

EMPOWERING GHANAIAAN WOMEN FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: REVISITING THE TWO IMPERATIVES OF THE PRACTICAL AND THE STRATEGIC

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Abstract

The paper presents a case for the consideration of both practical and strategic needs when empowering women for community development. Using conceptual analysis, the complex and multiple roles of Ghanaian women are examined resulting in revelations that point to compromises in women's empowerment initiatives. The revelations demonstrate that women's empowerment initiatives have resulted in marked improvements in women's conditions but only dismal improvements in their status, as women remain in subjugated positions in society.

The persistence of women's subjugated positioning in the socio-economic system of Ghana is attributed to the limited framing of ongoing initiatives that only stress the practical needs of women without similar emphasis on strategic interests. Consequently, an assertion is made that ongoing initiatives focus only on enabling women to function in their traditional subjugated locations without fostering the kinds of change that will transform their positioning in society. Evidently, the so-called women's empowerment has occurred in sites of subjugation rather than in preferred transformative sites. Arguing that the pursuit of strategic needs has relevance not only for women but also families and communities and even national development, a case is made for women's empowerment initiatives to take more seriously questions of strategic relevance.

1. Introduction

National and community development efforts in Ghana during the last two decades have been marked, among others, by an increasing awareness of the need to empower women for more effective social participation. This awareness has been precipitated and sustained by the growing appreciation of the centrality of the myriad roles that women play at family, household and community level toward national development. An understanding of the impact of past exclusionism and the resulting intensification of gender inequalities with their attendant effects on national development efforts have

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added impetus for change. Hence, in the last decade, especially, development efforts have sought to address women's challenges and enhance their conditions for more effective social participation.

This paper examines women's empowerment efforts in Ghana during the period for the ways that they attend to both the practical and strategic gender needs. It establishes that while there is growing support for women's empowerment, emphasis has been placed on practical to the detriment of strategic needs. Consequently, the initiatives although have led to significant improvement in women's conditions change in women's status remains dismal. Arguing that women's empowerment can only be realized through a change in the status of women, a case is made for the re/channeling of practical programs in ways that support and promote strategic gender interests.

2. The challenge of women's empowerment

Studies show that the challenges of Ghanaian women as they play their complex and multiple roles serve to constrict performance, restrict social participation and impede household and community development (Apusigah, 2002; Hesse, 2000; Nikoi, 1998; Dolphyne, 1991). An appreciation of the implications for national development of the effects of women's challenges has motivated community-based institutions, non-governmental organizations and governmental institutions to initiate programs that purport to support and promote women's "integration" into community development processes. To this end, various programs have been initiated, especially at the grassroots level, with the view to empowering women to participate more effectively in community development.

The cause of empowerment engenders specific meanings; the lack of which policies and programs can be misguided and goals defeated. Such meanings are captured eloquently in Sara Longwe (1997) analysis of women's empowerment processes in Africa. Longwe stresses in her analysis that empowering processes must not only support women's welfare needs but also work to transform the playing field in ways that facilitate and secure gender equity and social justice. The former relates to practical needs while the later seeks women's strategic interests. Against the background of

subjugation and subordination, therefore, empowering processes will seek to improve women's conditions while work to enhance their status in society. Empowering processes, then, entail the two imperatives of the practical and the strategic in order to engender the kinds of transformations requisite for the effective social participation of women.

3. The practical imperative

The myriad roles played by Ghanaian women in community development are toward meeting the practical challenge of providing for the basic yet essential needs of the family and community. These needs, which include food, water, shelter, income, health and education, are basic to the extent that they form the immediate necessities of life and yet essential because they support the very survival of human beings. In the modernist scheme of things, as reflected in Abraham Maslow's categorization of needs, they form the first in the hierarchy. As first in order, basic need satisfaction precipitates the desire for other needs. Indeed, these basic essentials provide humans with the requisite life support. It is when these needs are met that the desire for other needs become possible.

Often framed as needs, the practical imperative has a direct link to women's conditions and can be "readily identified and usually relate to unsatisfactory living conditions and lack of resources. ... Meeting such needs through development activities can be a relatively short-term process involving inputs such as equipment, technical expertise, training, hand pumps, clinics or a credit program"(CICC, p. 33). Also, CIDA (1999) defines practical needs as "immediate necessities (water, shelter, food income and health care) within a specific context. Projects that address practical needs generally include responses to inadequate living conditions"(p. 15). The urgency of practical need satisfaction makes it an easy target not only for development workers but also women in their everyday struggles. Indeed, women's lives at the grassroots are organized around providing for these basic needs.

4. Women and basic needs

Women's activities at the grassroots center on ensuring that their families and communities gain access to basic needs. Within the contexts of depravity, which is highest at the lower echelons that women occupy, this practical imperative is even more evident. Especially in rural communities, the daily struggles of women tend to center around efforts to provide for the basic necessities of their families. Women walk long distances with big containers on their heads to fetch water for household use. They provide water for cooking, drinking and bathing. In Northern Ghana, in particular, women also fetch water for building projects. Among the Frafra people, the building of new compounds puts additional tasks on women, as they have to fetch the water needed for all aspects of the projects. Women also have sole responsibility of fetching the raw materials for plastering, flooring and decorating the buildings that form the family compounds. Hence, long after men's work in a new building project is over, women are still actively working on the finishing. This is comparable to women's roles in the provision of food.

With the exception of the Northern Region where in some communities women are exempted from active farming, in most Ghanaian communities women are active in the field right from the beginning to the end. Among the Frafra, women's work begins with the carting of manure from the animal pen and compost dams to the farmland. They play more active roles compared to men in the sowing of seeds. They are also involved, at critical stages, in the clearing of weeds on the farmland. They stand side by side men during the first and second weeding periods during each farming season. Men however have the sole responsibility for the final weeding when the grass is high and mulched for the following season. Women also play very active roles during the harvesting, plucking and carting of food crops to the house. After harvest, they take on very active roles in processing the foods for consumption and storage. Women's activities during this stage include blanching, steaming, cracking, dehusking, drying, roasting and smoking. After the preparation for storage

activities, they also play active roles during the storage process bagging, banning and potting foodstuff. As well, they have to continually check on stored items and when necessary take steps to ensure such items do not decay.

In addition, Ghanaian women have responsibility for the preparation of food for the entire family. In these times of perennial food shortages, women have the added responsibility of ensuring that when production stocks are out, the family does not starve. This has meant, engaging in extra occupations that either bring in additional income or food supplements. In Northern Ghana, this has meant the cultivation of marginal lands to supplement family farms, engaging in dry season gardening, fetching firewood and/or burning charcoal for sale. Petty trading becomes brisk after the main farming season is over as seasonal traders, mostly women, join in the trade. Even in Dagbon, where women are not traditionally active in farming, they still have this extra responsibility. Most Dagbon women engage in various forms of petty trading to support their families. In recent times, travelling to the big towns and cities to work as porters (i.e. kayayee) is common. The many women, young and old, who are found on the streets of Accra, Tema, Kumasi, Obuasi, Takoradi and even Bolgatanga and Tamale include not just unmarried but also married ones. The many roles that women play in the provision of basic necessities are indicative of the significance of their contributions to the survival of families and communities. To the uncritical viewer this could suggest a locus of power with women at the center. However, it is in these very sites that women suffer the various forms of discrimination that perpetuate their subjugation.

5. Women's subjugated empowerment:

Studies on Ghana reveal that women at the grassroots play roles that are at once empowering and subjugating (Nikoi, 1998; Dei, 1994; Dolphyne, 1991). Such claims will have to be taken very seriously because of their implications for community development. The impression that is often conveyed by such claims is that women do not suffer complete domination after all. In fact, analysts such as Dei (1994) and Dolphyne (1991) appeal to this argument to further a

politic of an anti-Western imperialist discourse that contests so-called liberatory discourses.

Dei (1994) argues that such discourses tend to end up reinscribing domination by failing to appreciate the differences in location and diversity in subjective experiences. This failure, he claims, results in new forms of exclusion as Western experiences become normalized and projected as women's collective experience and imposed on all cultures irrespective of differences. The silencing that occurs in the process, he suggests, promotes voicelessness and powerlessness of the non-West. His anti-imperialist project is therefore aimed at fostering the respecting of difference and reclaiming of voice with the view to compelling an appreciation of cultural diversity.

Evidently, diversity is observable among all cultural systems and serves to differentiate them in ways that are at ones separating and connecting. It is this diversity that makes it possible for the categorization of cultures into the West and non-West. The ideological, geographical and ethnic/racial differences and their attendant shaping of life patterns and growth processes position the West differently from and yet connected to the non-West. Similar differences among societies engender the separation and connection of identities and bodies within Western cultures. For instance, within Western cultures there is further differentiation among North American, European, First Nations, Australian and Black cultures. Consequently, the experiences of Black women in Europe and North America might be similar due to the shared experience of racism but different in terms of historical shaping and framing. Also, First Nations women might share the experiences of Black women insofar as the experience of racism is concerned but different in terms of the history of the enslavement of Blacks. Similar differences mark the experiences of the diverse women of the non-West. The experiences of Filipino women as victims of sex exploitation differ from Chinese women under one-family-one-child laws. Also, the experiences of Black and Indian women under apartheid South Africa were different.

In Ghana, the experiences of southern women under relatively thriving economies are different from northern women's experiences

of intensifying poverty. Even among the women of Northern Ghana, the plight of women in the Upper East Regions whose cultural systems allow them to engage in active productive activity differs from that of women in some communities in the Northern Region where such activity is tabooed. For instance, Frafra and Kusasi women are able to at least access marginal lands for the cultivation of some food crops while Dagbon women are completely excluded from any such activity. Under the circumstance women's marginalization differs by degree.

An appreciation of diversity is therefore critical to the extent that difference is made visible. To frame these differences in ways that diminish the very basis of the discourse constitutes a disservice to the gender cause. Disservice is evident in the growing backlash against gender initiatives. Threatened by the equality agenda that underpins gender initiatives, opposers find easy flight in arguing that gender is a Western concept or imposition. Through such flight, it becomes possible to ignore the many ways that women suffer exclusion and remain subjugated in various socio-economic systems and structures. There is no doubt that Western imperialism has played and continues to play significant roles in sustaining and maintaining gender inequalities within traditional societies. It is also the case that these forms of imperialism have been made possible by the patriarchal nature of indigenous/traditional societies. In Ghanaian societies where women were only seen as helping hands and not co-owners of production processes it was easy for paternalistic Western development projects to target male members. Evidence of such exclusion is reflected in stories of community development projects that fail because the actual users, women, are excluded from critical planning and programming decisions. A story is often told of a community water project that failed to recognize women as key managers. Lacking such an appreciation, officials targeted men rather than women in the decision-making process. In the end, the completed project was underutilized and was not maintained as women in the community did not find the facility suitable but perhaps also that they were resisting the patriarchal and paternalistic framings of such gender insensitive community development initiatives.

Even though women in grassroots communities play very active roles of diverse forms toward the survival of their families and communities, they lack access to critical cultural resources and the basic human rights for the effective performance of their roles. Studies show that Ghanaian women are disadvantaged regarding access to education and training, health and nutrition, politics and decision-making and, employment and income (Apusigah, 2002; Hesse, 2000; Nikoi, 1998; Mould-Iddirisu, 1996). As well, they suffer several human rights abuses in both the domestic and public spheres (Aryeetey & Kuenyehia, 1998; Dormakyereh, 1997). They are exposed to all kinds of domestic violence and subjected to various forms of sexual harassment in households, communities and workplaces. This situation is attributable largely to their subjugatory positioning in society, especially in the socio-economic system. It is in appreciation of the need to reverse these deplorable conditions that national and community development efforts in Ghana, during the last two decades, have included a move to mobilize diverse sources toward women's empowerment.

6. Mobilizing change:

The creation of the National Council for Women and Development (NCWD) in 1975 was in furtherance of the causes of the women of Ghana. As the state machinery, the NCWD was charged with the task of:

- Advising the National Government generally on all matters relating to the full integration of women in national development at all levels;
- Examining and evaluating the contribution of women to the various sectors of development in the light of national needs and priorities;
- Studying the specific areas where women's participation should be initiated and/or strengthened;
- Developing and promoting action programs to integrate women in all sectors of national development;

- Assisting government to formulate requests for international technical assistance available through the UN system of organizations; and
- Working in partnership with government authorities at all levels and in close co-operation with NGOs especially women's organizations.

(Nikoi, 1998, p. 86)

The NCWD provides the framework for all stakeholders, governmental and non-governmental, to work toward the elimination of the various forms of discrimination that women suffer in communities in particular and the nation as a whole. Since its establishment the NCWD and its regional and district offices have developed and embarked on various gender programs including the initiation of income generating activities, conducting research and providing counselling while striving to influence policy at both national and community levels (Nikoi, 1998; Dolphyne, 1991).

The work of the NCWD has been complimented by the myriad NGOs that embrace, even if nominally, the principle that gender equity is critical for promoting social justice for effective community development. Apart from its own direct interventions, the NCWD also works with ministries, districts and agencies (MDAs) toward the promotion of gender equity in Ghanaian society. Ministries such as the Ministry for Food and Agriculture, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education have gender units that work to influence policy as well as initiate and coordinate programs from the national level. At the local level, District Assemblies have established gender desk offices with the responsibility of working to mainstream gender concerns in the Assemblies' planning and programming as well as at the community levels. NGOs such as Integrated Social Development Center, Action Aid Ghana, SEND Foundation, Center for the Development of People and Plan Ghana strive toward mainstreaming gender in policy and programming while in some cases maintaining gender desk offices. There are also others that focus directly on the promotion of women's causes by working to secure gender equity and social justice. The 31st December Women's Movement, NETRIGHT, CENSUDI, WILDAF, Womankind, Maata N Tudu, FIDA, African Women Lawyers

Association, among others, initiate various targeted programs on women's concerns.

The import of gender equity and social justice to development planning and programming has been given new impetus with the establishment of the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs (MOWAC) in 2001. While it might be too early to evaluate the effectiveness of MOWAC against the backdrop of ongoing debates on its establishment, the fact remains that the ruling government shows an appreciation of gender concerns in community and national development. The cabinet capacity accorded the Minister provides possibility for more direct influencing of national policy and programming.

Effective cooperation between MOWAC and NCWD and between them and the many NGOs can foster collaborations that would likely open opportunities for effective gender work. As a new Ministry, MOWAC can benefit from the wealth of experiences that reside with NCWD and NGOs. Their experiences in influencing policy, organizing women at the grassroots, lobbying at community, national and global fora, initiating research and development projects and, fundraising and resource mobilization are possible areas for learning. Grassroots women's groups, whose knowledges and understanding of their environment, culture and people have been critical for coping and surviving many challenges would be critical for initiating and negotiating change. An understanding of their modes of resistance is equally important for building support and engendering bottom-up, people-centered, women-led and culturally relevant discourses of change and of development. On the other hand, MOWAC provides the framework for institutionalizing gender work as well as legitimating and authenticating the ongoing gender struggles. Both grassroots groups and NGOs can work with MOWAC to give voice to their endeavours and help hasten policy change. Such learning possibilities necessitate collaborations that can help move discourse and action beyond the basic need agenda, which dominates current initiatives, to include initiatives that can engender strategic change.

7. The strategic imperative

In spite of the general impression of promoting revolutionary change in national and community development efforts since the 1980s, this has been limited largely to general national policy and programs. The revolutionary spirit was not applied to gender work in ways that could transform the socio-economic system to ensure gender equality and social justice. National programs, while openly declaring support for gender equity and expressing commitment to equitable development lacked the transforming spirit insofar as gender was at issue. Undeniably, the initiatives that characterized reform efforts at the time have resulted in some improvements in access to education and training, health and nutrition, politics and decision-making, employment and incomes as well as the human rights of women (Ghana Government, 2003; Apusigah, 2002). It is also arguable that such improvements were not transforming as they served to preserve and reinforce traditional gender relations resulting in the perpetuation of existing forms of inequality.

Improvements in education were concentrated at the basic school level, where graduates have limited access to policy-making and programming decisions. Wide gaps remain at the secondary level, where graduates have better chances of moving into professional training programs. As well, at the tertiary level, where middle level personnel are trained and graduates have higher chances of taking on leadership roles female participation rates remain very low (Ghana Government, 2003; FAWA, 2000). In health, programs such as the training of traditional birth attendants, free maternal and child health care and, periodic immunization against diseases have helped reduce maternal mortality and raised the life expectancy of women, however, access to regular health care by women remains problematic (Hesse, 2000; Lamptey, 1997). Also, the vigorous campaign toward enhancing the resource rights of women, have resulted in the establishment of various credit schemes and relaxing of gendered banking restrictions on women. In fact, both banking and loaning agencies report of less defaulting and higher repayment rates among women than men. These improvements have made it possible for NGO's and community-based women's groups to access various

credit schemes to support their income generating activities (CENSUDI, 1999; Nikoi, 1998). However, women have not been able to break the barriers that keep them from participating in non-traditional areas. Also, in spite of the increased awareness of including women, access to politics and decision-making remains a big challenge as community, local government and national structures remain male-centric (Dormakyaareh, 1997; Mould-Iddirisu, 1996).

Consistent to practical need programs, these achievements have resulted in marked improvement in the conditions of women. However, they have failed to change the status of women in Ghanaian society in any significant way. Ghanaian women remain subjugated in the socio-economic system and still occupy the lower echelons in social relations and interactions. As already pointed out, the ongoing reforms have failed to engender the necessary transformations that would foster gender equity and secure social justice. Indeed, it is only when the strategic agenda is taken more seriously and pursued more vigorously will the necessary transformations occur.

8. Strategic interests explained:

Often expressed in terms of interests, the strategic agenda finds appeal in the way that it propels communities and nations to consider questions regarding the status of the disadvantaged. As a gender pursuit, the strategic agenda pushes for the questioning of gender relations in ways that expose the subordinate positioning of women relative to men. CCIC's (1991) painstaking elaboration of strategic interests is worth quoting at length here.

Strategic interests are long-term and related to improving women's positions. Access to participatory processes is in the strategic interest of the poor in general. Access to gender equality is in the strategic interests of women in particular. Empowering women to have more opportunities, greater access to resources, and more equal participation with men in decision-making is in the long-term strategic interest of the majority of the world's men and women alike.

Strategic interests are less obvious and less readily identified by women than practical needs. Like any powerless group women may be well aware of their subordination, but may not understand its basis or the possibilities for change. Even when options for change are known, practical needs and family survival are always priorities. Given the appropriate opportunity, however, women are generally able to describe their situation - their condition and their position. Strategic interests readily emerge in women's gatherings and in the most informal of consciousness-raising processes. The strategic interests of women as a group include:

- Reduced vulnerability to violence and exploitation;
- More economic security, independence, options and opportunities;
- Shared responsibility for reproductive work with men and the state;
- Organizing with other women for strength, solidarity and action;
- Increased political power;
- Increased ability to improve the lives and futures of their children;
- More humanistic and just development processes. (Two Halves Make a Whole, p. 34)

Obviously strategic initiatives have benefit to not just women but entire communities and nations. They result in the repositioning of women to take control of their lives and initiate action toward personal, family, community and national development. It is evident from CCIC that strategic interests can not be divorced from practical needs. For it is only when women's basic need for food, water, shelter, employment, incomes, education and training are met that the various forms of insecurities can be eliminated. By so doing women can be positioned to assert themselves and initiate actions to challenge the status quo.

Indeed, in the case of Ghana where not just women but the majority of Northern and/or rural communities as well as food crop

farmers, children, persons living with disabilities and the working class live below the poverty line, basic needs satisfaction remains very important. The strong appeal to practical rather than strategic issues in Ghana comes as a natural response to a lived reality. Yet, it is also important that initiatives that support practical needs seek to promote the strategic interests of women. The imperative is for such initiatives to keep a strategic agenda in constant focus.

In the explanation above, CCIC (1991) projects a picture where strategic interests become ends external to the process. CCIC's framing shows that strategic interests are long term, less visible and less identifiable. Although meritorious in all intents and purposes, CCIC's framing fails to keep the strategic agenda in view. By implication the framing allows the suspension or postponement of action until the end. It is no doubt therefore that ongoing gender reforms persist on working to satisfy practical needs with very little emphasis on strategic interests. This, undoubtedly, has resulted in marked successes practical need without similar effects in strategic interest provisions.

Advocacy and organizing have resulted in policy reforms and programming changes but not enough to yield expected transformation. Law reforms have resulted in the criminalizing of female gender mutilation, wife beating, sexual harassment, to name a few, but these have not generated the necessary understanding and appreciation that would result in the diminishing or elimination of violence. The Ghanaian media is often replete with reports on gender-based violence giving an indication of an upsurge in violence against women. Undoubtedly, the criminalization of gender-based violence has made it possible for victims to report such acts rather than suffer in silence. It is also the case that in spite of the promulgation of the Intestate Succession Law, PNDC Law 111, the marital and inheritance rights of women remain undefined in relation to cultural rights and dependent on the goodwill of the family of the deceased spouse. More importantly, implementation of the laws is heavily dependent on a woman's ability to bring action, which in turn, is dependent on education and finances; major challenges of many women at the grassroots. As well, during each election year, whether national or

local, there is heightened campaign to increase women's political participation. Advocacy groups mount platforms and engage in all kinds of lobbying and canvassing in support of the election of women. However, progress remains dismal. Obviously, Ghanaian women are yet to overcome the myriad challenges to their effective social participation as systemic and structural forms of discrimination originating from cultural systems or so-called modern institutional arrangements continue to obstruct progress.

9. Engendering the strategic:

The discussions so far point to the fact that progress toward women's empowerment has been slow. Women remain subjugated in workplaces, educational institutions, families and communities (Ghana Statistical Service, 2000; Hesse, 2000; Nikoi, 1998). Hence, to suggest that practical need satisfaction should be suspended will be counter-productive as it forms a critical part of the move toward gender equity and social justice. What is being suggested is the blending of the practical and strategic agenda. This will require changes in the framing of practical and strategic needs.

The framing changes will entail first, the couching and pursuit of practical needs in a way that works toward the fulfilment of the strategic agenda. Practical needs should be couched in an agenda that has long-term ends in view. It should seek not just to meet the immediate needs but also that the satisfaction of these needs should pave way for reaching the higher end of securing gender equity and social justice. This will mean that programs seek actively to transform social interactions and relations in ways that engender the appreciation and valuing of women's roles and contributions. By so doing women can rightly assume their place as key players in family life and community development sharing in and actively participating and making decisions and as well, exercising their human rights.

It should be possible for credit schemes to be arranged in ways that do not intensify burdens but rather pave way for women to live more fulfilling life-styles, as such burdens are shared by all family members. Experience abounds in Ghana of how women's access to loans has been interpreted as an opportunity for them to carry the

reduce economic burden of the family. The loans that were meant to support women to engage in economically viable ventures were used as "chop money" and "loans" to spouses that were never paid back (CENSUDI, 1999; Dolphyne, 1991). In the end women were saddled with debt and the burden of redeeming their commitments to financiers.

Also, such schemes have resulted, in the past, in the pulling out of girls from school to support their mothers by peddling wares, nursing siblings or cooking for the family. Rather than providing support for they have resulted in the denial of female children the right to education. As well, although beneficiary women might be gainfully employed and earning incomes, an important weapon for male dominance, they still did not wield the power to overturn dominance and/or share equitably in the power structure of the family and household. If dominance were overturned, all family members, irrespective of their sex would share household chores and burdens. In that case the female child will not be pulled out of school and all children, including female children, as household chores will be shared by all. Perhaps all children will have the chance of attending good schools, as both parents will contribute their earnings to support them. As well, women will be seen participating actively in decision-making processes and exercising their political rights as relations will be built on mutual respect and support for the greater good.

A key component of the strategic agenda is that programs enhance women's inclusion and participation in the politics of the home, workplace and community. Women should become active partners in the decision-making process at all levels. That will entail pursuing basic needs in ways that enable women to access and participate in the decision-making process. Enhanced education and training, health and nutrition, employment and incomes as well as human rights are all critical tools for political leverage and participation.

Secondly, framing changes will mean the couching and pursuing of strategic interests as means and ends. To frame strategic interests as means and ends implies that there can not be a suspension of goals until the end. The goals stay in constant focus shaping and

defining the policies and programs. This will entail a viewing of strategic interests as an active part of the equity project right from the start. It takes on the quality of a process (ongoing) rather than a target (point in time) waiting to be achieved in the end. In that case, right from the preparation through to goal setting, project identification, activity implementation and impact assessment stage, there will be mechanisms at each step that have strategic intent. It should also make it possible for the dovetailing of programs such that the completion of one marks the beginning of the next. This is a more complicated agenda to take on but not impossible.

What is being suggested is that more time and efforts are devoted to planning and programming. It also requires greater and more effective collaborations among diverse groups. Stakeholders have to network to forestall unnecessary duplications, benefit from one another's good practices and promote continuity. Above all, a strong well thought out gender equity and social justice agenda should guide all undertakings. By so doing it will become possible to derive maximum benefits from programs and projects.

10 Benefits of strategic pursuits:

As succinctly captured in the CCIC(1991) explanation above, the pursuit of strategic interests has benefits not only to women but also men. Families, communities and nations will benefit as much as women from an effective pursuit of a strategic agenda.

The improvement of women's status in society will serve to enhance equitable access and utilization of community resources. This will mean the maximization of the utilization of abilities and capabilities with the potential of improving productivity and output. For instance, the women of Dagbon who are denied access to certain productive engagements and those in Kusasi and Nabdam communities who can access only marginal lands will have the opportunity of the full utilization of land and technology. With an enhanced access to these resources women can apply their knowledges and skills in ways that will heighten their creative productions resulting in improved quality and increased output.

Also, a pursuit of strategic interests that facilitates the appreciation and valuing of women's roles will mean addressing seriously women's challenges. These challenges limit women's social participation to further subjugation and maintain gender injustices. The feeling of injustice, whether perceived or real, breeds animosity and contempt as they instigate resistances and contestations. These resistances are often met with counter resistances and contestations as both parties struggle for control and dominance. The tensions and violent outbreaks resulting in the growing incidence of domestic violence, separation, and divorces point to the increased resistances of unequal gender relations in families and communities. The effect of such resistances and counter resistances is evident in the growing concerns regarding the breakdown of family and communal values and the upsurge in streetism that is manifested in the varied and sophisticated forms of crime and violence in Ghanaian society today. A better appreciation of women will contribute to the diminishing and eventual elimination of such forms and sources of conflict and violent reactions.

A related dimension is the vicious cycle of violence, which has been and continues to be detrimental to both victims and victimizers. Victims, namely women and children, are often trapped in a web of perpetual abuse and counter abuse, which gets passed down to future generations. While women might be experiencing the direct effects of victimization of various forms their children suffer similar agonies watching their mothers, sisters and aunties go through abuse. In some cases, children become targets for venting frustrations or dotting as victims seek revenge or solace elsewhere. Children in such relations grow up fully trained to be abusers and/or victims of abuse. The growing up process, which ought to be filled with love and goodness, is marred with the fears and pain of real and/or potential abuse. Childhood becomes a period of insecurity that is more likely to be carried to adulthood. This cycle of violence can be broken if the injustices and attendant insecurities that women suffer are eliminated. By so doing families can become true families and homes can become peaceful places for nurturing children in love and in peace.

When community development efforts work toward and actually result in the enhancement of the status of women they create conditions for the entire family to enjoy a good quality of life. With an enhanced status, women can participate more effectively in household decision making processes in ways that do not only validate the importance of their roles but also position them as part and valued members of families and communities. This will help boost women's confidence and serve to enhance their contributions. By so doing women's creative potential can be expressed and energies released and channelled into productive work to the greater benefit of the family, household and community. The strategic agenda is thus critical for changing the status of women. It must, however, be built on a practical goal thus rendering the two imperatives intricately connected.

11. The practical as means to the strategic

The discussions so far have sought to establish that change that caters to the practical needs of women only results in improving the conditions of women and not necessarily their status. This is elaborated in the above analyses that point to the continued subjugation of Ghanaian women in spite of the many initiatives that sought to address women's concerns. It has been acknowledged that such initiatives that tended to address women's access to basic needs, a practical imperative, were successful in enhancing their conditions. However, improvement was not significant enough to engender requisite change in the status, a strategic imperative, as Ghanaian women continue to live subjugated lives.

It was argued that Ghanaian women at the grassroots continue to face significant challenges even as they play complex and multiple roles in their families and communities. As a result, it was suggested that efforts have to be intensified to move reforms from a preoccupation with practical need satisfaction to include strategic concerns. It was demonstrated that the fulfilment of the strategic needs of women would bring greater benefit not only to women but also their families and communities.

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