts to get more viable women candidates to contest parliamentary seats. And we at the same time call on presidential candidates to commit to a progressive agenda of reforms to empower women. We will recommend to them the women's manifesto and seriously urge them to study it and come out with an action plan for implementation.

Gender advocacy groups, e.g. Abantu, have been largely successful in increasing women at the local governance level – At the last district assembly elections ---This is still woefully under-represented but if you consider that at the beginning of the democratic process there were only ...157 in 1998, and 362 in 2002, and in the last one 2006 there were 478, (as against 4,254 for men) We can derive some satisfaction that efforts have yielded fruit.

Parliament has been resistant to an increase and the numbers of women since the fourth republic have not even made it up to the 15% mark. Currently we stand at 10%. We need to improve this. We know that the much touted countries in Africa that have impressive levels of women's representation achieved this through taking concrete measures such as affirmative action, or quota systems. Rwanda, South Africa to name a few. We need to consider such measures if we are to see any improvements.

The party primaries must field women in safe seats to increase their chances. We cannot claim that the women are not there because they are; there are competent women proving their mettle at the local governance level and we need to pay closer attention to them.

As I have already intimated we need our political leaders to address the demands of the women's manifesto and to engage the issues as outlined in a planned and systematic manner.

The UN 2007 Progress report on the MDGs describe the challenges for Africa as staggering and women are most vulnerable. As we inch up to the deadline for achieving the MDGs we urge that our governments commit more resources into ensuring that the goals are met.

Finally before I take my seat let me congratulate those who are in the forefront of the fight for gender justice. Many women and men, many organisations are working constantly to ensure that the lives of women are improved. This year we especially salute the DV coalition for the role it played in the enactment of the DV bill. We also acknowledge work of the Joint parliamentary committees of Gender and Children and Parliamentary, Legal and Constitutional, Mowac and the President for signing the bill into law.

And finally finally we acknowledge organisations such as Abantu, Third World network, Women's Manifesto Coalition, Action aid, Wise, and all the members of Netright. Wish you a very happy holiday season, full of rest so that come next year we will have the health and find the strength to continue the struggle for gender justice.

Thank you

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## 7 An Assessment of Issues of Concern to Women in the Year 2008 - Dr. Rose Mensah-Kutin

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### 1.0 Introduction:

This presentation seeks to provide us with a sense of what has happened to women across the world with a specific focus on the Ghanaian context. The interest in doing this is located in our consciousness about the reality of the existence of gender inequalities as a fundamental dynamic in the overall hierarchical structures of relationships that characterise all political, economic and social processes. Such an assessment is a further indication that our awareness about who we are, where we are and why we experience social processes the way we do, is an assurance that we can be active sources and participants in the complex and dynamic change processes that happen on an on-going basis even as they intertwine with our lived experience of oppression, discrimination and inequality.

The presentation is divided into four sections. The first section dwells on some of the main issues and challenges for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality at the international level. This is in recognition of the fact that what happens at that level has implications for our own well-being and the struggles and solidarities we need to forge given our basic experience of denial of rights and inequality within the global political and economic system. This discussion is then linked with the second section where we focus attention on the African Continent to examine some of the key actions within the period that have either enhanced or limited women's chances for accessing their rights as equal citizens of their communities. This is important given that regional integration in historical and current initiatives for development and the similarities and differences in our experiences as Africans, can be used as sources of empowerment and development. The third section looks at the situation of women within the Ghanaian context in terms of what has happened and their implications for our rights. The final section attempts to draw out the key lessons and makes

suggestions for how we can strengthen ourselves to move our struggle ahead in the coming years.

## **2.0 Approach and Information Source:**

It is important to point out that this presentation adopts a limited approach in gathering and utilising information sources. In short, the main source of information is newspaper reports compiled throughout the year from the main Ghanaian newspapers such as “The Daily Graphic”, “Ghanaian Times”, “Public Agenda”, “The Mirror” and “Spectator”. Thus whereas every human issue has a gender dimension, one has utilised only stories that specifically refer to women, their actions and experiences as real persons living out their lives as individuals or in groups.

## **3.0 Critical Issues for Women at the International Level:**

At the international level, women continued to demonstrate that they are active in all spheres of life. At the same time it was clear that women experience hardships and discriminatory practices. Their participation in politics was also seen as being fraught with many challenges which often point to the gendered and differentiated nature of the social relationships between women and men.

Among the prominent stories about women during the period was the tragic one about Benazir Bhutto, a former prime minister of Pakistan who had returned home in October 2007 to join her party the opposition Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), was assassinated December 27, after addressing a political rally. It was alleged that she had either died in a bomb blast or been murdered. Several people were killed in the rioting after her death. The investigation following her death under Pervez Musharraf was largely considered unsatisfactory. Clearly a major symbol of women’s capabilities and power for Moslem women had been shattered.

Another interesting and significant issue during the year was the candidature of Hilary Clinton, the first First Lady to be elected to the United States Senate and the first woman elected statewide in New York for the American Presidency. In January, a polls carried out by CBS television said 63% of Americans believed that she was “highly likely” to win in the next presidential elections in 2008. Among Democrat voters, 77% said they expected her to win and even the majority of Republicans (53%) believed she was going to be American’s first female president. She however lost the Democratic nomination to Obama, who is now the president-elected of the U.S. Even though she launched a bitter attack on Obama during her campaign, she quickly rallied round him very strongly and urged her supporters to do the same. We also had to contend with Sarah Palin, the running mate of the Republicans who unfortunately displayed all the qualities of a leader who would not support women’s rights. Her shocking pronouncements enabled those of us in the women’s movement to think through our strategies for promoting women in politics and decision-making, and to differentiate between women who are supportive of women’s rights and those who do not. Eventually, we were happy that the struggles of the black civil rights movement had finally been won with Obama becoming the first black President-elect of the US.

Women are not spared the horrifying experiences of power struggles. During the period, there was the story of the rescue of two Colombian hostages. They are Consuelo Gonzalez and Clara Rojas who had been held hostage for several years by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombian (FARC) rebel group. Hugo Chavez, the Venezuelan President had helped mediate the release. The two were united with their families at an airport near the Venezuelan capital, Caracas. The FARC holds about 750 people as hostage. In Thailand also, there was a report early in the year about the trial of the wife of ousted leader Thaksin Shinawatra for alleged violations of stock-trading laws and a land sale. Pojamarn Shinawatra had returned from exile. Philippine President Gloria Arroyo who is said to have survived three plots by army officers attempting to seize power,

pardoned nine such officers who had taken part in a failed coup attempt in 2003, involving over 300 officers and troops. The officers cannot return to the army and can be detained again if they support future uprisings.

On a more celebratory level, a woman was appointed for the first time as governor general, the official representative of the British monarch and Australia's highest office. Quentin Bryce, 65 was the former sex discrimination commissioner and she had also been a law professor. She took up the position in September, 2008 when the Prime Minister's term expired. Israel's foreign minister, Tzipi Livni, also became victorious as head of the governing party, Kadima, in a race to replace Ehud Olmert in September, 2008.

Earlier on in April however, we were reminded about the harsh reality and deep-rooted nature of gender discrimination. A report released by the UN in Geneva confirmed that women are discriminated against in almost every country in the world, in spite of the pledge by 185 UN states to change laws favourable to men. The report was prepared for the UN Human Rights Commissioner, Louise Arbour by Fareda Banda, a law professor at the London School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). The report recommended the introduction of a new separate mechanism to fight discrimination since existing UN and international human rights laws are not being upheld. The results of a study on wages for women and men in the US further reported that " while there may be more women holding high-power positions, they are still being paid as their counterparts were three decades ago" .

Even though there was very little on women's participation in sports, FIFA's U-17 Women's World Cup was inaugurated during the year. Ghana and Nigeria are among countries with U-17 teams. Ghana also hosted CAN 2008 which brought

many African countries together to participate. Even though Ghana played well we did not win the cup. Women's support during the period was phenomenal.

There were a number of stories on HIV/AIDs. The most inspiring was that about the courage of a young 12-year old girl, Keren Dunaway who lives with HIV, which gained currency during an international AIDs conference held in August in Mexico City, Mexico. She is one of the most prominent AIDs activists in Latin America where like Africa few children can break the silence and tell others that they have HIV for fear of rejection. Keren who edits a children's magazine on the virus shared the stage with Mexican President Felipe Calderon and UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon and said, "we want to be artists, teachers, doctors – even get married and have kids..... But achieving these goals will only be possible when we receive the attention we need, when we are guaranteed the medicines that we need, when we are accepted in schools".

In Turkey, a tragic story was reported in August of the death of about 17 young girls aged between 8 and 16 and about 27 injured ones when a three-storey girls' dormitory collapsed in central Turkey.

Greater accountability by governments helps protect women from oppression and abuse. In this connection, a British man was jailed for raping two of his daughters and fathering nine children with them over 27 years. The father, 56, was expected to be jailed a minimum of 19 and a half years. In actual fact he was made to serve 25 life sentences to run concurrently. Justice indeed can be assured to punish sex offenders and protect other women from abuse. Finally, the German government continued to hold itself accountable to women by addressing their personal safety concerns. For example, to address a safety risk for women wearing normal brassieres, the German federal police was going to equip some 3,000 police women with "bullet-proof bras". The brassieres are made of cotton and feature the word "Polizei" along the seam and is meant to better protect police women who wear bullet-proof vests.

#### **4.0 Critical Issues of Concern to Women in the African Region:**

Many more stories were reported from the international level on women than from the Africa regional level. Perhaps this points to how we tend to prioritise our relationships with the west rather than strengthening Africa regional integration processes. Many of the stories ranged from the scandalous, to issues of social concern, peace and women's leadership.

The need to prioritise gender equality issues was firmly laid on the table in January, when an Ethiopian lawyer, Ms Meaza Ashenaphy, spoke at an AU pre-summit conference in Addis Ababa and argued that gender inequality is a major hindrance to the achievement of the mandate of the Africa Union (AU). She said the continent continued to witness major irregularities in the implementation of international and regional legal frameworks on women's rights and that this is a major challenge as the continent cannot unite with such gender gaps in laws related to half of its population.

In the area of peacebuilding, a seven-member Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was set up by President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf to look into violations in the conflict in Liberia that ended in 2003. Statements from around the country showed how several lives were shattered through the war with stories of rape being high on the list of atrocities.

Still on Liberia, the government of President Johnson-Sirleaf requested IMF assistance to develop a programme to support economic reconstruction, soon after taking office in January 2006, On April 5, 2008 the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) and the International Monetary



Fund (IMF) agreed that Liberia has taken the necessary steps to reach its decision point under the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. Liberia therefore became the 33<sup>rd</sup> country to reach its decision point to qualify for debt relief under HIPC. To do this Liberia also committed to implementing a broad set of reforms including macro-economic stability measures, the preparation and implementation of a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) for at least one year, and other reforms in governance and the social sector. Given our own experience with PRSPs and its implications for the promotion of women's rights, the Liberia case needs to be watched carefully to see if any different experience would be forthcoming.

The unacceptable suffering of women and children of Darfur also gained prominence during the period. A report on Darfur released by Human Rights Watch and published in the April, issue of "Daily Graphic" pointed to worsening conditions of women and girls who are still subjected to widespread rape and sexual assault, five years after the start of the conflict. More than 200,000 people have died in Darfur since rebels took up arms in 2008 according to the UN and two million have fled their homes. The presence of UN and African Union peacekeepers has helped deter attacks in some areas. Last year NETRIGHT joined the MFWA and other civil society groups to express solidarity with women of Darfur during the African Union (AU) summit here in Accra.

Similar to the international level, Africa also had some things to celebrate. A new Deputy Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, Mrs. Masire-Mwamba of Botswana was appointed to succeed Mrs. Florence Mugasha of Uganda who was leaving office after six years. Mrs. Masire had held a number of high level positions in Botswana. The African Women Development Fund (AWDF) also launched a report showcasing the achievements of its HIV/AIDs funds at the XVII International Aids Conference in Mexico.

One of the major characteristic of the women's movement is resistance and in August this year, we heard of the story of a protest march by hundreds of SWAZI women through the streets of the capital to protest against a shopping trip taken by nine of the king's 13 wives. The wives of the king chartered a plane to go to Europe and the Middle East to shop. The protestors handed in a petition to the finance ministry saying the money could have been better spent in addressing poverty. Swaziland is Africa's last absolute monarchy. It is also one of the poorest countries in the world with more than 40% of the population believed to be infected with HIV-AIDS. King Swati III who is 40 years old, uses public money to pay for new palaces, a personal jet and luxury cars. Soon after this, and specifically in September, tens of thousands of virgins competed for King Mswati III's eye in a traditional Reed Dance. This was to enable the King choose his 14<sup>th</sup> wife at a time when activities were being organised by protesters against the monarchy.

A very important story on women in parliament which contrasts sharply with our situation in Ghana today was reported about RWANDA where women were said to have taken 44 out of 80 seats in its parliament, becoming the first country where women outnumber men in parliament. This shot Rwanda's previous figure of 48.8 per cent to at least 55 per cent. A constitution put in place after the genocide ensures that a 30 per cent quota goes to female MPs. The ruling coalition of President Paul Kagame won 78 per cent of seats. Women who stood for seats reserved for female candidates are not allowed to represent a party.

The debate about the role of wives of heads of state should be of interest to gender activists as they continue to take up public roles even though they have no mandate to do so. In the year, First Ladies in the West Africa sub-region met in a three-day meeting to discuss FGM in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. They were from Benin, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Togo and Burkina Faso. Almost half of all women in Burkina Faso are circumcised.

Discriminatory practices against women in the name of culture still prevail on the continent with increasing efforts being made to address them. A major campaign was launched by ten UN agencies who want a major reduction in the practice of female genital mutilation by 2015. An estimated three million girls a year are said to be at risk from this practice and many of them are in Africa. Villages and communities in West Africa have joined together to make pledges to abandon the practice. Another story from Uganda talked of a ban of FGM in a number of communities while about 300 girls in Kenya were reported to have fled from their homes for refuge in churches to escape from forced FGM which is banned there but still practiced in some communities. There is also the case of albinos in Tanzania and Burundi who live in fear of their lives. In Tanzania, five people were arrested for killing a nine-year old albino girl in September. In Somalia, the horror story is reported of a young woman who was stoned to death even though she pleaded for her life to be saved. The stones were thrown by 50 men. The girl had confessed to adultery in a Sharia Court. Even though her father told Amnesty International she was 13 and been raped by 3 men, no one listened to him.

In spite of all such unacceptable practices, women still struggle for better treatment. In August, Nigerian women's groups including National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) opposed an attempt by the National assembly to enact laws to prohibit and punish indecent dressing. Alliance for Africa (AFA), a women's rights group, led a strong campaign arguing that the proposed bill sought to set unacceptable guidelines to determine personal dressing and to criminalise and penalize persons who do not comply with the dress code. This struggle and the lessons learnt have been well documented by AFA.

### **5.0 Issues of Concern to Women in Ghana:**

Within our own context Ghana, a range of themes are obvious from the stories published during the period on women. As is to be expected, more than half of

all the stories were on women, politics and decision-making with a specific focus on this year's elections. Indeed one can track women's agency in this area from January to December within the general and specific preparatory efforts around the elections. Other stories can be located within the general themes of violence against women, women's health, beauty and entertainment, women and the economy as well as discriminatory practices against women.

Very early on in the year, there was a reports from the widow of the murdered Presiding Member of Asunafo North District Assembly Anthony Yeboah Boateng. He had been killed in the presence of his wife Cecilia Akosua Yeboah at Abronie near Sunyani in the previous year on suspicion that he was a criminal, inspite of the fact that he pleaded he was not. Cecilia came out publicly to ask for material support to help cater for herself and her two children.

Stories of violence against women included murders, rape and battering. Samples of such stories are as follows:

- In January a 32 year old chainsaw operator and hunter, Kwasi Akowah, shot his wife Abenaa Saamah, 29 and later committed suicide at Kenyasi in the Asutifi District of the Brong Ahafo region.
- One Thomas Alan Tichler, a Briton was accused of indecently assaulting a three year old girl. He came to Ghana under the auspices of the Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO) and was guest in the home of the girl's parents.
- A 47 year old woman at Twobodom in the Techiman district was also nearly hacked to death by an alleged rapist Kwaku Paul, for rejecting his request for sex.
- A 45 year old man allegedly defiled a 12 year old girl after blindfolding, gagging and tearing her panties before abusing the girl sexually. The girl collapsed afterwards and had to be rushed to hospital for treatment.
- In October, an 18 year old woman, Matilda Adu was allegedly murdered by her boyfriend Nii Tackie in Tema.

- There were several stories of incest including one in which a 65 old Catechist was alleged to have defiled his five year old granddaughter.

Contrary to what we all do know, a story in the Ghanaian Times of September 3, 2008 reported that the number of husbands suffering physical abuse in the hands of their wives was getting higher than the reverse. It is gratifying to note that the National Secretariat of the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) wrote a rejoinder to correct the false impression the story created which was published in the September 15, 2008 paper of the “Ghanaian Times”. The real situation according to the rejoinder was that, only records of the Ministries offices of the unit had been cited and that the explanation for that particular case was that many more men were willing to report cases of abuse against them by women. Interestingly, the DOVVSU marked its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary during the year. Again during the year, a Domestic Violence Management Board was established to coordinate the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act 2007. International Day of Zero Tolerance of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) was also launched on February 6 with a number of local women’s organisations organising activities to mark the day and calling on the government to enforcement laws to protect women and girls against FGM.

On discriminatory practices against women often undertaken in the name of culture, the classic case during the year was that of three widows of the late Nana Kwaku Dimpo II, chief of New Longolo in the Kintampo North District in the Brong Ahafo region. The widows were Madam Yaa Nsia, 80, Madam Afua Nkume 75 and Madam Ama Sumaa 69. They had performed widowhood rites for more than nine years in the name of culture and tradition as they could only be freed after the funeral rites of their late husband had been performed.

On women’s health, many of the stories during the period were mainly on maternal mortality, breast cancer awareness and treatment issues, and

HIV/AIDS. Stories on Breast Cancer urged women with symptoms to report early to health centres for treatment. A breast Cancer Awareness Walk was launched on October 15 and several activities organised to heighten awareness. A Breast Cancer Centre was also established in Kumasi in September and a National Breast Cancer Fund launched in early November. With reference to women's maternal health, public discussion about the causes and extent of maternal deaths also intensified after the government launched the free pregnancy care policy in a bid to reduce maternal deaths. The launch has seen an upsurge of the numbers of pregnant women registering at health facilities. The British government had made funds available to support free care for pregnant women.

Many of the stories on HIV/AIDS were advisory in nature. The public was generally called on to be sensitive to HIV/AIDS sufferers and to avoid stigmatization. WOMEC organised a three-day training for 20 female journalists on "Effective Reporting on Women and HIV and Aids". The Society for Women and AIDs in Africa (SWAA) attempted to make HIV/AIDs an election campaign issue by inviting wives of the various presidential aspirants for the 2008 elections in September, to engage with them. Spokespersons other than the wives themselves, were sent to represent the wives of the NPP and the NDC flag bearers while the other parties never turned up. It is therefore not surprising that the issue was never picked up seriously by any of the flag bearers as a critical campaign issue. In any case using wives of presidential aspirants as an entry point for such an important public policy issue is itself a contentious one given that wives of heads of states are not public office holders.

The Beauty and entertainment Industry also continued with the contentious Beauty Pageants including one initiated by one Ewura Adwoa Boahemaa of Shear Power Ventures on the theme "Excellent Women – The Role of Women in National Building". The programme sought nominees from all the ten regions of the country. The women were expected to be 50 years and above and one of

them was to emerge winner and crowned “Portrait of an Excellent Women – The Role of Women in National Building”. Unfortunately one of the nominees, Mrs. Fati Issaka from the northern region died on April 8, 2008 the day a press conference was to be organised to introduce her as the region’s nomination.

On the economy, stories featured the contributions and plight of “Kayayee”, skills and entrepreneurial training for women, calls for micro-credit facilities for women and complaints from market women about space constraints for displaying wares and low sales of goods especially in the early part of the year when a number of them drew public attention to low sales during the 2007 Christmas season. Similar complaints are being made now about low patronage of goods and services as a result of the elections. A number of stories were also evident around women’s income-generating activities such as basket weaving in Bolgatanga with calls for substantial support from government and NGOs of such initiatives. There was an interesting story of a woman, Madam Gladys Nukomeko Nutakor who had ventured into a traditional male occupation of corn-milling. Located in Kotobabi/Maamobi, Gladys ventured into the field in 2002 when those she had employed to operate the machine were not accounting to her properly: “I decided to learn how to operate it myself”.

Sadly there was only one story on househelps which was mainly the report of a study conducted on the subject.

One major issue that was widely covered in all the newspapers around women and the economy was the Paris Declaration and its Aid Effectiveness High Level Forum III Conference, held in Accra from September 2-4, 2008. Civil Society activities started early in the year and culminated in the organisation of the International Women’s Forum and the Civil Society Parallel Event on August 31-September 1, 2008 and the Ministerial High Level Forum 3. NETRIGHT played a lead role in this process and received wide media coverage on issues relating to gender equality, women’s rights and aid. The network worked with other international women’s groups to amplify the voices of women and the

dissatisfaction with the current aid architecture and the need for an alternative that is responsive to women.

As mentioned earlier, issues relating to women in politics and decision-making dominated media reports on women during the year. The central focus was on women and the elections even though significant leadership efforts by women in other spheres were acknowledged. For example, the appointment of the first woman Vice Chancellor in the country, Prof. Naana Opoku Agyeman was widely reported with her appointment taking effect on October 1, 2008. The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs' congratulatory message to her was published in Daily Guide of July 21, 2008. Selina Dabuoh also became the first female National Chairperson of the Construction and Building Materials Workers Union (CBMWU) of the Ghana Trades Union Congress (GTUC). This was reported in the "Ghanaian Times" of October 28, 2008. "For the past 50 years this enviable position has been occupied by men. But this time round, the jinx has been broken and I am grateful to the delegates", she said in an interview after her election. Ninety per cent, of the delegates were men.

The only female technician at the Tema Oil Refinery, Esther Sarpong was also featured in the November 4, 2008 issue of "Ghanaian Times". She works at the Instrumentation Unit where her work involves assembling, installing and calibrating components of measurement and control system.

With specific reference to the elections, there were several statements from women leaders about the need for women to actively participate in the process by offering themselves as candidates, beginning from January, 2008. There were specific activities and statements from women's groups to political parties to field more women in safe seats, as there were others to directly strengthen individual women's capacity to stand and win seats as parliamentary candidates. The Women's Manifesto Coalition hosted by ABANTU for Development actively initiated actions supported by CIDA, Actionaid, FES and others in this respect.



WiLDAF also launched its “We know Politics” programme which was supported by DFID and The Dutch Government on related activities.

Women’s groups’ participation in mainstream advocacy work on governance was widely covered. The Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) organised a Presidential Encounter in June and early July for Presidential Aspirants with representation in Parliament. Women’s groups including NETRIGHT and individual women were represented ensuring that women themselves could ask specific questions of concern to them. There was also the Presidential Debates Committee on which NETRIGHT was represented and which made decisions about the organisation of Presidential Debates involving the 4 aspirants of parties with representation in Parliament. (NPP, NDC, CPP & PNC). Two presidential debates were organised in Accra and Tamale, while a debate for vice-presidential candidates of the same parties were organised for the first time in Cape Coast also by the IEA.

Flag-bearers wives carved an important role for themselves by actively campaigning for support for their parties and spouses. The question is whether their spouses would have played a similar role on their behalf were they to be the ones offering themselves as flag bearers. Women’s Aglow on its part played a unifying role by inviting all the wives of flag bearers to its National Convention on the theme “Come let us walk in the light of the Lord”, at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi. Aglow had earlier on in the year organised a Thanksgiving Prayer Session to thank God for a successful Can 2008 soccer tournament.

The message of peace was very strong throughout the year, with specific peace initiatives being organised around the conflict in Bawku and others around the elections. In July for instance, women and children in Bawku embarked on a “peace march” through the principal streets of the town and presented a petition to the President through the Bawku Municipal Chief Executive (MCE). This was

organised by the concerned women of Bawku in collaboration with the Bawku East Development Association (BEDA) and supported by the Bawku Municipal Assembly. With the peace initiatives, some faith-based organisations and churches organised marches on their own or called on women to play a lead role by using “your special God-given feminine influence” to impress upon male relatives to desist from violent attitudes and behaviours, before, during and after elections 2008” as one church leader said. Organisations such as the West African Network for Peace (WANEP) and the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) also mounted campaigns around the message of peace. A number of stories also focused on Muslim Women Associations either calling on the to advocate for peace in elections or calling on women to stand for elections.

Still on election 2008, two interesting developments were evident: the keen interest demonstrated by women in the elections through their active participation in the primaries as well as the issue of women as running mates of presidential aspirants. Some of the women in parliament decided not contest again while others did. A few went through the primaries smoothly while others had to endure all kinds of challenges. New names also came up. These include Mrs. Zita Okaikoi of the NDC for the Dome/Kwabenya constituency and Gloria Ofori-Boadu who lost at the primaries, while Zita sailed through but could not win the seat which was retained by the incumbent. One interesting candidature was that of Mrs. Nancy Thompson, a former headmistress of Wesley Girls High School who became the only woman among those contesting the NPP Parliamentary Primary in the Cape Coast Constituency. She launched her campaign in April but very soon unrelated accusations started coming through, including the fact that as headmistress she had not helped the people of Cape Coast to gain admission to the school!!

Perhaps the single most prominent issue for women around this year’s elections was on the running mate issue. Once the issue was raised, it took centre-stage, became defined and redefined in many twists and turns to undermine women’s

bid to be seen as active and interested persons vying for power and positions in the public space. Several names came up in the process and those who came closest to being appointed as running mates were Mrs. Betty Mould-Iddrisu of the NDC and Hon. Hajia Alima Mahama of the NPP. It was very clear to us as women through the discussions that occurred around their nomination that for us, when it comes to politics, nothing is enough for us to gain access: not qualification, competence, hard work nor commitment to a party's ideology and practice. Indeed as this year's elections have shown, for a woman, every aspect of our lives can be redefined to disqualify us. Being married can be the reason; being single can also be; being a Christian or Muslim can also be used; being too quiet or talkative are both unacceptable. So basically, it is just the fact of being a woman which is the main source of our discrimination, oppression and inequality. In the end the PNC, DFP and RPD parties chose females as their running mates but this has been of no effect given the poor performance of these parties. Given the way the parliamentary candidature of women became subsumed under the "women as running-mates" discourse, it is not surprising that only a few women out of the 103 who went through primaries, managed to sail through the elections. So we are faced with the very sad and unacceptable fact that only 20 women managed to win their seats, meaning that for a period of 4 years, only 20 voices of women will be heard in the 230 member Parliament. While we congratulate these sisters as well as those who offered themselves at all, we are deeply concerned about our retrogression given that we have lost 5 seats out of the current 25.

### **6.0 Implications for The Promotion of Women's Rights:**

It is clear from the stories from the Ghanaian media that even though there are many difference between women at the international, regional and national levels, there is also a lost of similarity. The broad experience of gender inequality and the denial of women's rights is shared across the globe even though the nature and characteristics may be different. Accounts of economic

hardship, violence, discriminatory practices and lack of access to resources and power unfold around stories told of women everywhere.

Related to this is the fact that the landscape for women is changing as far as the situation of women is concerned. Noting that change only occurs when women speak out, many of the stories point to different ways in which women work hard to promote their interests. Those women who move into male dominated occupations as well as others who struggle hard for food to meet the survival needs of family members are all part of this complex process of change, as are those who utilise UN agreements and conventions to do away with outmoded customs, practices and behaviours.

Indeed the media itself has demonstrated its ability to adapt to changing situations. It was obvious from the stories that, the discourse on issues of concern to women was more favourable than some years ago. Sections of the media as part of civil society seem to be increasingly becoming aware of the direction women are moving and so whether in language, extent of reports and use of photographs there was a high sense of the media wanting to align itself with the promoting of women's rights. This notwithstanding, the mainstream media remains male-dominated, sexist and not balanced in its reports on women. For instance very few stories on women were on the front-pages of newspapers.

Another issue worth noting is that, there are several areas of women's lives that are either minimally raised or not discussed at all. Stories on violence against women and those on politics and decision-making, with specific reference to women in the elections predominated media spaces while others around women's land rights, science and technology, and economics were woefully inadequate. But for the specific initiative of NETRIGHT around the Aid Effectiveness agenda, there would have been very little policy discussions around economics and its implications for women and this at a time of a global financial crises. It is therefore extremely important for us to broaden our scope

and the dynamics and interlinkages of our work so that our effectiveness can have the needed impacts it deserves.

There is also the class dynamics of our struggle. Many of the stories on violence against women tended to be reported about ordinary persons such as watchmen, labourers, carpenters. There are however a few ones where the perpetrators are school teachers and others who are supposedly “respected” by society. Which are often followed with stories of attempts to cover up. Such narrow focus clearly points to the class bias in the places we look for crime, and discriminatory practices against women. This calls for greater openness, about the character of this social crises so that the blame is not laid at the doorstep of only one socio-economic group.

A narrow definition of women’s political participation was also obvious as very little information was provided during the year on local governance and the activities involving women in the district assemblies. The only prominent story on local governance was one related to the National Associations of Local Authorities, (NALAG) which hosted an African-wide assembly of Local Government Authorities, a component of which was a discussion on issues of women in local governance. The Graphic Corporation on its part organised the third in the series of its innovative programme the “Graphic Governance Dialogue” within which gender perspectives around local governance was discussed.

There was also very little discussion about households, and the dynamics of social, economic and work relationships that occur there and their implications for democracy, women’s rights and gender equality. This is a huge gap and women need to pay attention if we are genuinely committed to promoting gender equality and equity.

Finally what has happened to us women in this year's elections means that we need to wake up from our slumber. We need to rethink our approaches and strategies for organising and engaging with policy processes. We need a framework that provides principles that guide our actions and enable us to link the macroeconomic environment with processes at the national, sectoral and micro levels as well as with international conventions and commitments to human rights development and gender quality. Once we demand that national policies must conform to a human rights agenda, the rationale for such policies changes fundamentally. Our demands will be driven by the recognition that we have needs and concerns that have to be met but also that we are entitled to having them met on the part of the state and other relevant actors who have legal obligations to do so. Thus if we demand for the implementation of quota systems, for example, we will be doing so to fulfill our rights as a legal obligation as countries like Rwanda and Angola have done.

We must start with the underlying challenges posed by how the flawed economic and political systems within which women's rights promotion have to occur and address their oppressive and discriminatory character. We have done some of the work already but we need to work together more through our networks, coalition and organisations in a more strategic way. Indeed we have learnt that change only comes to those who act with a commitment at the personal level and in a collective way. Perhaps what has happened in this elections in terms of our low representation in parliament, may be the one chance that we have as women to demand radical and effective measures for a gender responsive governance system.

I believe all of us are ready to stand up and be counted. Thank you.