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Ghana: Women in Decision-making – New Opportunities, Old Story

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Introduction

Two decades of democratic change in Ghana, coupled with economic liberalization and intensified advocacy for women's equality, had fueled optimism among those in journalism that there would be significant improvements in the status of women in the media industries. However, empirical evidence emerging from recent research suggests otherwise. Not only do men outnumber women by a 2:1 ratio in the nation's newsrooms, in particular, but few women own media, or occupy top governance and management positions (Byerly 2011). The aim of this chapter is to assess the occupational status of women in the Ghanaian news media and examine whether or not transformations in the media landscape resulting from redemocratization have facilitated women's rise in decision-making positions. The analysis draws on new data from the *Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media (Global Report)* (Byerly 2011), existing research on the career conditions of women in the news business and the antecedents of female media workers dating back to the colonial period. It argues that while there have been positive improvements in media-related education and jobs, the proverbial glass ceiling continues to perpetuate gross gender inequalities in decision-making positions in the Ghanaian media.

Ghanaian women and redemocratization

Ghana is regarded as an African success story and boasts one of the most vibrant media systems on the continent. In 1957, Ghana became the first sub-Saharan African country to attain independence from colonial rule. The country made a fresh start in democratic governance in 1993 following decades of mostly military rule. It has remained politically stable since then and held five successful elections; a sixth election is scheduled for December 2012. Ghana's estimated 24 million people represent more than 100 distinct groups, the largest being the

Akan, Moshi-Dagomba and Ewe. The national language is English, although local languages are widely spoken and used in national life and on audiovisual media. Ranked 88 out of 214 countries on the World Bank's annual World Development Report for 2010 (published in 2011), the country has a diverse and rich natural resource base with gold, timber, cocoa, diamond, bauxite and manganese being the most important source of foreign trade. Large-scale oil production in December 2010 has added another natural resource and is expected to further drive economic growth and boost Ghana's standing as one of Africa's most promising nations.

Women constitute nearly 51.2 per cent of Ghana's total population, have a literacy rate of 68.5 per cent as compared with 80.2 per cent for men (Ghana Statistical Service 2012) and a life expectancy of 65 years compared with 63 years for men (World Bank 2011). Over the years there have been positive changes in the social and economic status of women, but the country's record on gender equality is mixed. Ghana places 70 out of 134 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report, conducted by researchers Hausman, Tyson and Zahidi (2011). That report also highly ranks Ghana on labor force participation (2 out of 134 countries) and on economic participation and opportunity (17 out of 134 countries). When it comes to women's participation in public life the country's position begins to slip. It is ranked 45th in the category 'legislators, senior officials and managers' and 91st on political empowerment (Hausman *et al.* 2011). Although a few women hold high-level positions (e.g., as chief justice and speaker of parliament), men continue to dominate decision-making at all levels of public life.

The gender gap is worse when it comes to parliamentary representation, where women are less than 10 per cent, a figure far below the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) target of 30 per cent representation to make women's participation in political office meaningful. Women continue to occupy secondary status in these ways despite the fact that the Ghanaian Constitution has clear provisions against discrimination and enjoins the state to take steps to end all forms of discrimination through law reform and affirmative action. Some gender activists charge that the main constraint to women's equality in decision-making has been 'political culture, which is elitist, gender blind and riddled with patronage' (the Women's Manifesto for Ghana 2004). Others lay the blame on religious and cultural conservatism for constructing 'fixed identities for African women, which often puts them in a place not believed to be subject to change, analysis, challenge or negotiation' (Adeleye-Fayemi 2011, p. 9).

Media in Ghana

The media are seen as having a role to play in contributing to or countering some of the negative attitudes that perpetuate women's inequality and