

West Africa Trends

A newsletter published by ACET (The African Center for Economic Transformation)



The West African Woman:

Trends in Employment, Entrepreneurship, and Political Leadership

CONTENTS

Editorial	2
Women's Labor Participation: Trends and Prospects	3
Women and Entrepreneurship in West Africa	8
Women and Leadership	10

The purpose of this newsletter is to monitor trends across the West Africa region for policy makers, researchers and other decision makers in the international community.

Disclaimer: *The views expressed in this newsletter do not represent those of the Rockefeller Foundation.*

Introduction

Stemming from narrow beliefs that limit the role of women to the domestic sphere, women in West Africa have traditionally been marginalized in economic and political spheres. The consequence of this marginalization results in limited investment into viable areas of women's human potential outside of the home.

In recent years, there has been some progress within the region, highlighted by the election of the first female president in Africa. However, the exceptional success stories that exist may mask the much more common gender disparities in the region. Much more progress is needed before we can say that the futures of the region's women rest in their own hands, because in most West African societies, men still control the bulk of resources and decision-making power that affect the opportunities availed to women.

This issue explores the future of the West African woman from three perspectives. The first article looks at trends in women's labor participation. The second article examines women and entrepreneurship, and the third article looks at the trends in women's political leadership.

Editorial

The future of West Africa is intricately linked to the future of its women. The critical role that women play at the family and national level is evident. They nurture the future generation, and produce and market most of the food consumed in the region. Thus, women are at the center of the functioning of the most fundamental sectors of the economy. They are also increasingly playing an influential role in leadership and business.

Cultural attitudes largely influence what opportunities are available to women. They not only determine how much is invested in developing their human capital, but attitudes also influence in what areas of employment and entrepreneurship they are allowed to participate. For example, in agriculture, women produce close to 80% of food crops, however they tend to be confined to lower ends of the value chains, with their labor participation concentrated in traditional processing. In this situation, the returns to women are disproportionate to their input, as they have little power to influence how value for their economic activities is shared. And in the lucrative technology industry, where jobs are commonly labeled and perceived as masculine, women are confined to the sector's lowest paying service jobs.

These realities are neither healthy for the region's development, nor is it a good human rights practice. As World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim states, "the ideal of equality before the law and equality of economic opportunity isn't just wise social policy: it's smart economic policy. When women and men participate on an equal footing", he continues, "they can contribute their energies to building a more cohesive society and a more resilient economy." Kim further states that, "[t]he surest way to help enrich the lives of families, communities and economies is to allow every individual to live up to his or her fullest creative potential."

Supporting Kim's views, research has shown that companies and governments that diversify their procurement see improved savings and efficiencies by opening the process to female players. And companies that have greater diversity in management and leadership also see greater returns, allowing them to be more prosperous, create more jobs, and contribute to development and poverty alleviation.

While breaking the glass ceiling in the corporate world or moving to higher-end entrepreneurship are important goals, perhaps the most important achievement will be parity in politics as this is a critical lever in shaping the

future of West Africa's women. It is when appropriate legislation is instituted to equalize gender disparities that societies can start chipping away at some of the more entrenched social and cultural attitudes that militate against West African women's attainment of their potential.

However, as a result of prevailing attitudes, women often lack the resources, political experience, education, and political connections to run for office. Popular perceptions about women's roles lying outside of areas such as government persist among men and women alike. These are reflected in voting patterns, media coverage of female politicians, political apathy amongst women, and in overt attempts to suppress women's assertion of their political rights and views. As a result, female representation in parliament in the region hovers around 10%, well below the UN mandate goal of 30%, and far below the best performing countries in Africa that reach 40% and above. Yet the less women participate in the formal decision-making of their societies, the less likely it is that government decisions will work in favor of more gender equality. This underscores the need for affirmative action for women to gain entry in public office and hopefully start working on policies and laws that can initiate the needed changes.

The approach to gender parity must be multi-dimensional. Legislation alone won't do. It must be combined with efforts to shift general mindsets not only among men, but among women as well. Having internalized their own marginalization, women often fail to take full advantage of unconventional opportunities. For example, there is a program in Plateau State, Nigeria, to provide women with taxis, and thereby offer them entry into a new path of employment. However, gendered perceptions about the occupation may be the cause of low female turnout to take advantage of the program. In cases like this one, the need to push the boundaries of what is perceived as appropriate work for women is apparent.

More examples of women who break the mold in business, in the workforce, and in political leadership will be key to transforming mindsets, and therefore such role models should be more frequently showcased, and with equal attention across spheres. Entrepreneurship and leadership forums for women should be strengthened and supported. And success stories in technical and vocational careers, like that of "The Lady Mechanic" in Nigeria, should be lauded as well.

Women's Labor Participation: Trends and Prospects

Employment is probably the single most important deciding factor for poverty, therefore women's participation in labor markets has a huge bearing on the poverty or prosperity of the region. Women's access to jobs is essential to the fight against poverty and reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), not only for the direct contribution that gainfully employed women make to the household, but because having well-paid jobs empowers women to redirect spending beyond essential needs, notably in favor of children's health and education.

However, labor participation is highly influenced by social norms around expected roles for women and girls, especially the expectation of marriage and the traditional function of women in the marriage setting. This view of women's obligation as homemakers has played a significant role in shaping women's labor participation.

All the same, women's labor participation across Africa has grown modestly in the past decade (see Fig 1). This growth has however been very uneven and an aggregate figure hides the significant disparities in labor participation within the region. For example, participation in Ghana peaked at 80%, while in Nigeria the adult female labor force participation rate in 2010 was 40%, only 3% higher than in 1990. Such disparity underscores the long distance to parity in the region.

The challenge of labor participation is quite entrenched due to wide disparities in pay. A World Bank study found in Burkina Faso for example, the average ratio of female-to-male weekly labor was 23%—the lowest of the countries studied².

The traditional mindset has shaped what jobs are opened to women. As Fig 2 indicates, in Nigeria, women are over-represented in trade, industry and service professions,

while under-represented in oil, gas, and agriculture. This is a trend which is replicated across the region.

Drivers of Female Labor Force Participation

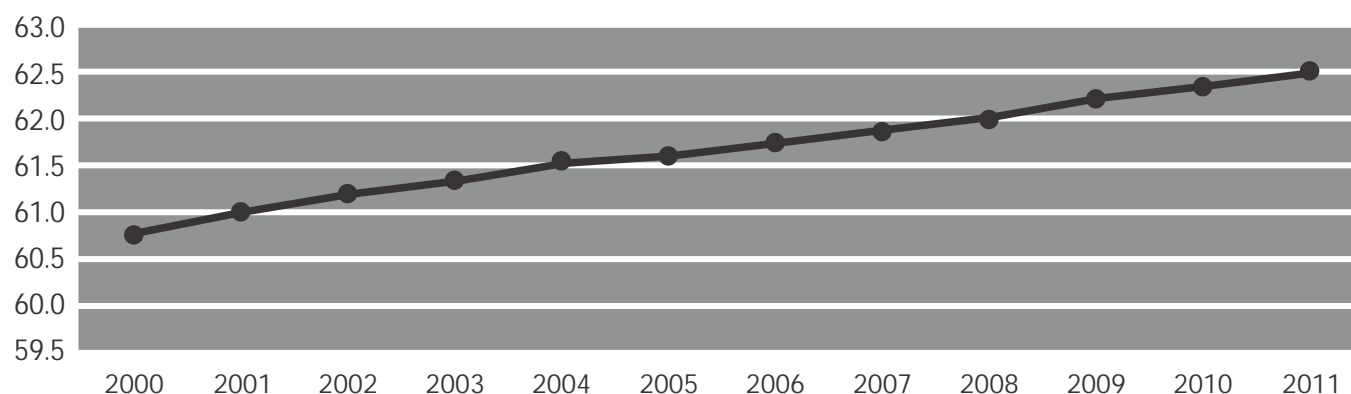
Generally, lower levels of educational attainment due to gender discrimination in provision of education means that girls are generally less prepared for the job market than boys. Other drivers compound this situation, such as:

Cultural and Modern Stereotypes

While cultural mindsets that see the woman's primary role as homemaker, modern stereotypes of the role of women in the workplace are increasing shaping their labor participation in the region. These stereotypes can be very pervasive, even infiltrating areas one would expect more equal treatment. A study in Nigeria identified some common stereotypes to include:

- The belief that women are more likely to quit a job in order to get married and have children. The result is that investment in their professional development is often regarded as wasteful or unprofitable.
- The belief that women lack the emotional stability required for some jobs and tasks, making them less likely to withstand stress. This shapes hiring and promotion practices, creating a glass ceiling for women that keeps them in low-level jobs.
- The belief that women are less committed and less productive than men, due to their domestic responsibilities as wives and mothers.
- Women are not amenable to discipline in organizations.

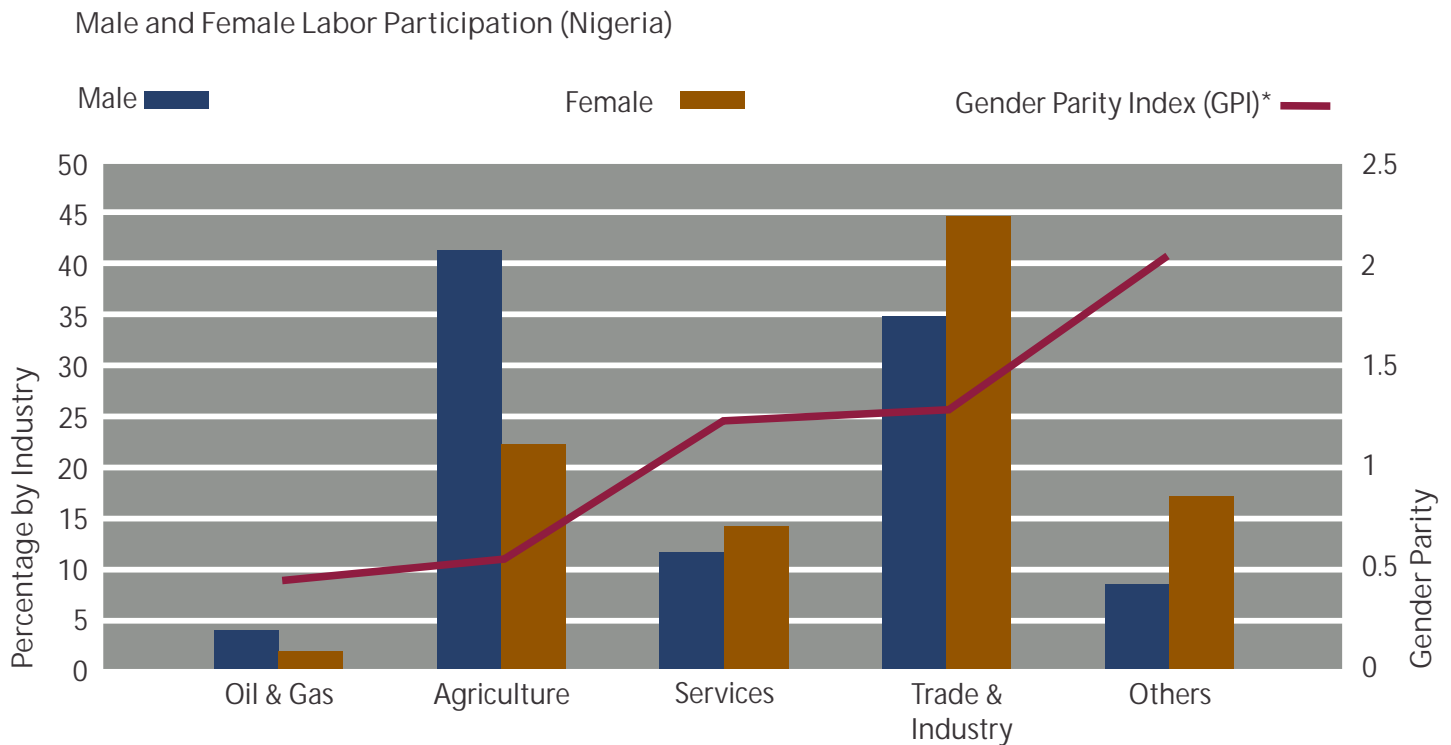
Fig 1: Labor Participation of Women (% of female population aged 15-64)



²A World Bank study found in Burkina Faso that, the ratio of average female-to-male weekly labor income ranged from 23 percent in Burkina Faso to 79 percent in Ghana.

Source: World Development Indicators

Fig 2: Economic Participation by Occupation and by Sex



Source: Federal Government of Nigeria

The old stereotype of women as sex objects persists in the region as well. The trend of using "sex appeal" as a strategy for selling services and merchandise is gaining traction. Women are sometimes pressured to dress in suggestive ways to "soften" male "targets", a practice that is used in banks for example, to lure high value customers to sign up for various banking products.

"Masculine Jobs"

The perception of what jobs women can and cannot do prevails at very high levels of policy making. For instance the participation of women in Ghana's emerging oil and gas sectors has been discouraged by one government minister on the grounds that the nature of the industry makes it difficult to hire women for many of the jobs, calling the work "masculine" because of the size of the required equipment, the noise of detonation, the rugged working terrain, and the necessity to wear safety boots and hats.

Gendered Education

How various subjects in schools are framed influences who takes what course and thus impacts the career paths of boys and girls. An overly masculine image of science is conveyed through the curriculum, where illustrations in math and science textbooks are almost entirely male related and work problems generally use male-oriented examples leading to significant under-enrollment in science and technology courses by women.

A study of the disparity between male and female student access to Science and Technology education in Nigeria found no differences in the job performance of women and men scientists and technologists, indicating that once women get into the profession they do just as well as their male counterparts. Education systems that have gendered

leanings towards certain topics are thus a significant barrier to women in some of these most lucrative professions.

Visibility

Role models are important in providing inspiration for women to take up certain jobs. In some professions where there are women working there, that fact is not communicated well. For instance in Nigeria female scientists have had very low visibility. Yet, visibility especially in non-traditional careers is key to inspiring young girls to new opportunities.

Legal Provisions

Cultural perceptions of the role of women are also reflected in legal provision. Married men get some tax benefits that are not extended to women on the assumption that there is a man in the house that enjoys the benefits. In many organization's women's medical benefits do not cover their spouses based on the assumption that the woman cannot be the breadwinner in the households.

Likewise, where there are strong legal provisions that promote women's participation in the labor market, e.g., mandates on maternity leave, they can circumscribe what work women can do. For example, Nigeria's Labor Act mandates that women not engage in night jobs, except if necessary, and legislates against women being employed in underground work of any mine.

Interventions

There are many innovative interventions with potential to increase women's labor participation, especially in the non-traditional science and technology sectors. Some of the more promising interventions include:

- The Gender Responsive Skills and Community Development Project (GRSCDP) is a regional campaign to promote enrolment of girls into courses that feed into male-dominated professional trades such as electrical installation, masonry, and carpentry. The four-year project is jointly sponsored by the African Development Bank (AfDB). About 65 scholarships have been made available for girls from extremely poor households to enable them to pursue technical skills training for three years.
- WAAW Foundation, in partnership with the Women Technology Empowerment Centre in Nigeria have a Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) camp to inspire girls to perform well in science and technology. This program is conceived as an exciting and technically challenging one-week residential camp for African girls in senior secondary school.
- In Liberia Google and iLab, a non-profit operating in the field of ICT, are running a "Girls in ICT" program, which provides training opportunities to young Liberian women. The program, funded by Google's RISE program, was one of four African awardees and one of thirty awards given worldwide. The program consists of several trainings - ranging from a two-day career workshop, to a week-long intensive internet and social media trainings and even one month long programming course. These trainings, which are free of charge, are meant for girls who would like to take first steps into a career in ICT, a bold move in a society that does not encourage young women's participation in IT.
- "The Lady Mechanic Initiative" is perhaps the most audacious project aiming to launch girls into the non-traditional career of motor vehicle mechanic. The program provides three years of free training and apprenticeships that lead to good jobs and a much brighter future for the vulnerable girls and women it recruits from the streets of Lagos. This initiative, started by a lady mechanic known as "Sandra," is now attracting women engineers across the world to volunteer, helping deepen the skills and increase the range of skills offered to include business management and negotiation.
- In Togo, the Centre d'Appui pour la Gestion et le Developpement CAGED program encourages young women to enter the welding, mechanical, cooling management, and other manual trades traditionally seen as masculine. In three years, 63 women have been trained to date. More than 30 are now

employed, and 4 women own their own company.

- In a similar effort, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) through its technical and vocational education and training (TVET) program is helping Sierra Leonean and Liberia women acquire technical and vocational skills (the program also runs in Burundi and Somalia). Of those who graduated in 2011, 133 found relevant employment while a further 58 went into internships. This program has been a strong catalyst in creating interest in vocational education among girls. In Sierra Leone alone, girls' enrolment in technical and vocational programs increased from 5% in 2009 to 65% in 2011.
- Women are also becoming more active as role models to inspire new career choices by girls. In Ghana, Women in Vodafone (WIV), an association of women working the Vodafone telecom company recently teamed up with the Leading Ladies



Girls in the WAAW Foundation Program, Nigeria

Network, a local NGO to offer career guidance and development to young girls from selected basic schools within the Greater Accra region. At the interactive sessions, the young girls were taken through a range of career choices in Marketing, Human Resource Management, Technology and Enterprise Development, and Management. They were also offered guidance on general topics such as self-esteem and discipline, and were advised on how to carve out a career in a male dominated society where socio-cultural attitudes and institutions will often try to push them towards careers that have low economic returns.

The Future

While these and other programs have sparked some successful interventions, there is still a lot of work to be done as the example of Plateau State of Nigeria demonstrates. In an effort to improve participation of women in non-traditional vocations, the government launched a program to distribute taxicabs to women, but few applied. There is thus need for research to get a better understanding of all the issues that women consider in making decision about labor participation so that appropriate support can be provided to enable them to seize new opportunities.

However, some answers are coming through. An evaluation of the Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women (EPAG) project in Liberia revealed that the program has succeeded in boosting employment and earnings among young women by its

innovative training strategies and strategic links with the private sector. The evaluation also suggests that a carefully



Google and iLab's "Girls in ICT" program providing training opportunities to young Liberian women

ALWAYS-TESCO-UNESCO Girl Literacy in Senegal

In Senegal, for every 60,000 girls who enter primary school in the region, only 4,500 make it to middle school, according to a study by Vaughn. Just 15 of those females graduate from university. This has huge implications on women's ability to participate in future labor markets.

However, an innovative program is promising to give thousands of young women in Senegal an opportunity to gain literacy. A partnership between leading feminine care brand *Always* and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), through an exclusive Tesco campaign is aiming to raise funds for 8 million lessons to teach girls and women basic skills such as reading and writing. Under this campaign, for any UNESCO marked-pack of *Always* pads or liners bought at Tesco, *Always* will donate 1 lesson towards empowering young women through literacy under their "1 Pack = 1 Lesson!" campaign. For a limited time, donations will also be made for each Facebook like that the campaign receives.

Source: <http://www.tescopl.com/index.asp?pageid=17&newsid=796>

References

- http://www.google.com.gh/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCgQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cssia.org%2Fpdf%2F20000061IncreasingFemaleParticipationinScienceandTechnologyCareers.pdf&ei=qIggUqeiA4LStQaZjYHQAg&usg=AFQjCNEhj5flQ0ncTfbclCteRUUjPPwYvg&sig2=jyym_g4sViXiRnUJJVGIrQ&bvm=bv.51495398,d.Yms
- <http://adsabs.harvard.edu/abs/2012IJART...1e..94C>
- <http://www.afterschoolafrica.com/3931/nwag-scholarship-for-nigerian-women-undergraduate/#sthash.pNkKvPXO.dpuf>
- <http://www.naijalately.com/news/women-foundation-camps-girls-for-science-education>
- <http://zunia.org/post/literacy-project-for-girls-and-women-in-senegal-goes-digital>
- <http://allafrica.com/stories/201306040783.html>
- <http://www.vso.org.uk/about/stories/lady-mechanic-initiative-nigeria>
- <http://www.nepad.org/crosscuttingissues/news/2751/rural-women-west-africa-get-boost-nepad-ecowas-spanish-fund>
- <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/07/212239.htm>
- <http://ghanaoilonline.org/2010/10/women-unsuited-for-work-in-oil-sector-asaga/>
- <http://www.spyghana.com/women-to-overtake-men-in-job-force-by-2020/>
- <http://www.ghananewsagency.org/social/isser-to-investigate-women-failure--60557>
- <http://www.vso.org.uk/about/stories/lady-mechanic-initiative-nigeria>
- <http://graphic.com.gh/General-News/volta-region-promotes-enrolment-of-girls-into-male-dominated-professions.html>
- <http://www.vso.org.uk/about/stories/lady-mechanic-initiative-nigeria>
- <http://www.businessghana.com/portal/news/index.php?op=getNews&id=187550>
- <http://allafrica.com/stories/201307150223.html>
- <https://www.jobsknowledge.org/JobsandDevelopmentBlog/Lists/Posts/Post.aspx?List=2865966b-969e-44d4-a556-19cf83c472ab&ID=158&Web=0883d59e-523e-4969-b84d-4e317deed77c>

Women and Entrepreneurship in West Africa

Entrepreneurship among women in the region is a fairly well established activity, with the ubiquitous market queens who have been very successful. Though most of the market women are moderate or petty traders, the more successful ones have been nicknamed “Mama Benz” in some countries like Cote d'Ivoire and Benin due to the fact that they drive Mercedes Benz limousines. Traditional market places have long seen strong participation of women in the agricultural value chain, stretching across production, distribution, and retail.

Women own up to one third of business in the region, however they have special challenges. Women entrepreneurs face issues in addition to the common economic and business environment issues that male entrepreneurs experience.

- A study of women entrepreneurs in Liberia found that women have weaker human capital and also lack networks resulting in weak understanding of market demand and thus limits their opportunities.
- Cultural norms around women's roles also mean that they are dominant in agricultural trading, which depends more on very poor road transportation.
- Women generally do not hold property tenure and thus lack collateral to secure credit. This scenario is further compounded by low education and their inability to write business plans. In Nigeria, recent research found that the ratio of male to female application and approval by microfinance banks is 65% to 35%.

These factors have meant that female-owned businesses in the region are mostly confined to lower-value sectors (traditional markets) and the low end of supply chains. As a result, women entrepreneurs tend to manage firms with less revenue, fewer employees, and slower growth.

The traditional markets, which women dominate, have been under attack from two fronts. First, cheap import goods have eroded the share of traditional markets, especially on the supply side where locally sourced goods like clothing and other wares have lost ground. And second, the rise of modern retailing avenues has also contributed to the diminishing importance of traditional markets. This trend is likely to accelerate in the wake of the ongoing supermarket and shopping mall revolution (see issue 6). Thus, the consolidation and modernization of markets, together with globalization are likely to have lasting negative impacts on women's businesses in the region.

Interventions

- There are a number of ongoing interventions to upgrade women's business and help them move to more lucrative sectors.
 - The Supporting Public Advocacy for Regional Competitiveness (SPARC) program aims at fostering increased African women's economic engagement in the labor force and in entrepreneurship. It is an initiative of Vital Voices, a US based non-governmental organization (NGO) that identifies and invests in female leaders around the world working to advance human rights, political participation, and economic empowerment. In Nigeria, Vital Voice is working WIMBIZ (Women in Management, Business and Public Service), to sensitize the general public and seek possible legislative change to deal with the issue of female representation in socio-economic decision making processes, especially in company boards.
 - The African Women's Entrepreneurship Program (AWEP) is helping strengthen women entrepreneurs' exports to US under the AGOA program. AWEP is running programs for business women with aims of:
 - Providing a forum for effective business growth strategy-sharing (i.e. scaling up)
 - Providing networking opportunities amongst AWEP participants and best practices sharing
 - Inspiring women toward greater AGOA utilization with first-hand testimonials and dialogue with women who have succeeded under AGOA
 - Facilitating action plan development to encourage the AWEP alumni to continue their efforts in business and in women's economic empowerment
 - Strengthening supply chain management skills
 - Fostering better understanding of AGOA and the diversity of the US market
 - The Business Incubator for African Women Entrepreneurs (BIAWE) is a NEPAD and ECOWAS project that aims to nurture the business ventures
 - of rural African women operating primarily in the area of agriculture. The BIAWE Project, will run for two years beginning July 2012 and will guarantee resources for rural women entrepreneurs to receive support from banks and financial institutions for loans, produce processing, and market access for the sale of their produce
- A innovative program by Sara Vaughn in Senegal, and run by school dropouts, is launching semi-

illiterate girls into entrepreneurship by exporting teas and handicrafts to the US and using returns from the venture to fund the girls' education. Women apprentice for \$10 a month, learning sewing, agriculture, baking, or batik printing. Recruits undergo business and leadership training. Their tablecloths, breadbaskets, dolls, and quilts are sold in festivals across the United States. The women send 49% of their profits back into Vaughn's private tutoring service, now a school of 3,838 girls with a name that highlights its aim to educate 10,000 Girls.

- UN Women in partnership with the National Gender Equality Institute in Cape Verde is piloting a project to improve rural women entrepreneurs. Under the program women potters have been trained in all phases of the craft from clay preparation to ways to diversify designs and make market-oriented products. They are also given the chance to meet experienced and successful ceramic producers from

whom they can learn about alternative techniques, different modern and traditional designs, and different ways of structuring the management of producer groups.

To date 20 grassroots women have been supported to improve Aloe Vera based products such as handmade soaps and shampoos, as well as their branding and marketing. A similar project is connecting women producers of traditional cheese and vegetables with the growing tourist market on the island of Boa Vista in Cape Verde

- In Ghana, more than 100 women who run market stalls in Accra and the Eastern, Central and Western regions have been given ICT training aimed to show them ways to use their mobile phones to improve their businesses. The training is an initiative of the National Communication Authority, the Kofi Annan ICT Centre, ESOKO, and Google Ghana.

References

<http://www.modernghana.com/news/365587/1/trade-minister-launches-ghanas-african-womens-entr.html>

<http://www.vitalvoices.org/node/1489>

<http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/education/101108/senegal-school-project>

<http://www.biztechafrika.com/article/ghana-market-women-get-ict-training/2858/>

<http://unwomenwestafrica.blog.com/2012/03/03/business-training-for-rural-women-in-cape-verde-to-increase-economic-opportunities/>

<http://www.newstimeafrica.com/archives/3193>



Liberian women celebrate Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

Women and Leadership

Introduction

African women have traditionally been part of the political process at the grassroots level where political support by female grassroots groups have been a major determinant of local elections. However, this influence has not often translated to much political power for women at the national level. Women have been underrepresented in key political decision making bodies, most notably the presidency, the cabinet, and parliament. This is important as it is at the national level where decisions on resources and their distribution are made.

Trends

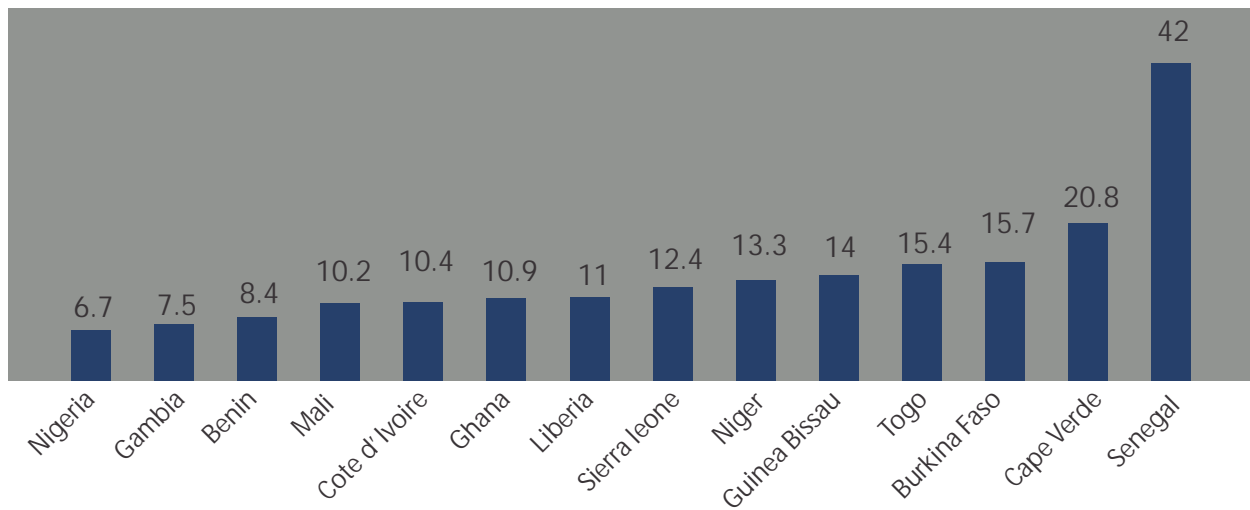
There has been some progress, and indeed the first female president in Africa, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, was elected in the region. The current prime minister of Senegal is also a woman, and Mali had a female prime minister between 2002-2012.

The number of female parliamentarians in Ghana has been increasing. However, a closer examination shows that progress has been slow. For instance, while in absolute numbers, the female MPS in Ghana increased by 53% between 2000 and 2012, in terms of proportion of male to female MPs, the rise was only marginal from 10% to 12%. Indeed female parliamentary representation in the region has hovered around 10% (7-15%) with the exception of Cape Verde and Senegal. This compares poorly against the top African country Rwanda that has 53.6% representation of women. The explanation behind many of the top performers in female legislative leadership is the use of affirmative action mandates that reserve a certain number of seats in a legislative body for female representatives. For example in the Rwandan Chamber of Deputies, 24 seats *must* be held by women. Affirmative action has been strongly advocated in the region in line with the commitments to

West Africa's Women in Power

- Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of Liberia, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate
- Fatou Bensouda, Chief Prosecutor at the International Criminal Court
- Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Finance Minister of Nigeria, failed in bid to head the World Bank
- Leymah Gbowee, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Liberia
- Georgina Wood- Chief Justice of Ghana

Fig 3: Percentage of Female Elected MPs in West Africa



Source: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/classif010913.htm>

the United Nations mandate for 30% women's representation in politics and decision making. However, no country has yet implemented it despite pledges. For instance, in Ghana, the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) promised in their 2012 Manifesto a commitment to attain 40% women's representation in all public appointments.

While women's voices in political leadership has been minimal, women have been very active in the leadership of civil society and have been very effective in using this vehicle to push for women's rights.

In Mali, female political leaders have worked to change property laws, marital laws, and the tax code to eliminate discrimination against women. In other countries, the focus has been on conducting workshops and using the media to educate women about their rights. Both the Ghana branch of the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) and the Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF) sought to educate people about the

1985 Intestate Succession and Property Laws that require all customary marriages and family property to be registered to facilitate a widow's acquisition of property should her spouse die. Under these laws, widows and children are entitled to three quarters of the immediate family's property.

Women's organizations are also becoming bolder in challenging other societal actors and institutions over issues that affect women's rights. For example, in Mali, women's rights organizations like COFEM and l'Association Pour le Progrès et la Défense des Droits de la Femme (APDDF) challenged senior Islamic leaders in the media on whether female circumcision was condoned by Islam.

Interventions

Women leaders are also beginning to consider ways to draw younger women into politics, especially where they have been left on the sidelines, since the majority of women who are mobilized still tend to be middle aged or elderly. Ghana's

Women In Political Reform In West Africa

Women in the region have been active in pressing for legislative and constitutional changes through participating in political reform movements and defying government oppression. In Mali, women were at the forefront and were shot at by the forces of president Moussa Traore. Similarly in Sierra Leone, women were the only group that defied the military and openly demonstrated for free elections when rumors circulated about the postponement of Sierra Leone's post conflict elections. In Guinea, women organized a sit-in in front of the presidential palace in support of the 1990 general strike of workers and student demonstrations, and to protest the economic crisis, which they blamed on the country's leadership. In Niger, several women protested the exclusion of women (1 to 68) representatives in the preparatory commission charged with organizing the 1991 National Conference.

WILDAF encourages women to stand for local government elections, work to repeal discriminatory legislation, and conduct human rights training and civic education seminars for women.

An area where women leadership has been sorely missed is on peace negotiations, where participation has remained below 10% (and less than 3% as signatories to peace treaties). The UN is addressing this through a number of initiatives including training programs and dialogues to increase the region's commitment to women leadership in peace and security. This is also being supplemented by the Women Peace and Security Network Africa (WIPSEN-Africa) a Pan-African Non-Governmental Organization with the core mandate to promote women's strategic participation and leadership in peace and security governance in Africa. WIPSEN has been instrumental in training security agencies on gender mainstreaming and increasing female involvement in security agencies in the Mano river countries.

Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) is an international solidarity network that provides information, support, and a collective space for women whose lives are shaped, conditioned, or governed by laws and customs said to derive from Islam. WLUML is helping women in the region to develop leadership skills that address unique challenge that face women living in the region's Muslim countries. WLUML's current focus includes peace-building, resisting the impact of militarization, preserving multiple identities, exposing fundamentalisms, widening debate about women's bodily autonomy, and promoting and protecting women's equality by law.

The Future

There have been gains in women in leadership albeit small ones. Most progress has been seen in civil society where women's leadership roles have blossomed most. However, despite inspired efforts by women's organizations in many countries, women have yet to see significant payoffs in terms of elected officials and political appointments.

Women often lack the resources, political experience, education, and political connections to run for office. Affirmative action is needed to give them a firm foothold on which to build. The good news is that women's issues are now at the top of many of the region's national agendas, and it is likely that affirmative action that has been seen in other parts of Africa will spread in West Africa.

However, affirmative action will not be enough. Prohibitive cultural attitudes against women's involvement persist among both men and women. These are reflected in voting patterns, media coverage of female politicians, political apathy amongst women, and even in blatant attempts to suppress women's assertion of their political rights and views. These popular perceptions which often suggest that women's "proper" place is still in the home rather than in politics need to be dispelled before female leadership can be fully embraced and effective.

Changing mindsets will be a much bigger battle than getting affirmative action in place. This is where greater effort is needed.

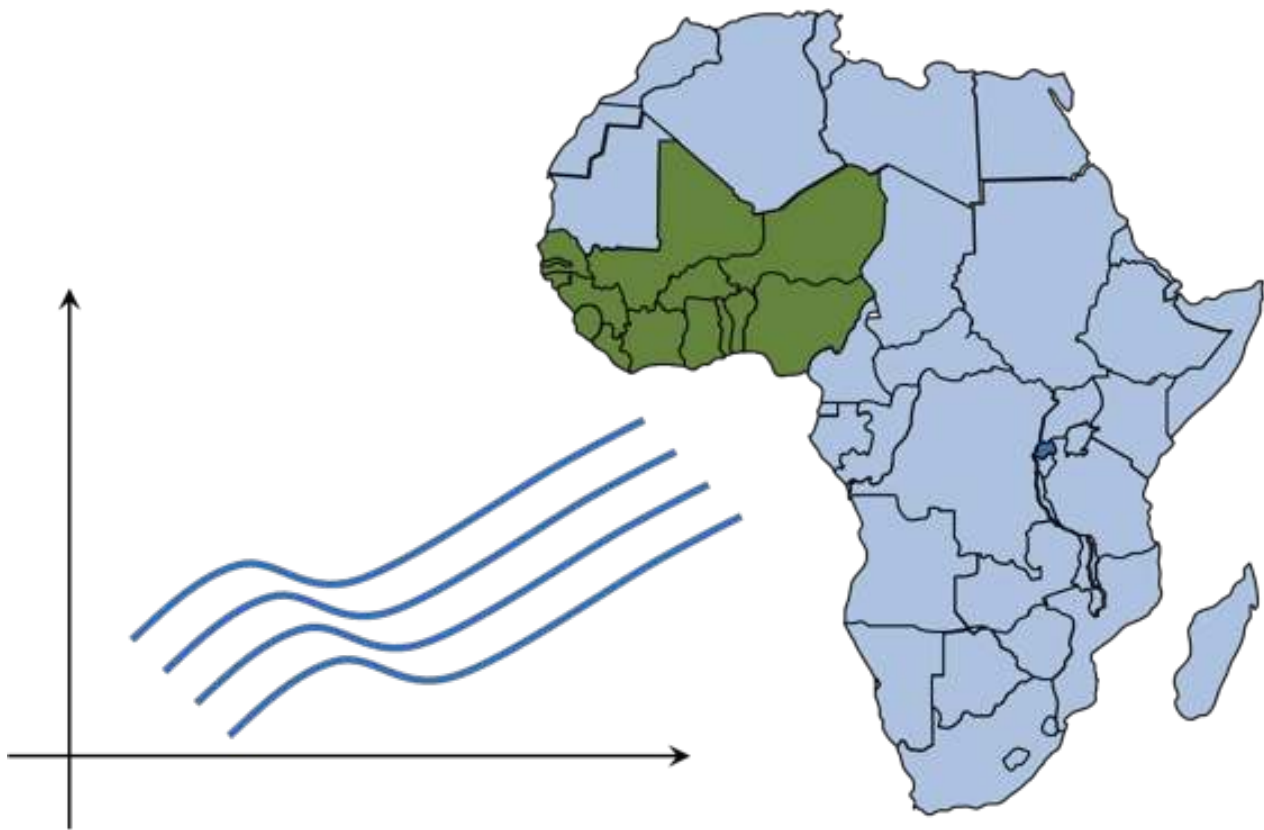
Women and Traditional Leadership

The West Africa region is unique in that it has two parallel leadership structures—the modern political arrangement, and the traditional chieftaincies/kingdoms. While much of political power has been ceded to the modern state, the traditional power structure still wields significant power especially on matters of land. These systems have traditionally excluded women from decision making structures and have served to perpetuate some of the discriminatory practices against women.

In Ghana, the constitution gave authority to the National House of Chiefs to codify customary laws, which often governed women's lives. However, there are now calls for greater inclusion of women in chieftaincy issues. Some have asked for women to be elected into the house of chiefs to participate in decision making. There are also efforts being made to organize a National Council of Women Traditional Leaders to help address the grievances of women in the country.

References:

- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-19700781>
<http://thinkafricapress.com/gender/experts-weekly-africas-leading-women>
<http://www.msafropolitan.com/2013/07/women-political-leadership-africa.html>
<http://www.wildaf.org/index.php/news-and-events/308-petition-appoint-40-women-as-dces-and-ambassadors>
<http://pathwaysghana.blogspot.com/2008/02/womens-participation-in-politics-in.html>
http://www.makeeverywomancount.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2745&Itemid=170
<http://africanarguments.org/2013/03/08/women-as-leaders-power-participation-and-progress-in-the-21st-century-by-dele-meiji-fatunla/>
<http://www.catholicethics.com/forum-submissions/african-women-and-political-participation-a-worrying-trend>
<http://www.royalafricansociety.org/event/women-leaders-africa-participation-power-progress>
<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/democraticgovernance/successstories/nigeria--a-boost-for-women-s-participation-in-politics/>
<http://www.royalafricansociety.org/event/women-leaders-africa-participation-power-progress#sthash.4IAnCTdu.dpuf>
http://gbcghana.com/new_site/index.php?id=1.1064442
<http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2012/11/west-african-women-urge-greater-leadership-and-participation-in-peace-and-security-during-a-regional/>
<http://www.wipsen-africa.org/wipsen/publications/reports/>
<http://www.afriwlo.org/index.php/awlc-2013>
<http://edition.myjoyonline.com/pages/news/201307/109020.php>
<http://www.moremiinitiative.org/milead-fellows>
<http://wacsi.org/en/site/newsroom/1969/Call-for-Applications-Ghanaian-Women%27s-Social-Leadership-Program-Ghana-Women-Leadership.htm>
<http://www.enca.com/africa/woman-mp-run-mali-president>
<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/04/04/ozatp-mali-government-idAFJOE7330GI20110404>
<http://www.askanisenegambia.com/3/994/senegal-hails-new-prime-minister-known-for-football-and-feminism>
<http://www.voanews.com/content/africas-female-presidents-say-they-offer-different-kind-leadership/1206098.html>
<http://unwomenwestafrica.blog.com/2013/04/11/women%E2%80%99s-leadership-gaining-momentum-in-sierra-leone/>
<http://www.wluml.org/media/wluml-transformational-feminist-leadership-west-africa-workshop>
<http://reliefweb.int/report/mali/communique-regional-dialogue-enhancing-women%E2%80%99s-leadership-peace-and-security-west-africa>



West Africa Trends Team

West Africa Trends Team

Editorial Dr. Julius Gatune Kariuki (Coordinator)
 Mr. Ouborr Kutando
 Mrs. Erinn Ransom-Ofori
 Koku Dotse, Esq.

Editorial Advisor Dr. Ed Brown

Research Mr. Francis Kobbina Appiah Abebrese

Interns Ms. Constance Ando (Francophone)
 Ms. Abigail Anani (Anglophone)

