

Gender Mainstreaming the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy or is it?

By Agnes Afia Apusigah

Introduction

Since independence, efforts at national and community development have been aimed at reducing poverty and promoting growth (Ghana Government, 1995; Nikoi, 1998). In recent times, questions of equity and women's empowerment have engaged development planners and policy makers with the increasing realisation that blanket policies do not necessarily achieve blanket results. Activism and advocacy, championed by women's organising locally and supported by global

initiatives, have helped put gender concerns in development on a high pedestal, although the impact is still in question. More and more women are becoming the victims rather than beneficiaries of development and poverty reduction plans. The intensification of poverty among vulnerable groups hits women the most as shoddy attempts at poverty reduction yield gendered results. It is in view of this situation, often referred to as the feminisation of poverty, that calls have been made for the mainstreaming of gender in Ghana's poverty reduction efforts (Derbyshire, 1999; Ofei-Aboagye, 1999).

This examination of efforts in Ghana to reduce poverty and promote growth since the 1990s seeks to unveil the attempts at mainstreaming gender issues in the processes. The analysis is focused on the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS)—on the ways that it positions or not, and responds to or not, gender concerns in national development planning.

Gender and Poverty in Ghana

It is almost impossible to initiate development in Ghana or elsewhere in the Third World without factoring in gender concerns. For, more and more, the gendered impact of programmes and projects that purport to enhance livelihoods and well-being at the individual, household, community and national levels are evident (Ghana Government 1995, 2003; Nikoi, 1998). The increasing realisation of the differing effects, often negative, of gender-blind planning has sparked off moves to evoke differential treatment in planning for growth and development.

Growth and poverty 1990s: At the beginning of the 1990s, Ghana was faced with the mixed reality of boom and doom (Apusigah, 2002). It was a period of relative success as the near decade-old economic recovery and structural adjustment programming had yielded significant improvement in the economic sector. The rapidly economic decline of the late 1970s



Isis Photobank

through the early 1980s was halted, and gains were made in the area of gross domestic product growth rates, inflation rate reduction and export trade enhancement. Celebrating this so-called success, the government reported in 1995 that:

The economic recovery program (ERP), inaugurated in 1983, succeeded in reversing the previous decline in the economy. Since then, GDP has grown at an average rate of nearly 5 percent per annum (pa)... Inflation rose to 123 percent in 1983 but was gradually reduced to 10 percent in 1992 (Ghana Government, p.v).

In addition to these growth indicators was the marked improvement in infrastructure development. The rehabilitation of major road networks, key industries and social services such as schools and hospitals meant improved access to such services. Yet, these developments were with costs.

Both economic and social costs were obvious. Indeed, some Ghanaian social critics and gender activists refer to the so-called economic boom as a doom in social justice (Apusigah, 2002; Nikoi, 1998). Such criticisms stemmed from the grave social inequalities that characterised the program of adjustment. The cost sharing, downsizing and cutbacks that marked the neoliberal efficiency model of adjustment resulted in the devaluation, and to some extent, total neglect, of social concerns.

Writing on the contradiction of Ghana's planned development in the 1980s, Dei (1993) points out:

In its eighth year of SAPs, Ghana has been presented as a showcase for the "success" of World Bank/IMF policies in Africa because of the gains in GDP.... Despite the optimistic view of some World Bank economists, SAP has meant a high cost of living for many ordinary Ghanaians. Prices of basic necessities of food, health, clothing, transportation, and fuel have soared considerably beyond the reach of many citizens, and urban wages and household farm incomes have not kept pace with the rate of inflation. Cuts in government spending on social services have hit the rural population, particularly women. (p. 45)

Indeed, the social cost of adjustment, especially for vulnerable groups such as the rural poor, women, and working class, was tremendous. During the 1993

Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Lectures, Nikoi asked:

To what are we adjusting? To what system are we adjusting? ... This system which has patently failed to meet the expectation, the aspiration and basic human needs of the majority of post-independence Africans is what we are being asked to adjust to. Can we? Must we? (Gender and Development, 1998, pp. 60 - 62)

The frustration that underlies Nikoi's questioning was common to many ordinary Ghanaians. The worsening poverty and marked equity gaps amid promises of better living could only be described as the "doublespeak" of planned development. The promise of progress in the form of enhanced wellbeing became an illusion as ordinary Ghanaians became more and more disenfranchised. The weakened purchasing power resulting from low and/or lost incomes through job retrenchment, accompanied by the removal of subsidies and upward adjustment of costs of essential social services such as water, food and shelter, served only to increased these groups' vulnerability. Such powerlessness was to yield voicelessness.

Indeed, social critics such as Nikoi (1998) and Tsikata (2000), and the resistance by the masses of the Ghanaian working class compelled the government to address the social issues toward the close of the 1980s.

The gender question: It can not be denied that Ghanaian politicians and policy makers have no or low knowledge of gender questions in development planning, and any such knowledge has been poorly applied, or misapplied. The argument of low knowledge comes from the lack sensitivity to change the status of women in society exhibited by policy and programming initiatives for development, whether at the local or national levels. Projects such as the programme of action to Mitigate the Social Costs of Adjustments, Ghana Vision 2020 and even the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy guarantee the promotion gender causes, but only on paper.

While official policy, at least since the 1990s, continues to acknowledge the need to address the problem of grave gender imbalances in the distribution of the benefits of development, this has not translated into practical actions toward the reduction and eventual elimination of the imbalances. Grave gender gaps

persist in the participation, retention and achievement in education, as well as in terms of access to health and nutrition, employment and income, decision-making and political participation, micro-credit and capital, and technological and entrepreneurial skills, to mention a few.

Effective gender mainstreaming also requires that gender be treated as a crosscutting issue throughout a project or program cycle. From the start—policy, to the end—monitoring and evaluation, gender analysis tools have to be applied for effects and implications. All decisions at each step of the way and across the board will then be influenced by such a gender analysis.

The deprivations that women suffer, at the household, communal and national levels, continue to relegate them to the background even in an era of purported gender-aware planning. Such relegation has only served to intensify women's poverty. The continued erosion of social security and welfare programs as a result of stringent macro-economic policies that prioritize economic efficiency with little regard for social justice has served only to deny women their rights to the basic necessities.

These programs supposedly aim to maximize women's productive capacity and creative genius through initiatives designed to integrate women in development, but little is being done to ensure equity benefits from the returns of development. The result is the continued victimization of women due to their lacking ca-

pacities or failure to access the benefits of modernity and progress. As such, efforts at poverty reduction continue to target women for change, rather than the change process.

Strategising to Reduce Gendered Poverty

The criticisms that characterised the stringent economic reforms in Ghana during the 1980s were to compel policy makers to rethink the development project.

Programming for poverty reduction: The move to humanise development programming in Ghana and foster social equity dates back to the Program of Action to Mitigate the Social Cost of Adjustment (PAMSCAD) and the Ghana Vision 2020. PAMSCAD was an immediate response, and a "quick fix," at that, to pressing social concerns. Ghana Vision 2020 contained long-term and graduated projections to address such concerns.

PAMSCAD saw women, rural poor and displaced workers as the worst victims for their failure to benefit from skills training and material support as a way of cushioning vulnerability. The US\$85 million fund that was established in 1988 was meant to benefit the "poorest individuals, small scale miners and artisans in particular, and communities were to be helped to implement labour-intensive self-help projects." (Ghana Government, 1994, p.2)

Women were targeted to benefit from micro-credit and skills training. A component of PAMSCAD was the Enhancing Opportunities for Women in Development (ENOWID) project. ENOWID consisted of allocation of small business credits and loans to women in only three of Ghana's 10 regions loans.

Laudable as the PAMSCAD was, its stress on job creation, above all else, was indicative of its neo-liberal roots and emphasis on efficiency. Ignoring the deficiencies of the reforms in the ways that they contributed to the heightening of vulnerability and intensification of exclusion, the plan found an "easy way out" through compensatory programs that provided a quick fix, not sustained relief.

By the middle of the 1990s, the ruling government initiated yet another process of change with poverty-reduction goals. The resulting Ghana Vision 2020

emphasised, in addition to economic growth, some aspects of social concern. Human and civil rights were made part of official development policy as pressures for democratic governance and social equity mounted.

With specific reference to gender, for the first time, the development plan devoted a section on women as part of the human development agenda. This agenda was aimed at “improving the quality of life and expansion of opportunities for productive employment, leisure activities and exercise of civic rights for all members of the society” (Ghana Government 1997, p. 20). Programming options included poverty and population, women and development; health, nutrition, education and training, water and sanitation, and income and employment.

The Women and Development component of Ghana 2020 sought to “strengthen the foundations for the establishment of a social environment that is void of gender bias and accords full recognition to women as equal societal and productive assets” (Ghana Government 1995, p. 48). The three key areas targeted were health and nutrition, productive resources, and educational enrolment and achievement. Yet by the end of the 1990s, the plight of women had not changed in any significant way.

Some progress had been made in improving the conditions of women. Improved access to micro-credit, targeted maternal and child health programmes and the female education drive led to enhanced access to capital, health and education. However, at the basic level where these programmes were run, the neglect of the broader questions regarding the status of women in society continued. The result was the continued feminisation of poverty. By the close of the 1990s, fresh attempts were made to address the question of poverty more seriously.

The Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy: The Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) purportedly represents “comprehensive policies, strategies, programmes, and projects to support growth and poverty reduction over a three-year period (2003-2005)” (GPRS 2003, p. i). This new package, shaped by learning from years of failed attempts at poverty reduction, mounting pressure from social/gender activists and increased awareness of the need to temper economic growth with social welfare, rightly and deservedly

seeks growth with poverty reduction at the centre, even if nominally.

Acknowledging that “over the past ten years, Ghana has experienced growing and deepening poverty, an evidence of intensification of vulnerability and exclusion among some groups and in some areas” (GPRS 2000, p. ii), the GPRS seeks to reverse the situation. It aims “to create wealth by transforming the nature of the economy to achieve growth, accelerated poverty reduction and the protection of the vulnerable and excluded within a decentralised, democratic environment”(GPRS 2000, p. ii).

This laudable goal is to be achieved through:

- Ensuring sound economic management for accelerated growth;
- Increasing production and promoting sustainable livelihoods;
- Direct support for human development and the provisions of basic services;
- Providing special programs in support of the vulnerable and excluded;
- Ensuring good governance and increased capacity of the public sector; and
- The active involvement of the private sector as the main engine of growth and partner in nation building. (GPRS 2003, p. i)

While the goal and focus of the GPRS is laudable, the challenge remains in the ways that the entire strategy document balances economic growth and social welfare. Indeed, the policy goals emphasise, strongly, both welfare and economic concerns. However, as with efforts and more so, their accompanying SAPs, the failure to mainstream welfare concerns in every day business raises questions. For gender activists and analysts, the realities on the ground as the programme reaches mid-term raises questions regarding commitment to gender issues.

In a recent sensitisation workshop for female teachers in the Upper East Region of Ghana, one woman’s response to the question “What does poverty mean to you as a woman?” was:

Poverty means woman. The face of poverty is woman. The woman is the one who is still struggling. She can’t have equality in education, in capital and in decision-making. When you want to see poverty, you have to see a woman.

The immediate reaction of her colleagues was laughter and awe. However, when the group began dissecting the comments, affirmation rather than doubt, followed. Sharing their individual and their communities' stories, the other women engaged in analysis that made evident the persistent exclusion of women from the mainstream of development at the community and national levels. The analysis surfaced factors including cultural inhibitions, denied opportunities, restricted inclusions, un-enforced legislation and under-resourced networks. In short, the women did not think that their efforts were receiving the required support in terms of time, resources and leadership.

During the interaction, it became clear that the gender dimension of poverty remains a major issue even in an era of seeming political goodwill and committed leadership in fostering gender causes.

Mainstreaming the GPRS

The suggestion to mainstream gender issues in policy and programming for development is not new to Ghanaians. Women's organizing at the local level and networking at the international level has resulted in increased awareness of the need to include gender concerns in development planning. Women's causes have ostensibly been supported at the national level through the ratification of various conventions on gender equality. An example is the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) ratified in 1982. Since the establishment of the National Council on Women and Development (NCWD), the national machinery for promoting gen-

Effective gender mainstreaming will also mean moving beyond lip service—that is, policy statements and formulations—to include commitment to the development of strategic plans that promote organizational change.

der equality, various programs and projects have been initiated to empower women in ways that support poverty reduction. Under PAMSCAD, the ENOWID was implemented as part of empowering women for greater participation in development.

After the Beijing Conference, the concept of gender mainstreaming was popularized in women's empowerment initiatives throughout Ghana. Various ministries, departments and agencies were charged with working to mainstream gender in policy and practice. As a demonstration of its commitment, the government issued a White Paper on Affirmative Action in 1998 (Aboagy-Offei, 1999).

Progress in mainstreaming gender: The progress in gender mainstreaming in Ghana has been captured in two reports: *Report on Gender Mainstreaming in Ghana* and *Integrating Gender into National Poverty Reduction Strategies*.

The *Report on Gender Mainstreaming in Ghana* was a product of a national workshop that brought together consultants, development workers, government agencies and non-governmental organizations to evaluate progress in mainstreaming gender in Ghana. At that workshop, held in 1999, the Ghanaian Government reaffirmed its commitment to mainstream gender in policy and practices. The presentations of the ministries, departments and agencies revealed that structures with oversight responsibilities of pursuing, coordination and implementing gender causes had been created within the administrative system and in civil and public institutions. Gender Desk Offices or Units were established and officers were appointed to coordinate and work toward the realization of the mainstreaming agenda.

At the level of policy, while waiting for the NCWD to complete the National Gender Policy and Strategies, the various agencies such as the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education completed and began implementing their sector-specific gender policies and strategies with significant success. These three agencies, which serve key targeted areas for Ghana's poverty reduction effort, had overtaken the national machinery in furthering the gender mainstreaming agenda at the policy level.

At the level of practice, workplaces and public institutions were also targeted for gender equality. The Trades Union Congress (TUC), the NCWD and Women in Public Life (WIPL) presented their achievements and challenges in mainstreaming gender. Apparently, majority of Ghanaian women in formal-sector jobs remain in the lower echelons of their organisations; only a few were in any decision-making capacity.

With regard to service delivery, presentations focused on gender mainstreaming in credit delivery, water and sanitation, education and training, and local government. NGOs, District Assemblies and government agencies reported the implementation of policies and programmes that targeted women and incorporated gender considerations with considerable success in meeting the needs of grassroots women.

On the whole, the workshop revealed political will toward fostering gender mainstreaming in Ghana. It also became clear, however, that despite similarities in strategies and processes, inconsistencies remain in policy areas and focus due to differences in one institution's understanding of gender and gender mainstreaming from another's. The workshop also confirmed that gender gaps remained wide in all service areas including education, health and credit delivery.

Consequently, three recommendations dealing with the reshaping of legislation and developing of policy, changes in organisational culture, and the promotion of rights and services were articulated.

Although its examination of policy and process issues was good, the *Report of Gender Mainstreaming in Ghana* did little with regard to contextual issues. Questions regarding the development framework, commitment beyond policy in terms of resource allocation and the monitoring and evaluation of programmes from a gender perspective were not given attention.

The second report, *Integrating Gender into National Poverty Reduction Strategies* by Birte Rodenberg, issued in 2001, focuses on the poverty reduction strategy. It, however, gives context to discussions by examining historical and contextual questions, including the structural adjustment experience.

While commending the final GPRS document for its improved coverage of women's issues and women's

involvement, Rodenberg (2001) is critical of the lack of a gender mainstreaming content. She noted:

It is too early, however, to speak of the establishment of a gender mainstreaming approach, as this is still at the targeting stage. Women continue to be involved primarily as the recipients/beneficiaries of development measures, and not as actors. The concepts of empowerment and "the voice of the poor," which point towards a pro-active role in shaping policies within social processes, are of subordinate importance in the GPRS. The empowerment of women goes no further than their participation at the local level. (p. vi).

Rodenberg traces this, and rightly so, to the deficit approach to gender planning and the lumping of women's concerns under issues of vulnerability and exclusion. Such categorisation fails to acknowledge women's important roles in community and national development—in removing barriers and strengthening achievements.

The gross minimalisation of women's roles and lack of integration of gender concerns in critical aspects of the GPRS leads Rodenberg to recommend that "[t]he mainstreaming of gender and gender projects at a higher level of political dialogue and development-policy programme activities ('scaling-up') is urgently required" (p. vii).

Indeed, in gender mainstreaming, micro- or sector-specific work is as important as the macro-level planning and budgeting. More work is required not only in policy formulation but also in implementation and evaluation. As well, targeted programming is as important as integrated programming.

More effective mainstreaming: Effective gender mainstreaming requires effective integration. While the concept of integration is not new in gender and development work in Ghana, it needs to be reconfigured. Past gender equity initiatives have applied the concept to programmes and projects seeking to integrate women in development processes. An appropriately reconfigured use of integration will require the integration of gender issues in development. In this case, the issue is the consideration of the effect and implications of programmes and projects on women and men. As well, it is women's concerns, not themselves, that would be at the centre of the development process.

Effective gender mainstreaming also requires that gender be treated as a crosscutting issue throughout a project or programme cycle. From the start—policy, to the end—monitoring and evaluation, gender analysis tools have to be applied for effects and implications. All decisions at each step of the way and across the board will then be influenced by such a gender analysis. Gender analysis will be central to discussions on geographical location, ethnic background, social status and occupational background. In doing so, gender questions are addressed at each stage.

Effective gender mainstreaming also requires that accountability be made part and parcel of the entire process. Accountability will focus on policy, politics, resource, time and personnel allocation. Accounting in these areas will include ensuring that all decisions are cognizant of both male and female concerns, while compensating for histories of discrimination.

Effective gender mainstreaming will also mean moving beyond lip service—that is, policy statements and formulations—to include commitment to the development of strategic plans that promote organisational change. Such a commitment will entail the creation of an organisational culture that rewards gender-sensitive efforts and penalises insensitivity. Gender-based discrimination and all forms of gender violence and biases, including the systemic, will be targeted for elimination.

Above all, effective gender mainstreaming should move beyond the creation of structures or institutions to include the transformation of existing structures that place gender issues at the core of everyday business, instead of throwing in a few words or lines on women from time to time, or setting aside a section on women, as does the current GPRS. Efforts should be extended to making gender discussions key to every business of the mainstream, in the boardroom, factory and tennis court.

Conclusion

Inarguably, the Ghanaian effort at gender mainstreaming for poverty reduction has made progress in terms of policy and political will. Policy formulation efforts and review initiatives at the sector and national levels point to a desire to make gender issues part of the mainstream. Also, commitments in

the form of issuing a white paper on affirmative action and the creation of structures demonstrate a strong political will to bring about change. However, the inability to move beyond these levels poses a serious challenge to the gender mainstreaming agenda.

More is required to institutionalize the gender mainstreaming agenda. To this end, efforts have to be directed at the integration of gender issues, pursuit of gender as a crosscutting issue, engendering accountability at all level, fostering organisational change, and transforming the mainstream. ♪

References

- Aboagye-Offei, E. (1999). Approaches to integrating gender in a national policy. In Akpalu, E. & E. Aboagye-Offei (compilers). *Report on Gender Mainstreaming in Ghana*. Unpublished Report.
- Akpalu, E. and E. Aboagye-Offei (compilers). *Report on Gender Mainstreaming in Ghana*. Unpublished Workshop Report.
- Apusigah, A. A. (2002). *Reconsidering women, development and education in Ghana: Toward critical transformations*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation submitted to Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada.
- Dei, G.J.S. (1993). Learning in the time of structural adjustment policies: The Ghanaian Experience. *Canadian and International Education*, 22(1), 43-65.
- Derbyshire, H. (1999). Clarifying the concepts of gender and mainstreaming. Akpalu, E. & E. Aboagye-Offei (compilers). *Report on Gender Mainstreaming in Ghana*. Unpublished Report.
- Ghana Government (19 February 2003). *Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (2003-2005): An Agenda for Growth and Prosperity*. Vol. 1: Analysis and Policy Statement. Accra, Ghana: National Development Planning Commission.
- Ghana Government (1995). *Ghana Vision 2020 (The First Step: 1996 - 2000)- Presidential Report to Parliament on Coordinated program of Economic and Social Development Policies*. Accra, Ghana: Government of Ghana.
- Nikoi, G. (1998). *Gender and Development*. (1993 Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Lectures). Accra; Ghana: Buck Press.
- Rodenberg, B. (2001). *Integrating Gender into National Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSPs): The Example of Ghana*. (Expert Appraisal Reports). Bonn, German Development Institute.

Dr. Agnes Apusigah <apusigah59@yahoo.com> is a lecturer, Consultant and Gender Advocate. She is taking her Doctoral Degree in Cultural Studies, Queen's University at Kingston, Canada. She assumed work as lecturer in the Department of African and General Studies, University for Development Studies, Ghana in 2002.