



WOMEN'S SITUATION ROOM IN GHANA

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Canada



Norwegian Embassy





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1. INTRODUCTION

Ghana has earned international commendation as a beacon of hope for the consolidation of democracy in the West African sub-region. Arguably, the democratic practice in Ghana has provided for relative political stability, a positive democracy dividend, and has contributed to the comparatively transparent mode of election management. Ghana has held seven (7) successful and relatively peaceful general elections within the framework of the 1992 Constitution. This followed a period of the longest military regime in Ghana's history. The 2000 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections was arguably a significant turning point in the 4th Republic as the election saw the democratic change of power. This was a first in the history of Ghana since its independence. The seeming smooth transition of power from one political party to another also enhanced Ghana's democratic credentials. This democratic feat was further strengthened by the successful elections held in 2004 and 2008, with the latter witnessing another defeat of a governing party by an opposition party.

After this, the 2012 general elections brought a further consolidation of Ghana's democratic gains, given the closeness of the result. Amidst allegations of rigging and electoral fraud during the 2012 elections, the country, for the first time, witnessed the challenge of the provisional result of the presidential poll as declared by the Electoral Commission (EC) in the Supreme Court of Ghana by the losing main opposition party, NPP. In its ruling to dismiss the petition and uphold the results of the election, the Supreme Court recommended some reforms for the EC, many of which are administrative, which in their opinion would help forestall any electoral irregularities in future. The EC heeded several calls for electoral reforms, especially by the political parties and some sections of civil society.

In the lead, up to the 2016 General elections, the contentious atmosphere created a real sense of uncertainty and a fearful undercurrent of violence. This was heightened by the aggressive call for a new voter register, the numerous litigations about the electoral processes and increased political attacks on the EC as well as public scrutiny of the EC. The contest was fierce between the two major political parties – the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP), given the slim margins in the 2012 elections. There was confusion with the Ghanaian subculture that awards a party a 2-term mandate to govern. As it was unclear if the ruling NDC party had fulfilled this unwritten rule making it the turn of the opposition. NDC had held office for the prescribed 2 terms but with 2 different leaders, as such the incumbent President was seeking his second term in office. On the other hand, the opposition NPP's Presidential candidate was on his third and last opportunity to vie for the Presidency. This situation was worsened by tensions and pockets of violence that was associated with the voter registration exercise and the perceived need to bolster public confidence in the electoral system in Ghana.

In addition to these political challenges, preparations for the 2016 General Elections unveiled gaps in the democratic practice in Ghana. One of such was the relatively low participation of women at all levels of the governance structure especially at the national level. Several attempts to address this gender disparity had yet to achieve a significant outcome. All past governments had not actively addressed this gender disparity. Indeed, the Affirmative Action Bill which had been on Parliament's agenda was yet to be passed into law. Ghana, like many others, had failed to meet the MDGs target of 30% representation of women in national Parliament.

Considering the above and the SDG call for all nations to "Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life", Ghanaian women decided to act. Women in Ghana chose to be proactive in promoting peace and increasing their participation. They saw replicating the Women's Situation Room (WSR) as an appropriate tool that would enable women in Ghana to actively mitigate any potential conflict and provide a rapid response if violence occurs while guarding against violations of citizens' human rights during the elections.

2. THE WOMEN SITUATION ROOM GHANA

The WSR which is a process that mobilizes women and youth to ensure their active participation in peaceful and democratic electoral processes as a peace and security measure in accordance with UNSCR 1325. WSR uses a peacebuilding mechanism to mitigate conflicts before, during and after elections in African countries. It was initiated by The Angie Brooks International Centre with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia as the Champion.

a. Assessment and Planning Mission

The WSR process in Ghana started with an assessment Mission in May 2016. Two technical experts from the Angie Brook International Centre (ABIC) introduced the WSR concept to a variety of stakeholders in Ghana and assessed the need for replication. All national and regional stakeholders that participated in the mission agreed there was potential for violence during the December 2016 presidential and parliamentary elections in Ghana. The stakeholders identified potential hotspots for violence and called for the replication of the WSR during a one-day consultative meeting to culminate the mission.

The consensus to replicate the WSR in Ghana was unanimous as stakeholders identified the WSR as an important tool to promote peace and increase the participation of women and youth, during Ghana's December, 2016 elections. In addition to the forty-three (43) women's groups consulted, other stakeholders consulted during the mission included the Electoral Commission, the Media, the National Peace Council, the Ministry of Interior, Political Parties, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Youth groups, the Police, the Ghana Federation of Disability organizations and Development Partners.

A planning mission in July 2016 was set up to establish the necessary systems and structures at national and regional levels to replicate the WSR in Ghana.

b. Replication of the Women's Situation Room in Ghana

The WSR was replicated in Ghana under the theme **"Peace is in our hands"** with these objectives:

- a) To provide a platform for women's groups to strategize, plan and respond rapidly to election related issues in a coordinated manner;
- b) To establish a network of peace activists in African countries during the elections who are equipped with the requisite skills and knowledge to prevent and respond to political and electoral violence and emergencies before, during and after the elections; and
- c) To strengthen women's solidarity beyond borders and showcase their ability to constructively launch preventive measures to ensure elections take place in a manner that fosters an enabling environment and an inclusive process.

In September 2016, the Women's Situation Room Ghana (WSR-GH) set up regional hubs with a series of training activities to increase their capacity to mobilize women and youth to participate in promoting peaceful elections. The WSR regional hubs were at the forefront of replicating the process by engaging in various peace campaign activities to spread peace messages.

WSR-GH conveners were engaged to guide and support the replication of the process nationwide. The Conveners were Abantu for Development, The Women's Manifesto Coalition, Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Gender Centre for Empowering Development (GenCED), and Ghana (GFD) Federation of Disability Organizations.

c. Activities of the Women's Situation Room in Ghana

Key WSR-GH activities implemented included:

- An inter-party women and youth dialogue with representatives from the six main political parties;
- The innovative 1000 Women's Peace March was a march in each regional capital which mobilized women and youth to march in demonstrating their support for peace and presented a written appeal for peace to political parties in their respective regions;
- Training of youth leaders from various youth groups countrywide on various topics including the Ghana Constitution, elections laws, conflict resolution, mediation and communication;
- WSR-GH deployed 400 specially trained female observers nationwide on Election Day to monitor and report on issues related to election violence, anomalies and violence against women; Issues were reported to 120 focal persons who were on standby to respond.
- A physical Situation Room was setup with: 1) A call center and monitoring room that recorded 250 cases reported by Ghanaians nationwide; 2) The Eminent Women's Room of women who coordinated cases and response actions; 3) The Youth Room with youth leaders who were deployed to help avert potential violence in their communities. The Electoral Commission, Police, Media, delegates from Kenya and Somalia, UNOWAS, UN Women and ECOWAS youth were all hosted in the room.



Figure 1: **WSR GHANA OFFICIAL LAUNCH GROUP PHOTO**

Front Row Left to Right: Leslie Tinney, Global Affairs Canada; Lillian Bruce-Lye, Ghana Federation for the Disabled; CLLR. Dr Yvette Chesson-Wureh, ABIC/WSR- Initiator; Queen mother Nana Adwoa Awindor launched the WSR; Mrs. Charlotte Osei, Electoral Commission of Ghana Chairperson; Christine Evans-Klock, UN Resident Coordinator; HE Hege Hertzberg, the Ambassador of Norway.

3. KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

Overall, the WSR process in Ghana successfully mobilized women and youth throughout the country to actively contribute to a peaceful and inclusive 2016 General elections. Ghanaian women from all walks of life actively advocated for peace nationwide with a 1000 women's march, while the youth carried a peace torch to the physical situation room. This process paved way for the establishment of a physical Situation Room that operated an early warning and response mechanism, provided political and legal analysis, and engaged the media.

The successful contribution of the WSR-GH to Ghana's 2016 elections was acknowledged by the Chairperson of the Election Commission during her declaration of results.

Additionally, the European Union (EU) Election Observer Mission recognised the role of WSR-GH in their final report, stating that: "Innovations such as the Women's Situation Room (WSR) tap into the expertise of women to prevent situations that could lead to violence"

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EU Election Observation Mission Report
Republic of Ghana Presidential and Parliamentary Elections
7 December 2016

a. Increased Participation of the Youth and Women in Peacebuilding

Stakeholders, especially women and youth across all ten (10) regions were mobilized in their numbers to participate in the peacebuilding campaign. The WSR-GH Women and Youth Coordinating Regional hubs mobilized youth from all backgrounds, formal and informal, with emphasis on unemployed youth, and members of vigilante groups. The women and youth who rallied were impacted with a sustained awareness of the need for peaceful elections.

1000 WOMEN'S PEACE MARCH



Women and Youth march nationwide under theme: "PEACE IS IN OUR HANDS"



The WSR-GH youth got their peers to commit to peace and this contributed to the relative Peace the country enjoyed before, during and after the elections. WSR-GH youth rallied thousands of their peers nationwide to promote peace. They originated the Peace Torch campaign which facilitated the mass rallies culminating in a hand over of the Torch to WSR-GH Eminent Women Mediators as the symbolic commitment of Ghanaian youth to peaceful elections.

Youth leaders of gangs in the Ghana's ghettos actively participated and pledged their support to be peace ambassadors during the elections. Eight (8), gang leaders who would normally have been used by political parties as instruments of violence became agents of peace. This innovative activity was successfully negotiated by the WSR-GH youth team.

Another innovative activity of WSR-GH was the "1000 Women's Peace March" held in all regions. Ghanaian women participated in their great numbers to advocate for peace. Women took to the streets and visited the offices of the two major political parties to share peace statements. The party executives were receptive and pledged their support and commitment to ensuring peaceful elections. The women were also successful in getting the party executives to sign the peace cloth to signify their promise.

A total of 1153 participated in the 1000 women’s March across the regions, 42.2% of whom were female youth. A total of 61 women and 13 female youth organisers participated in the dialogue with political parties. An estimated 15,000 youth participated in the youth peer to peer process. In addition, about 60% of the 400 female WSR election observers were young women.

The numbers of women and youth participants were garnered by the trained WSR-GH coordinators and their deputies. The WSR teams managed to attract and maintain the attention of their peers with IEC materials like banners, t-shirts, and airtime, as well as through mediums like street broadcast, film screenings, floats, radio discussions, and flyers. The WSR teams reached out to women and youth peers on the street, at the markets, in churches and mosques, in local communities and through market outreach.

b. Peace Ambassadors

Thousands of Ghanaians understood the importance of maintaining peace in their communities for sustainable development in Ghana during the elections. Ghanaian women and youth answered the call to action championed by the WSR nationwide through community sensitization and engagements on peacebuilding and conflict prevention. For the first time, ordinary Ghanaians realized their individual roles as peace ambassadors in their communities.

The 1000 Women’s Peace March organized simultaneously in all ten regions of Ghana raised awareness on the urgent need to embrace peace during the election period. WSR-GH obtained the commitment of the two major parties, the National Patriotic Party and the National Democratic Congress to support the call for peaceful elections in December 2016. The peace march brought together all community members and created a genuine unity of purpose to ensure harmony.



GHANAIAN YOUTH CHOOSE PEACE



“The WSR [Ghana] really did well in engaging the youth... the engagement really helped ... The engagement was like a peace accord.”

ZAKIYU IDDRIS TINDANNAYIL
WSR-Ghana Ghetto Youth Leader

Ghanaian youth chose to advocate for peace instead of being used as instruments of violence before and during the elections. This was despite the frustration and vulnerability many of the youth felt given the rate of unemployment. WSR-GH’s youth campaign was so successful that gang leaders from the Ghettos became active participants and peace ambassadors in their various communities. Surrounded by members of his Ghettos, Zakiyu Iddris Tindannayil the leader of the Black Survivors reflected:

“The WSR [Ghana] really did well in engaging the youth...our base here is called black survival...the engagement really helped a lot because our base, here some of the bases we do not agree with them. But because of the engagement and the T-shirts we wore, we appeared different people to them [members of other

Ghettos]. We were able to penetrate and engage with them so if tomorrow they see me somewhere, they will not attack me because it was like a peace accord. The engagement was like a peace accord.”

This was accomplished by WSR staff and volunteers nationwide who had been trained on the Constitution of Ghana, the Electoral Laws of Ghana, Conflict Resolution, mediation and Gender roles in Peace building as well as advocacy for peace.



The all-female WSR national secretariat was made up of four staff members with three volunteers along with the WSR 10 regional hubs with each having staff of 20 adult women, 10 young women and 10 young males.

c. Responsible and Gender Sensitive Media Reportage

The Ghanaian media by observation were more responsible in terms of reportage and the coverage of women during the 2016 elections compared to the 2012 elections. WSR-GH contributed to this improved reportage.

A core of Sixty-Eight (68) journalist champions comprising nineteen (19) Females and Forty-Nine (49) males better understood the key role of the media in ensuring peaceful elections in Ghana in 2016. They used the skills and knowledge they acquired to play a positive role in reporting responsibly on elections related matters. These journalists in turn became peace ambassadors and sensitized colleagues to also report responsibly during the December 2016 elections. The journalists also reported on electoral issues with a gendered lens, ensuring gender disaggregated results and questioning the number of women appointed to leadership positions. Thus, news reportage on women candidates and opportunity for women’s groups to speak on election related issues can be said to have increased after the training; though not as expected.



WSR-GH’s training of these champion journalists, who represented a cross section of media personnel across the country made an impact. The journalist became not only cognizant of the important role of the media but the impact of their own action and inaction. They also saw their medium as an important platform to actively promote the participation of women in decision-making.

d. Increased Participation of the Youth and Women in the Electoral Process

“Political parties’ youth organizers agree for a need after elections to strategize together, irrespective of their party affiliation, on how to increase their participation in decision making.”

Political Party Youth Organizers
@ WSR-GH Interparty Tripartite Dialogue

Women and Youth organizers from the six (6) contesting political parties convened together and for the first time identified common concerns about the electoral processes and barriers retarding their progress in their different parties. These interparty tripartite dialogues were organized by WSR-GH.

The political parties’ youth organizers issued a joint press release not only committing to peaceful elections but also raising concerns on unfair reportage and political parties use of indecent language during campaigns. They realized their role as peacemakers despite political differences and acknowledged that peace must be paramount as it was necessary to sustain development.

Importantly, after sharing their challenges, the 61 youth organizers collectively realized the commonalties underlining their challenges irrespective of their party affiliation. Thus, the political parties’ youth organizers agreed for a need to brainstorm and strategize together after the elections. This would enable them not only find lasting solutions but also facilitate their ability to participate in decision-making.



On the other hand, the political parties' women organizers were already sharing information on the phone with each other but were appreciative of a WSR-GH platform to meet in person. This dialogue resulted in clear channels of communication amongst women in political parties. Additionally, a list of common challenges was identified such as financial constraints, unfair representation of women in a male dominated party structures and environment, lack of training/education, lack of interest by women in politics, as well as religion and cultural stigmatization of women. The women organizers also began brainstorming on how collectively they can improve the role of women in decision-making especially in political parties. They held a joint press conference to share these outcomes from the dialogue and committed women to advocating for peaceful elections on December 7 2016 within their parties.



e. Incident Free Elections in Ghana

The WSR-Ghana provided an early response mechanism on Election Day December 7 2016. This was accomplished by deploying four hundred (400) specially trained female observers nationwide on Election Day to monitor and report on issues related to election violence, anomalies and violence against women. Additionally one hundred and twenty (120) Focal Persons trained to monitor ninety-six (96) hotspots in all ten (10) regions of Ghana. As well as a team of Eminent Women Mediators from Ghana and Africa who made timely interventions to incidents reported to the physical situation room.

Notwithstanding the Early Warning Indicators for violence, the election day of 7th December was very peaceful. Throughout the country, Ghanaians respected the voting process, heeding calls to be orderly and not loiter after voting. Security agencies and political parties conducting themselves in a peaceful manner.



Figure 2: WSR Observer at a Polling Station on 7th December

The day after voting, on 8 December, tensions started mounting ahead of the results declaration by the EC. Both the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) kept claiming "victory" and "a comfortable lead" respectively. The parties held several press conferences and their supporters celebrated, the confusion created an extremely anxious environment.



Figure 3: WSR Observer at a Polling Station on 7th December

The WSR-Ghana Eminent Women Mediators played an important role by meeting with the Chairperson of the EC. At that meeting the women ascertained the true situation and encouraged the release of the results to reduce tension and the potential for violence. The eventual declaration and acceptance of the presidential results dissolved the mounting tensions.

Conclusively, despite all the challenges leading up to the elections, and the lessons to be learned, it is noteworthy that the consensus amongst all partners of the election process both local and international is the 2016 Election was Ghana's most peaceful.

4. LESSONS LEARNT

- Engagement of women and youth at the local level using formal and informal methods is very successful for promoting peace in communities.
- Women and youth are willing to participate in peacebuilding and the political process when given the platform. This was evident from how they embraced the WSR process participating fully and mobilizing their peers.
- Effective collaboration with key institutions and development partners such as the National Peace Council (NPC) and its Regional Election Early Warning and response Group (REEWAG), the National Commission for Civic

Education (NCCE), the Police, the Electoral Commission (EC), the Government of Norway, the Government of Canada, UN Women, and UNOWAS was essential for the sustainability of results.

5. CHALLENGES

- Late commitment of resources affected the ability to begin implementation early. This resulted in many activities being performed concurrently and within a short time. Additionally, this overextended UNDP and the WSR national and regional teams as they sought to fast track process.
- Given the pressure to implement within a short period, information sharing and communication both internally and externally was not coordinated or free flowing.
- Competing with politicians to mobilize the youth to talk to them was challenging as politicians mostly gave the youth incentives like money while the WSR team did not provide tangible incentives.

6. BEST PRACTICES

- Partnerships with Development Partners who understand the importance of gender equality and increasing women's participation in politics was essential to the success of the WSR process in Ghana.
- Uniform messages and materials for all activities in the ten regions resulted in one unified and persuasive voice for WSR-Ghana.
- The Youth Torch and Peer to Peer process was brilliant and provided the opportunity to engage the youth, especially in the ghettos, as advocates for peace instead of instruments of violence.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- An early start is essential, mobilizing resources should start at least within fifteen (15) months to the election. Conducting the WSR assessment and planning should start twelve (12) months to election. The recruitments should start ten (10) months to election. Implementation should start at least six (6) months to the election for effective impact.
- Roles and responsibilities should be delineated in practical Standard Operating Procedures and the entire WSR Ghana Team trained to facilitate efficient implementation.
- Procurement and financial training during the planning stage for the WSR national secretariat, regional coordinators and ABIC technical experts. This is critical to ensure adherence to international financial management standards for the transparent and accountable utilization of donor funds.
- The WSR process should be continued after elections to diffuse tensions and stem post-elections violence. The duration of the post-election WSR process should be determined as required.

8. CONCLUSION

Replication of the Women Situation Room in Ghana was beneficial as it galvanized Ghanaian women and youth throughout the country to promote peace. It is an effective conflict prevention mechanism, managed by women, and it contributed to the peacefulness on Election Day December 7 2016 in Ghana. In replicating the WSR process further in other countries, the above recommendations should be considered for a more efficient and impactful process.

9. Annex – Detailed WSR Report from the WSR Coordinating Team (Attached)