



PATHWAYS WEST AFRICA SYNTHESIS REPORT 2006–2011



pathways
of women's
empowerment



Pathways West Africa Synthesis Report 2006–2011

September 2011

Pathways West Africa is led by the Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy (CEGENSA) at the University of Ghana with partners in Sierra Leone and Nigeria. It is part of the Pathways of Women's Empowerment Research Programme Consortium (Pathways RPC).

CEGENSA at the University of Ghana is Ghana's leading research institute on women's rights and empowerment, and part of extensive regional and international civil society and policy networks, including CODESRIA and ABANTU. Members have distinguished track records on African sexualities, violence against women, land rights, masculinities, race and ethnicity, sex work, gender and economic reforms, and multidisciplinary expertise in gender, poverty and participatory analysis.

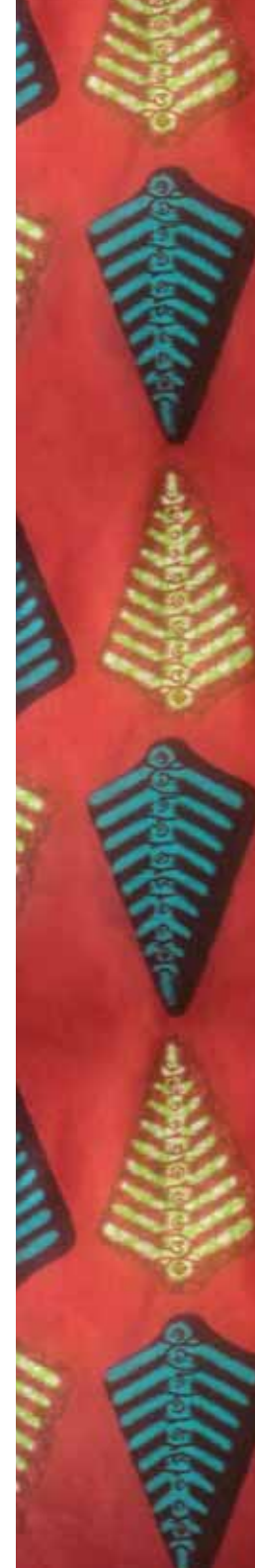
Pathways RPC is an international research and communications programme made up of activists and academics that explores and seeks to affect positive change in women's everyday lives. It is collectively run by six partners: BRAC Development Institute at BRAC University; the Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy (CEGENSA), Ghana; Institute of Development Studies (IDS), UK; the Nucleus for Interdisciplinary Women's Studies (NEIM) at the Federal University of Bahia, Brazil; the Social Research Centre (SRC) at the American University in Cairo; and UNIFEM.

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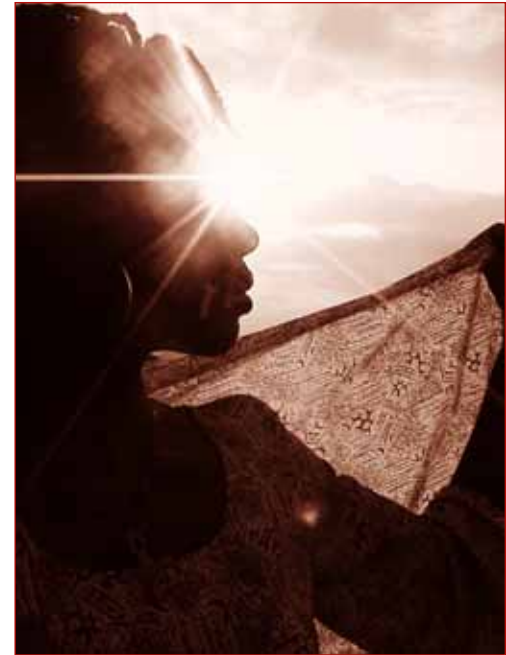
West Africa Hub Synthesis Report

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'Beautiful Dawn' 3rd place in the Pathways West Africa 'Changing Images of Women in Ghana' photography competition, 2008. Photo by Kwabena Danso

1 Introduction to Pathways West Africa

“I define women’s empowerment as a bundle of a number of things: an array of policies, practices and attitudes that allow women to actualise themselves, to realise their potential”, Takiywaa Manuh

Poverty as a constraint to empowerment: The more ‘mundane’ context for empowerment is poverty, which is partly the result of the ravages of structural adjustment and its associated reforms in West Africa. Thus there is the need to rethink empowerment in contexts of poverty, and to look beyond micro projects that focus on increasing the individual’s educational or income-generating capacity, to a broader focus on transforming the context and landscape of opportunities while addressing structural constraints in the economy and in society.

The West Africa Hub is made up of researchers from Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, from a sub-region characterised by generally low indicators of human development and which includes some of the poorest countries in the world. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and undoubted leader in West Africa; Ghana is a much smaller country, but is credited with several ‘firsts’ on the continent and in the sub-region, including its independence in 1957, its peaceful change-overs of power in multi-party elections, and its image as an oasis of peace and stability in a conflict-prone region; Sierra Leone has only recently emerged from a bloody conflict lasting nearly a decade that devastated institutions and social life. Together, these three countries which share a common colonial history and pre-independence nationalist collaborations, present commonalities as well as important differences for studying the pathways which women collectively and individually have taken toward their empowerment. Women in all three countries have high fertility and high maternal mortality rates, and high labour force participation rates with marked levels of personal autonomy, but they have low visibility in current politics and decision-making structures at local and national levels. The Pathways of Women’s Empowerment RPC provided an opportunity for hub researchers to plan and conduct research on some common themes (policy processes and discourses on empowerment; work and changes and continuities in women’s everyday lives; popular culture; women in local governance structures), and to be in continuous dialogue and exchange with researchers in other hubs. The process, methodologies, findings and communication strategies continue to yield a rich harvest with implications for policy, theory, activism and further research.



2 Pathways West Africa hub projects

Conceptualising empowerment

Interrogating policy discourses and practice on women's empowerment in Ghana

Researchers: Takyiwaa Manuh and Nana Akua Anyidoho

This research explores the role of institutions in providing the policy frameworks and for women's empowerment in Ghana, through a study of a key governmental institution, the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, multilateral and bilateral agencies, and selected NGOs. Study methods combined examination and analysis of policy documents with in depth interviews of policy actors.

Discourses on women's empowerment in Sierra Leone

Researcher: Hussainatu Abdullah

This study discusses how the concept of women's empowerment is conceived and applied in policy formulation and programme implementation in post-war Sierra Leone. The study has three foci – the state, national and international NGOs, and bilateral and multilateral organisations.

Tracking changes in conceptions of empowerment in Nigeria

Researcher: Charmaine Pereira

This project examines the discourses of empowerment used by specific actors, particularly in relation to understandings of women's disempowerment, and explores the effects of these discourses on efforts to bring about gender equality.





'Police woman directing traffic', entry to 'Changing Images of Women in Ghana'. Photo by Adelaide Otoo

Building constituencies for gender equality and justice

Dialogue with selected women District Assembly members in Ghana

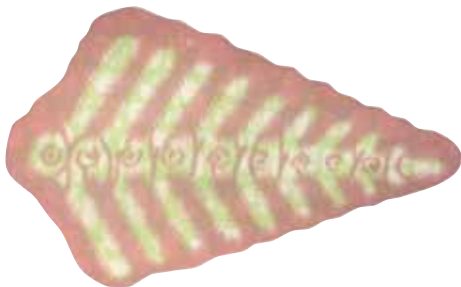
Researchers: Ghana Team

The dialogue, set over three days, explored the roles of education, family members, and community factors in preparing women to seek office in local governance structures in Ghana, and their understandings of processes and manifestations of empowerment.

Measuring the implementation of UN Resolution 1325

Researcher: Hussainatu Abdullah

This research is aimed at monitoring and evaluating the progress made on the implementation of UN Resolution 1325. So far the efforts undertaken by various organisations at implementing the Resolution are geared towards popularising, sensitising and building human and





institutional capacity on the Resolution, but not a critical assessment of the gap between policy formulation and programme implementation.

Religion as a part of a woman's conceptualisation of identity and empowerment. Photo by Steve Ababio

Mobilising resources for women's organisations

Researchers: Dzodzi Tsikata and Agnes Apusigah with Takyiwaa Manuh

This project concerns the significance and impact of official external financing for women's organising at global, regional and national levels. It uses participatory methods of critical reflection involving both donor staff and representatives of women's rights organisations and networks in both Ghana and Bangladesh as well as at regional and global levels.

Women and local governance in Sierra Leone

Researchers: Hussainatu Abdullah, Aisha Fofana Ibrahim and Jamesina King

The research focuses on Sierra Leonean women's engagement in grassroots politics 32 years after the abolition of local elections in the country's political





'Long time no see', winner of the Pathways West Africa 'Changing Images of Women in Ghana' photography competition, 2008. Photo by Kwabena Danso

"Song lyrics do have an impact on people's images and constructions of women and that very often these lyrics are very negative and so it feeds into the popular imagination of what women can and cannot do", Akosua Ampofo Adomako

structure. It contextualises women's participation noting that it was their first contact with the country's modern political structure. The study then looked at women's participation within the councils and the struggles of activists to get more women into local governance.

Empowering work

Changes and continuities in women's everyday lives in Ghana

Researchers: Dzodzi Tsikata and Akosua Darkwah

This study combines a survey of six hundred women in three regions of Ghana with in-depth interviews of three generations of women. The focus of the study is education, work, decision-making, access to institutions, autonomy in relationships with significant others and associational life.

Changing narratives of sexuality

Changing representations of women in popular culture in Ghana

Researchers: Akosua Ampofo Adomako and Awo Asiedu

The study seeks to unearth and contribute to challenging disempowering representations of women in popular music. It involves analyses of song texts; a textual analyses workshop; field work among consumers of music; reflection workshops with persons in/related to the music industry; and a song competition and launch.

Changing narratives of sexuality in Nigeria – Anita Hogan case study

Researchers: Charmaine Pereira and Bibi Yusuf Bakare

An incident in which nude pictures of a well-known Nigerian actress appeared in a 'serious' newspaper and the subsequent response provided insight into understandings of sexuality and its embeddedness in discourses on morality and freedom. This project explores this and the use of communications technology in the shifting of public/private boundaries and sexual commodification.

3 Analysis of selected research

Discovering the changing significance of education in Ghana

To capture the extent to which Ghanaian women have become empowered or disempowered over time and the determining factors, we combined a survey of 600 women together with in-depth life-story interviews with 36 of them. Both the survey and interviews were conducted with three generations of women in the same families. While in the survey we interviewed one woman from each family, in the intergenerational interviews we interviewed three generations of women from a particular family. This innovation enabled us to identify how a constellation of factors in an individual's life – both family circumstances and local/national context – made it possible for a woman to empower herself.

The women we interviewed came from both rural and urban communities in three of the ten regions of Ghana (the Northern Savanna, the Ashanti Region and the coastal Greater Accra Region). To be able to have three generations of women, we grouped the women into three age categories: 18–29; 30–49; 50 and above. The findings of the six hundred surveys were complemented with a total of twelve sets of intergenerational life-story interviews, one each from the twelve communities in which we worked.

The intergenerational triangulation approach where we combined our survey data with our life-story interviews had distinct advantages. Key among these was the ways in which we were able to illuminate the nuanced processes by which women came to acquire particular indicators of empowerment or otherwise. One of our key assumptions was that a highly educated woman would fulfil more



Limited gains of education for empowerment: In the last three decades, much emphasis has been rightly placed on girls' education. The myriad programmes and policies that have been undertaken have yielded effects as evident in the relatively high levels of education of Ghanaian women between the ages of 18 and 29 as compared to those above 30. However, education is not guaranteed to deliver empowerment in the way in which we had considered it. The younger women's jobs were in the private informal sector and did not meet the standards of decent work. Higher education in an economy that is not generating decent work does not empower women.

'Malaika and Saviour, nursing students going off to school', 2nd place in 'Changing Images of Women in Ghana'. Photo by Senyo Ganyo

indicators of empowerment than a poorly educated woman. Our findings suggest that while this may very well be true for women aged 30 and above, it is less so for the youngest women in our study, so far as choice of work was concerned. Although women's access to formal education has improved over the years, our intergenerational life-story interviews with a family in Northern Ghana showed very clearly how access to formal sector employment is not as readily available for young women with high levels of formal education as it was for the middle-aged women in our study.

'Female barber', entry to 'Changing Images of Women in Ghana'. Photo by Francis Quarcoopome

The mother and daughter we interviewed had similar levels of training in secretarial skills. Indeed, the daughter had started her job search with as many qualifications as her mother had acquired over her lifetime. However, in spite of this, the daughter has spent a couple of years searching



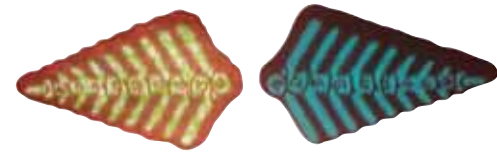
unsuccessfully for a job. Circumstances beyond her control have conspired to make her job search difficult. Structural adjustment policies since the 1980s have resulted in the downsizing of the public sector. Additionally, a larger pool of women with educational qualifications means that the daughter finds herself searching for a job in an economy with few available openings and a larger number of candidates compared to her mother who started her working life in a period where job openings were more plentiful and the qualified applicants fewer.

The lives of these two women illustrate the ways in which the significance of education for Ghanaian women has changed over time, a fact which came to light through the intergenerational life-story interviews.

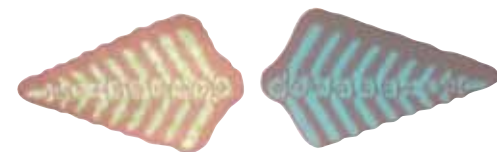
Changing narratives of sexuality in Nigeria

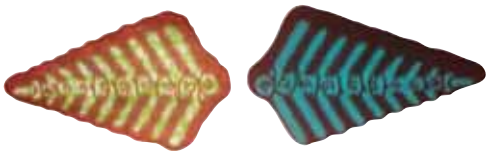
Nollywood films' popularity seems to rest on their ability to tell stories that address lived realities grounded in African contexts. As such, they offer considerable scope for exploring aspects of life that are hard to pin down, such as the workings of power in society. Between April 2008 and February 2009, the Initiative for Women's Studies in Nigeria's (IWSN) young women's discussion group series brought together between six to eight participants at a time to view one of three Nollywood films, followed by discussion. 'Indecent Girls' portrayed a young woman from a poor background, forced to become a dancer in a club, and her relations with a wealthy bachelor and his family. 'Law Students' followed the experiences of a group of university students and their lecturer who resigned his job rather than comply with an unacceptable instruction by the Vice Chancellor. 'Women in Power' contrasted the very different trajectories of two women appointed into political office.

Discussion of 'Indecent Girls' made clear that whilst club dancing and scanty dressing were generally associated with 'indecenty', for participants it was not appearance




“While in the Ghanaian context a lot of emphasis has been placed on educating Ghanaian women; not enough emphasis has been placed on ensuring they can translate that education into work in the formal sector”, Akosua Darkwah






that defined 'decency' but character. The film also provided rich terrain for exploring themes such as lust, love, and marriage. In 'Law Students', the encounters between a wealthy male student, Oscar, and a female student who rejected his overtures, attracted much attention. Oscar's relations with gang members, his lecturer and the bright male student in his class were also debated. 'Women in Power' brought to the surface the tension between women's exercise of power in public arenas, such as political office, with power in the home. Participants argued that women, however highly placed in public life, should ultimately be submissive to their husbands. The discussions revealed that young women's understandings of women's empowerment and women's sexuality were marked by deep-seated ambivalence towards gender equality. The discussion format nevertheless provided a forum for encouraging young women to think critically about gender, sexuality and power whilst gaining confidence in expressing their views.

Implementing UN Resolution 1325 in post-war Sierra Leone



The study commenced with some pre-research activities such as a feature article in national newspapers, distribution of a simplified version of the Resolution and a national press launch. In addition, there were radio discussion programmes and an interview on the BBC's Network Africa programme, to highlight and raise awareness on the research. We observed from our interviews that although a nation-wide mapping exercise of over 600 organisations had been conducted by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs to form the basis for the Sierra Leone National Action Plan for the implementation of Resolutions 1325 and 1820, the knowledge base on the resolutions was low. Activities on the implementation process were focussed mainly on awareness raising and human and institutional capacity building as well as addressing impunity.



Our research moved the process forward by analysing the gap between policy formulation, accountability and implementation. As a result, our focus was on policies, procedures, institutions and structures, personnel, training and internal and external oversight.

Our findings show that the government has focussed more attention on the protection and prevention pillars than the other two pillars namely, political participation and women's empowerment, and crisis and recovery. The government has enacted various laws, established structures and mechanisms to ensure the protection and prevention of women and girls from all types of violence including sexual and gender-based violence; human trafficking, rape and systematic rape.

However, women's political participation and empowerment has received the least attention from government. Despite this, women have continued to forge ahead. Political conscientisation of women has been intensified by UN Agencies, international and local women-focussed NGOs. Women are being sensitised on their rights and supported to contest elections. As a result, women's presence in the political arena has increased, especially at the local level. After winning elections, women are supported to organise into Parliamentary and Local Government Caucuses. Furthermore, the Political Party Registration Commission is working with women from all political parties by providing a space for political dialogue and tolerance and violence-free elections. Women's activism, energy and strength to engage within the male dominated political structure resulted in their recognition by the two political parties. The opposition Sierra Leone People's Party has adopted a gender policy to increase women's presence in politics and within the party structure, while the ruling All People's Congress Party has promised to adopt a temporary affirmative action policy.

Despite these achievements, most men and even a handful of women have opposed gender quotas as a temporary



means to reducing the gender gap in politics. As a result, the affirmative action policy promised by the government has neither been incorporated into the revised draft National Constitution nor those of the political parties. However, a Coalition of Women Groups is currently lobbying for a minimum 30 per cent gender quota in the draft Constitution, with the Ministry of Gender taking the leadership.

How to succeed as an Assembly woman in Ghana

'Honourable' is a documentary film by Yaba Badoe about three remarkable Ghanaian women, who represent their communities in local Assemblies. Ghana's 1992 constitution guarantees a place for women in local government, but out of 4,732 members of District Assemblies in the country today, only 10 per cent are women. Emma Adams, Hajia Damata Suleman and Rose Okley are the subjects of Yaba's film, as part of the project to document the life experiences of Ghanaian women.

Emma, a seamstress, sews at night to make herself available to citizens of the Bubii Electoral Area in Accra during the day. A committed Christian, she sees her role in the Assembly as sacrificial, an extension of her work as a community activist. Well before she entered local politics, Emma started a football team for young men and women in her neighbourhood. She trained with them, sewed shirts for them and still counsels them. Following her election in 2006, Emma lobbied the Electricity Company of Ghana to get over 50 street lights installed in her area. She persuaded the Ghana Water Company to extend pipe borne water to the district, and has had drains built to prevent seasonal flooding. Her achievements are such that, before the team started filming, members of her community were asking her to run again. "We need you Auntie Emma," they told her. "We'll help you put up posters. We'll campaign for you this time."

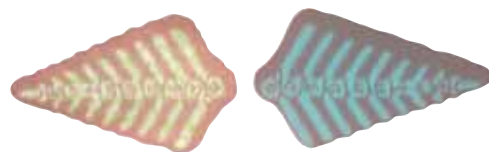
Women are making a difference in their communities as the documentary clearly shows. Decision-making structures must recognise and value women's participation and support their entry to advance women's rights and their empowerment.



The lack of money to run a competitive campaign is the main obstacle to women participating in what is supposed to be non-partisan community representation. This means that although the number of women contesting local elections is gradually increasing, most find it almost impossible to fund their campaigns. Rose Okley, a headteacher of a primary school, is the Assembly member of the Odumase Mampong electoral area in the Eastern Region. She became involved in politics through the 31st December Women's Movement. Her work as a community organiser – providing orphans with school uniforms and the elderly with Health Insurance cards – gained her the support of former students and their parents. Nonetheless, Rose finds the financial demands of electioneering difficult. Luckily for Rose, her family is extremely supportive of her ambition. Her computer-literate children help her make posters and her husband, though affiliated to the party now in opposition, contributes financially.

Hajia Damata Suleman, a single parent and midwife with her own clinic in Accra Newtown, who has raised four children on her own, is used to juggling her finances. Now the Assembly member for Kwoatsuru Electoral Area in Accra, she supplements her income as a government nurse and midwife with proceeds from her Maternity Clinic. Hajia's children also campaign for her and she acknowledges that her daughter has been her key support by taking care of the household and cooking. Emma Adam's family is also supportive. Her children polish up her English when she writes speeches, and Emma's sister, Esther Ansah, provides much needed financial and emotional support. But Emma's husband, a Prison officer, is not alone in voicing unease at the presence of women in a domain usually reserved for men.

***“When I am working, the way they call me Auntie Emma, children will come to me, others will come and say help. It makes me proud, it tells me I am doing something good”,
Emma Adams***

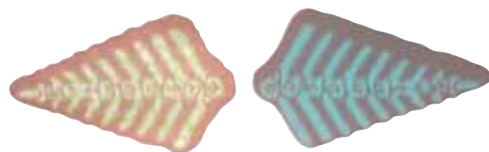


4 Summary of key findings

Conceptualising empowerment

Interrogating policy discourses and practice on women's empowerment in Ghana

- Understanding policy and its workings (actors, structures and discourses), as well as the fact of serendipity is essential.
- There are several processes of change, not all of which can be attributed to policy, including changes and choices initiated by women themselves, the influence of religion, work, women's independent organising and popular culture among others. We need to identify these different arenas and be purposeful about which arena we activate or seek to influence and for what purpose.
- There is limited capacity for and knowledge of dimensions, pathways and strategies for women's empowerment within the Ghanaian government bureaucracies, but at the same time there is a demonstrated commitment from female staff in particular, even at non-managerial level to work on behalf of women and women's empowerment.
- There are also personalised interpretations of 'women's empowerment' and how it is to be achieved which are not usually linked to a strong analysis of the structural constraints to women's collective advancement, compared to the focus on the indicators for women in areas such as education and political participation.
- There exist (female) bureaucrats and technocrats within the bureaucracy who are open to new ideas about gender and women's empowerment. We, as researchers and activists in civil society, can make connections to these 'femocrats' and seek to influence not only their knowledge but their politics as well.
- Economic dimensions of women's empowerment are





dominant in the discourses of government, multi/bilateral organisations and NGOs, without similar attention to other dimensions of empowerment, e.g. MDG 3 and women's participation in politics and decision-making in Ghana which raises issues of culture, values and attitudes as a constraint for women.

'Female car sprayer', entry to 'Changing Images of Women in Ghana. Photo by Francis Quarcoopome

Tracking changes in conceptions of empowerment in Nigeria

- Work on gender requires a grounded understanding of its complexity and the varied ways in which it is intertwined with other relations of power. This is not the same as a technicist understanding of gender in terms of gender mainstreaming.

Building constituencies for gender equality and justice

Dialogue with selected women District Assembly members in Ghana

- The political space is still male dominated and unfriendly to women, who are determined to take advantage of provisions in the law and a rising awareness of their



citizenship and participation rights to ensure a place at the table and make a mark in public life.

- The lack of money to run a competitive campaign is one of the main obstacles to women's participation and although the number of women contesting local elections is gradually increasing, most find it almost impossible to fund their campaigns.
- Women have been supported in their aspirations by children, some spouses, family members and benefactors who provide assistance in kind (care and domestic work), and in cash.
- When elected to public office, women tend to throw themselves into creating projects and providing basic services for their communities, and find the work of representing their communities deeply satisfying.
- To succeed in such an environment, a woman has to be determined, passionate about representing her community, willing to assist them at all times, and must have money, which is difficult for most working women.

Mobilising resources for women's organisations

- The resurgence of women's rights organisations from the middle of the 1990s and their establishment of coalitions has provided the much-needed socio-political space for challenging gender discrimination in Ghana.
- Women's rights organisations, often starting largely without resources, have gradually become donor dependant.
- Donor resources have played a critical role in women's rights organising in Ghana, in supporting their programme and organisational costs. However, reliance on these resources has been disadvantageous in limiting organisational agendas and innovation.
- The Paris Declaration and the aid effectiveness agenda has resulted in new aid modalities and practices such as pooled funds which are considered by women's rights groups to be inimical to their work and activism as it has the effect of starving smaller more vulnerable organisations from donor funds.



- Women's organisations have responded by resorting to their initial establishment strategies such as voluntarism, personal donations, networking and advocacy alongside fresh ones such as direct investments, consultancies and project partnerships.
- The responses to dwindling donor funds are reinforcing NGOisation and the postponement of much needed agendas for transformation.

Measuring the implementation of UN Resolution 1325/ Women and local governance in Sierra Leone

- There is a gap between commitment to gender equality and to promoting women's rights at the international level and implementation in the field.
- There is a weak and under-funded mechanism for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment issues.
- Women are emerging as actors in Sierra Leone's political landscape. Women's independent organising to get their voices heard in the country's political arena, has yielded fruit as the government has promised to implement a 30 per cent quota in the next electoral cycle of 2012–2016, while the adoption of a gender policy by the Sierra Leone People's Party, shows recognition of gender issues and some willingness by political parties to address them in their manifestoes and policies.
- A lack of adequate funding for women's rights projects leads to further marginalisation of women and the non-realisation of commitments made by both donors and national government to gender equality.
- The government's refusal to expunge Section 27 (4) (d) of the Constitution which allows discrimination in marriage, divorce and devolution of property, among other issues, makes a mockery of the entire discourse on women's empowerment in post-war Sierra Leone.





Hawa, a seamstress in Tamale, Northern Ghana, showcasing a dress she has made. Photo by Steve Ababio

Resources for gender equality work: Policy makers at the international, national and local levels need to put into practice their commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment by putting more resources into programme implementation and human and institutional strengthening of national machineries for gender equality and close the ever widening gap between commitment and implementation on gender equality.

Empowering work

Changes and continuities in women's everyday lives in Ghana

- There are a constellation of factors in an individual's life – both family circumstances and local/national context – that make it possible for a woman to empower herself.
- The changing significance of education in Ghana – cf. MDG 3, and the key assumption that a highly educated woman would fulfil more indicators of empowerment than a poorly educated woman.
- The importance of generation (cf. women aged 30 years and above) in terms of choice of work. Thus although women's access to formal education has improved over the years, intergenerational life-story interviews with a family in Northern Ghana showed clearly how access to formal sector employment was not readily available to young women with high levels of formal education as it was for the middle-aged women in our study, and underlines the necessity for decent work in discourses on work.
- There is much in the extant literature on the high level of associational life of West African women. However the sum of women's associational life across the three generations in the survey and interviews appeared to be their involvement in religious associations. While this effect may partly be attributable to the decades of military rule, economic decline and insecurities in livelihoods that occasioned a general turn to religion within society, it points to the need for more attention to the force of religion and its practices for understanding women's choices and agencies.
- There is a need to understand the complex role of religion in women's lives, and its different utilities, including the instrumentalist. It provides a forum for self expression, leadership, public speaking, social security, and prospect of good burial, at the same time as religious doctrines and practices may impose constraints on women's choices and room for manoeuvre.



Changing narratives of sexuality

Changing representations of women in popular culture in Ghana/Changing narratives of sexuality in Nigeria

- Women are often objectified, especially through their bodies and frequently seen as 'lesser' citizens.
- Women's value is often constructed in their roles as wife/mother.
- Songs, like other popular culture products, are powerful agents in shaping perceptions about women, and musicians are powerful conveyers of ideas.
- It is possible to create more positive images of women through popular music.
- Working out how policy makers might facilitate women's empowerment requires a deep understanding of gender, sexuality and power. It also requires a willingness to listen to different categories of women.

Sakina, daughter of Hawa (see photo on page 19) and a friend on a taxi in Tamale, Northern Ghana. Photo by Steve Ababio

5 Hub highlights

The importance of context

One element of the context of women's empowerment relates to the finding in the life story interviews of the everyday lives study that religion plays a complex role in women's lives. Both the survey and the life story interviews revealed that the sum of women's associational life across the three generations was their involvement in religious associations. Respondents extolled the advantages of church: self-expression, leadership, public speaking, social security, and if all else failed, they gave you a good burial. In the case of one respondent who came from a Muslim family, going to Catholic school and becoming a Catholic opened doors for leadership positions, travel abroad and work, as well as political office as an elected District Assembly woman. This finding raised questions about the constraints of religion. At the same time, it pointed to the range of uses beyond the spiritual to which religious associations could be put.

The policy context: Policy as formal statements, formulations and declarations of intentions in documents seems not to inform how and on what basis bureaucrats act on gender equality and women's empowerment. At the same time, policymakers need to be aware of the different processes of change, not of all which can be attributed to policy, including changes and choices initiated by women themselves, the influence of religion, work, women's independent organising and popular culture, and to factor these into planning and actions.

Tracking changes in conceptions of empowerment in Nigeria

After a busy weekend braiding hair in central Abuja's crowded Wuse market, a group of seven hairdressers came together on a quiet Monday in August 2008 to discuss their work, changing times and their hopes for the future. Some had heard the word 'empowerment' before on TV, without connecting it to themselves. That morning, the women stressed the importance of their work and how it had opened up new possibilities, changing their images of self in the process. Braiding hair meant many things. By earning their own money, the women became financially independent of their husbands: they could contribute to feeding, paying for children's schooling and rent, buy



Religion as a part of a woman's conceptualisation of identity and empowerment. Photo by Nana Kofi Acquah

clothes as well as support other family members. Their pride in doing this, despite poor working conditions, was tempered by having to negotiate rising food prices, restricted job opportunities for their children and the effects of poor governance. Whilst their work was empowering, everyday life was still challenging.

Launch of UN Resolution 1325 research in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone's weak performance in the implementation of UN Resolution 1325 seven years after the end of the civil war points to a need for a concerted effort to maintain the government's commitment to implementing such an important international instrument for women's empowerment in the post-war society. This research project by the Pathways Sierra Leone team critically analyses the activities and programmes of all stakeholders responsible for the implementation of the resolution and makes necessary recommendations to push the process forward.

Although the Civil Society Taskforce on the implementation of Resolution 1325 had undertaken a national survey on the Resolution, our pre-research activities especially the well attended press briefing; the convenor's participation on a national phone-in radio discussion programme; and interview broadcast on 13 May 2009 on the BBC's radio programme, Network Africa, broadcast around the continent; gave the research and Pathways both a national and continental exposure. The press briefing attracted a wide-range of audience members including government officials namely, Ms Jenneh Kandeh, then Deputy Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, Hon Dr Bernadette Lahai, an opposition MP and Member of the country's Taskforce on 1325, and academics and activists from women focussed NGOs. We used the opportunity of the press briefing to distribute various literature on Pathways such as posters, flyers and brochures. In addition, we donated 150 copies of the popular version of 1325 to the Gender Division of the Ministry to distribute to their networks especially in the provinces. We also had a meeting with the Dr Sorkoh Kabia, Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs.





Launch of winning songs in Ghana

Popular music is a powerful medium for reinforcing stereotypes and dictating what is considered to be the norm in society. Working with popular artists and radio presenters the research team undertook an analysis of 250 popular Ghanaian songs from the 1930s up to 2008. As part of their efforts to get members of the music industry to think more carefully about the kinds of images these songs are presenting and to counter the negative representations of women, the team launched a song competition.

Following advertisements seeking songs with socially conscious and empowering representations of women, 26 entries were received. Only two of the entries were from female musicians – reflecting the reality that music composition and production is a field dominated by men.

Launch of the *Empowering Song* album, from the song competition organised as part of the 'Changing Representations of Women in Popular Music in Ghana' project. Photo credits: Kwabena Danso



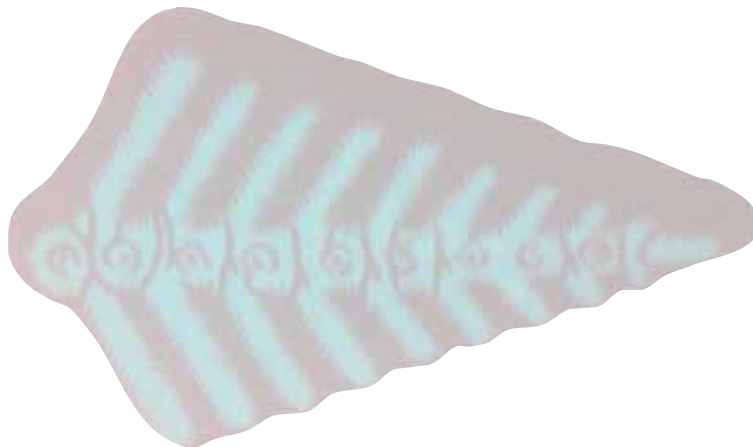
Reflection with Popular Artistes Workshop held as part of the 'Changing Representations of Women in Popular Music in Ghana' project. Photos by Akofa Anyidoho

Popular culture, representations and empowerment: Culture and representations matter for people and for development, and must similarly become of interest to policymakers. Rather than seeing culture as *the* obstacle to development, culture must be understood as a 'network of representations including texts, images, speech, codes of behaviour and their narrative structures' which shape all aspects of social life.

The winning songs were Kwabena Quaicoo's "As long as you are a woman" (1); Osei Korankye's "Mmma moo" (Kudos to women) (2) and Born African's "Equal rights" (3). The popular appeal and lyrics of the winning song identified many prominent historic and contemporary female figures while its chorus calls to displace preconceived notions of women, and the video is now available for sale and on youtube. The launch event, led by the Pro-Vice Chancellor of the University of Ghana, was well attended and featured many popular entertainers, including veteran female musician Bibi Brew, and the three winners also performed their songs. Hub researchers appeared on prime time shows to discuss the research, and the songs were also played on some radio stations. A BBC interview of the research and launch was telecast on Network Africa.

The research team are optimistic that by continued collaboration with the Musicians Union of Ghana (MUSIGA) and with a new generation of up and coming musicians they can help inspire the composition of socially conscious music that will influence the industry for the future. It is possible to compose music and produce videos that empower and speak positively about women whilst still being entertaining.

"I strongly believe that songs have great influence on people. There are certain songs when being played; you feel the words cannot help you positively. There are others too when being played; everybody joins in singing because the words are encouraging. For this reason, there is the need to have leaders who would frankly come out to say the words in a particular song are bad and would influence the youth negatively", participant at the Popular Artists workshop






The Pathways West Africa team. Clockwise from top left: Akosua Adomako Ampofo, Takiwaa Manuh, Akosua Darkwah, Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, Dzodzi Tsikata, Akofa Anyidoho, Charmaine Pereira, Hussainatu Abdullah, Awo Asiedu, Nana Akua Anyidoho.

6 Introduction to the team

Takiwaa Manuh, Hub Convenor, is Professor of African Studies at the University of Ghana. Her research interests are in the areas of gender, the state and development, contemporary African migrations, and higher education. She is active in the women's movement in Ghana and serves on the boards of several national, continental and international organisations.

Dzodzi Tsikata is the Head of the Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy (CEGENSA) and a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) at the University of Ghana. Her research interests are in the areas of gender and livelihoods, gender and development policy and practice, and land and resource tenures. She is a founding member and past convenor of the Network for Women's Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT) on whose steering committee she currently serves.



Charmaine Pereira is a feminist scholar-activist who has worked extensively on the themes of sexuality; feminist thought and practice; gender and university education; and civil society and the state. Based in Abuja, she co-ordinates the Initiative for Women's Studies in Nigeria (IWSN), which strengthens capacity for teaching and research in gender and women's studies. As IWSN National Co-ordinator, she oversees action research programmes on the politics of sexual harassment and sexual violence in universities; gender justice and women's citizenship; and women's empowerment. She is the author of *Gender in the Making of the Nigerian University System* (James Currey/Partnership for Higher Education in Africa, 2007).

Rose Mensah Kutin is the Director of the Accra-based West African Regional Office of ABANTU for Development, a women's rights organisation that works to promote gender responsiveness in policies in Ghana and Africa. Supporting women to enhance their political participation at all levels is a key area of her work. She served as the Convenor of the Network for Women's Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT), a membership organisation that focuses on economic justice and women's land rights during the period 2005–2009.

Akosua K. Darkwah teaches Sociology at the University of Ghana, Legon. She chairs the Research and Documentation Committee of the Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy and is a member of the Sexual Assault Committee of the Centre. She is also a Steering Committee Member of the Network for Women's Rights in Ghana. Her research interests include gender, globalisation and the nature of work, as well as sexuality, in the African context.

Bibi Bakare-Yusuf is an Independent scholar, founder and publisher of Cassava Republic Press. Her company is focused on publishing the best in contemporary African writing, especially works by women authors. Cassava Republic Press is driven by the dream to re-develop a reading (and writing) culture in Nigeria, as part of the bigger project of re-imagining Nigeria's future and being part of an African cultural and intellectual renaissance. She has a PhD in gender studies from the University of Warwick. Her area of research interests are: African women's corporeal styling, love and sexuality in the African world and feminist phenomenology. She has published many papers in refereed journals, and regularly presents papers at academic conferences. She sits on the editorial board of a number of influential journals and is a life-long and committed feminist.

Yaba Badoe is a Ghanaian-British documentary filmmaker and writer. A graduate of King's College Cambridge, she worked as a civil servant in Ghana before becoming a General Trainee with the BBC. She has taught in Spain and Jamaica and has worked as a producer and director for the main terrestrial channels in Britain. Her TV credits include: 'Black and White' for BBC1, 'I Want Your Sex', for Channel 4; and a six-part series, 'VSO', for ITV.

Awo Asiedu is a senior lecturer in the Department of Theatre Arts and currently the Acting Director of the School of Performing Arts at the University of Ghana. Her research interests are in the areas of contemporary African theatre and performance, the sociology of theatre, theatre for purposes other than entertainment and women and popular culture. She is a member of the International Federation of Theatre Research and was recently elected onto its Executive Committee.

Nana Akua Anyidoho is a researcher at the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) at the University of Ghana. She has a PhD in Human Development and Social Policy from Northwestern University. As a researcher, Nana Akua is interested in how ordinary people interact with policy – how they interpret, resist, adopt and adapt policy. Her work on the Pathways project has focused on policy discourses and practices on women's empowerment in Ghana.

Akofa Anyidoho is the Programme Administrator and Communication Officer for Pathways West Africa at CEGENSA. She has been active in online communications reaching out to new audiences through visual and multimedia aids. The Pathways West Africa blog has been a resource for audiences interested in following the work of Pathways researchers and news about women in Ghana. Akofa is interested in creative writing, newsletter/magazine publications, blogging and photography.

Akosua Adomako Ampofo is Associate Professor, and Director, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana. Her work focuses on race and identity politics; gender and violence; masculinities; and representations of women in popular music. She is a member of several organisations including The Ghana Domestic Violence Coalition; Sociologists for Women in Society; and, The Women's Caucus of the African Studies Association. She finds strength in Christian faith, family and sisterhood.

Hussainatu Jummai Abdullah, a sociologist, is an independent scholar and consultant. Her areas of research include women's labour rights, democratisation, religion and post-conflict reconstruction processes in Sierra Leone. She has undertaken consultancy services for the Swedish NGO Foundation, Ford Foundation, UNICEF, African Union, and the Nelson Mandela Foundation, among others.



Aisha Fofana-Ibrahim is a feminist scholar and advocate and is currently the Acting Director of The Gender Research and Documentation Center (GRADOC) and lecturer, Language Studies Department at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. Her research interests include women in/on war, women in African literatures, gender and citizenship and gender and sexuality. Her most recent publication is 'Gender Transformations in War and Peace: The Sierra Leonean Experience' in *Gendering Global Transformations: Gender, Culture, Race, and Identity*, edited by Chima J. Korieh and Philomina E. Okeke-Ihejirika, 2008, Routledge.

Jamesina King has an LLM from Georgetown University Law Center, Washington DC and is a Leadership Advocacy for Women in Africa and Cheveney Fellow. A lawyer and women's rights activist, she is currently a Commissioner in the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone. Her research interests are legal reforms to advance women's rights, advocacy for women's economic empowerment and political participation.

Irene Aituaje Pogoson is a lecturer at the Department of Political Science, University of Ibadan. She is a member of a number of learned societies including the MO Ibrahim Foundation Advisory Board and the Initiative on Women's Studies in Nigeria (IWSN). Her research interests are in the following areas: governance and development; gender studies; international politics and foreign policy. She has a number of local and international publications, journal articles, chapters in books and monographs in her areas of interest. She has attended numerous international and national conferences.

Princess Ufuoma Hamman-Obels was born in Lagos, Nigeria, and educated at the Federal University of Technology, Minna (B.Tech Hons, Estate Management, 2000); and the Institute of Social Studies (ISS), The Hague (MA, Development Studies, 2009). She is a gender activist with a keen interest in research and advocacy on women and gender issues. She has worked with the Initiative for Women's Studies in Nigeria both in the capacities of programme staff and research assistant. She is currently an Intern with the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) and undertaking research on best practices and challenges of women's political participation in Africa, South America and Eurasia.

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Definition of West African Adinkra symbol of 'Aya' (the fern) used in the design of this report: 'Aya' is the symbol of endurance and resourcefulness. The fern is a hardy plant that can grow in difficult places. 'An individual who wears this symbol suggests that she has endured many adversities and outlasted much difficulty' (Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary*).

For further information about this research contact:

Pathways of Women's Empowerment (West Africa Hub)
Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy (CEGENSA)
University of Ghana
PO Box LG 73
Legon, Accra
Ghana

Websites: <http://www.pathwaysghana.blogspot.com/> and
www.pathways-of-empowerment.org

