Employment of Women in Ghana

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Introduction

ONE OF THE OBSTACLES to the thorough examination of women's employment in Ghana, as in the other States of West Africa, is the paucity of detailed and accurate statistical data and research material. Nevertheless it is possible to glean certain facts, albeit of a very scattered nature, from various government reports and documents which, when pieced together, permit not only a worth-while over-all evaluation but also the derivation of definite trends.

Ghanaian traditional society was based on a subsistence economy in which a division of labour existed between women and men. The main functions of women were to look after the home, raise children and give regular assistance with farm work such as the planting and harvesting of crops. Men undertook the more arduous tasks, for instance clearing land for crops and building huts. They were also the warriors, protecting their families and the community from attack and the danger of capture and enslavement. When the need arose, women took up arms and fought alongside their menfolk.[2]

During the past century the traditional socio-economic system with the division of labour outlined above has been increasingly undermined by various factors—European territorial acquisition and commercial penetration of the hinterland, the growth of the mining industry, the development of cash crops for export and the establishment of a modern infrastructure, the migration of labour and urbanisation, the expansion of government administration and the provision of services, advances in education and the introduction of new ideas and concepts. A variety of new avenues for employment were opened up for women outside the home and their immediate locality. By the 1930s this social change was clearly noticeable and was observed, not with unqualified enthusiasm, by the then Chief Inspector of Labour—

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[2] A famous instance is that of Yaa Asantewa, Queen Mother of Ashanti, who led her people against the British in the last Anglo-Ashanti War (1900-01).

Women in this country are usually employed in trading on their own account, and the number of female wage earners is negligible. Women are employed by Government as schoolteachers, nurses and telephone operators, and commercial firms occasionally employ women in various capacities. The number employed regularly in the mining industry is 122 of whom the diamond-producing industry absorbs 109 as diamond sorters. . . . They are in charge of a female supervisor. Uniform and a private changing room is provided by the employers. The hours worked average nine hours a day and the wages vary from 9d to 1/6d. The remaining thirteen girls employed in the mining industry are cooks or water girls who are paid 9d for a four-hour shift. One mining company, with the permission of the Chief Inspector of Mines, employs a number of women on contract for collecting stones and sand, and occasionally building contractors engage women for a similar purpose. . . . It is probably useful for the women to be able to earn a few shillings: but having regard to the amount of unemployment amongst the men, it would seem that the women should be better at home looking after their menfolk than carrying stones and sand.[1]

Although this was written at a time when the Gold Coast (as Ghana was known before independence), like most other countries, was passing through a difficult period of severe unemployment resulting from the world economic depression of the 1930s, the view expressed by the Chief Inspector that wage-earning opportunities for men were more important than similar opportunities for women can be taken as typical of colonial government thinking even in "normal" times. In Ghana today it is generally true to say that most women, excluding the women traders who are mostly self-employed, regard wage-earning employment as a temporary phase in their lives. Their main preoccupation is to marry and raise children. In most cases marriage does not constitute a bar to further employment, but the fact that women consider such employment as of only secondary importance has meant, among other things, that they have played very little part in the trade union movement that has grown up especially since the Second World War.

Employment of women in the Gold Coast public service

Following the First World War, as more women received an education [2], they began to enter the public service. This made it necessary for the Colonial Administration to decide on its policy towards serving women officers in the event of pregnancy. In 1928 the Administration stipulated that women getting married should resign. Twenty-two years later this was written into the Pensions Ordinance, 1950.[3] Earlier, in 1936, pursuing a general policy of retrenchment, the Colonial Administra-

[1] *Report on the Labour Department for the year 1938-39.* A Labour Department was established in 1938.

[2] Government of the Gold Coast: *Report on the Education Department for the year 1919* gives total enrolment of children in government and assisted schools as 27,318; out of this number 4,600 were girls.

[3] The ordinance states that "It shall be lawful for the Governor to require a female officer to retire from the public service of the Gold Coast on marriage" (section 9 (3)).

tion ruled that the resignation of pregnant women should be a condition of appointment. Marriage gratuities thereupon became payable to married women or those with marriage in prospect who resigned after five or more years' service and who were not eligible for any retirement grant. Statutory provision for such gratuities had been introduced in 1929 for British West African nursing staff: general applicability was not granted until 1946. In introducing these special conditions of employment for women officers, the main consideration of the Colonial Administration was that of work efficiency. It held the view that in the public service women were more prone to inefficiency than men. This view is, perhaps, best illustrated by the Lidbury Report of 1951: "... under Gold Coast conditions, the responsibilities of married life are normally incompatible with the devotion of a woman's whole time and unimpaired energy to the public service ".[1] This was particularly evident when a wife was stationed away from her husband; during absences on account of pregnancy; or when a woman, married or unmarried, was unable to make suitable arrangements for the care of her children.

Any loss in efficiency, whether it resulted from absenteeism or divided loyalty between home and work, could not be accepted as it involved a waste of public funds (particularly since, in the public service, women received equal pay for equal work). Although the Colonial Government made it a condition of appointment that women officers should leave the service on marriage or pregnancy, it was discovered that inflexibility in this respect was not in the best interest of the public service. The directive that all women officers must resign on marriage did not survive for long. Before enforcement of this condition, a Head of Department was expected to take into account the factors affecting public service efficiency and economy.[2] A rule that all serving women officers on their second pregnancy must be called upon to leave the public service was recommended by the Lidbury Report [3] and was found acceptable in principle by the Gbedemah Report.[4] Resignation from the public service due to marriage or pregnancy did not necessarily lead to the loss of an officer's services to Government. If it were found to be in the interest of the service a woman officer might be re-engaged on a monthly basis with special terms suitable to her circumstances.

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[1] *Report of the Commission on the Civil Service of the Gold Coast, 1950-51*, Vol. I, para. 273.

[2] A Head of Department in deciding whether a female officer should be requested to resign or retire had to consider various factors, including *(a)* the expense already incurred in training the officer or in remunerating her over a long period of service during which she had gained valuable experience; *(b)* the expense which would be incurred in training a replacement for her; *(c)* the delay which might arise before a replacement could be obtained; *(d)* the existing and future staff situation in the officer's branch of the service; and *(e)* the nature of the officer's work.

[3] Lidbury, op. cit., para. 274.

[4] *Report of the Select Committee on the Lidbury Report*, 1952, para. 89.

Until recently relatively few women were engaged in wage employment outside the public service. Women found it more convenient leading lives of greater independence by retailing in such items as groceries, foodstuffs and textiles; this trade has been for a long time and is still mainly in their hands. In 1950 it was reported that " women continue to be engaged as sand, swish, water and gravel carriers on building sites and also as midwives, nurses, teachers, telephone operators, seamstresses, bookbinders, shop assistants and in allied occupations ".[1] In 1952 the Government clearly reiterated that women should be paid the same salaries as men for doing the same work.[2]

Labour legislation and women workers

The first enactment passed in the Gold Coast on the employment of women was the Employment of Women Ordinance (No. 9 of 1913). This regulated the employment of women in industrial undertakings only (where, for example, it prohibited their employment on night work); agriculture, where large numbers of women worked, was not mentioned, presumably because most women working on family farms were unpaid.

The 1948 Labour Ordinance prohibited the employment of female labour on underground work in mines and night work; it also permitted absence from work six weeks before and after confinement. The present labour legislation in Ghana applies in general to both males and females; complete legal equality of rights and privileges exists between the two. If special laws relate to women exclusively, it is more to take account of their special needs than to discriminate against them. Thus the Labour Decree of 1967, which confirms the prohibition of underground work in mines and night work by females, stipulates that the employer of any industrial, commercial or agricultural undertaking " shall give leave to any pregnant female worker if she produces a certificate given by a medical officer or a midwife . . . to the effect that her confinement is in the opinion of such officer or midwife likely to take place within six weeks . . .; give [her] at least six weeks leave . . . immediately after her confinement . . .; pay [her] . . . remuneration, in respect of such leave, of an amount which is not less than 50 per cent of the remuneration she would have earned had she not been absent; and allow [her] . . ., if she is nursing a child, half-an-hour twice a day during her working hours for this purpose ".[3] The law enables a female worker to take her annual leave immediately after her maternity leave and forbids the transfer of a pregnant woman if, in the opinion of a medical officer or midwife, this would be detrimental to her health. Another provision stipulates that prolonged

[1] *Report on the Labour Department for the year 1950-51.*

[2] Sessional Paper No. III of 1952, para. 30.

[3] Labour Decree, 1967, Part V (ILO: *Legislative Series*, 1967—Ghana 1).

absence on account of illness due to childbirth shall not be a valid ground for discharge.[1]

Women in employment

At the census of 1960 the total population of Ghana stood at 6,726,815. The population aged 15 years and over numbered 3,730,309, of whom 1,884,552 were males and 1,845,757 were females. The size of the economically active population was 2,723,026, of whom 1,677,058 were males and 1,045,968 were females. Those enumerated as being in employment are shown in table I. It is interesting to note that over three-quarters of all women in employment fall into the category of employers or self-employed.

TABLE I. DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT BY SEX AND INDUSTRIAL GROUP, 1960

Industrial group	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
All groups	**1 567 965**	**100.0**	**991 418**	**100.0**	**2 559 383**	**100.0**
Agriculture, forestry, hunting and fishing	1 002 300	63.9	579 031	58.4	1 581 331	61.8
Mining and quarrying	45 628	2.9	2 593	0.2	48 221	1.9
Manufacturing	135 198	8.6	98 749	10.0	233 947	9.1
Construction	86 022	5.5	2 631	0.3	88 653	3.5
Electricity, gas, water and sanitary services	14 015	0.9	174	—	14 189	0.6
Commerce	95 798	6.1	275 333	27.8	371 131	14.5
Transport, storage and communications	66 749	4.3	1 074	0.1	67 823	2.6
Services	122 255	7.8	31 833	3.2	154 088	6.0

Source: *1960 population census of Ghana*, Vol. IV (Accra, Census Office, 1964).

Considerable concentration of female employment, it will be seen, occurs in the "traditional" group embracing agriculture, forestry, hunting and fishing, as well as in commerce. These groups absorb 70 per cent of male, 86 per cent of female and 76 per cent of total employment. Generally speaking, it appears that customary and religious barriers to female employment have been and are still largely absent in Ghanaian society. This is one of the factors which, together with their spirit of enter-

[1] *Labour Decree, 1967*, op. cit., Ghana has ratified the ILO Maternity Protection Convention (Revised), 1952 (No. 103).

prise and self-reliance, accounts for the domination of women in the retail trade.

One thing that emerges from the figures given in table I is that more opportunities are required to widen the range of occupations accessible to women, but this depends to a large extent on the expansion and diversification of the economy as well as on an increased intake of females by higher educational institutions.

The figures in table II below illustrate the trend in the level of wage-earning employment among women from 1954 to 1967. They do not of course give a true picture of the number of women actually occupied in some form of economic activity, one of the chief reasons for this being that the market women engaged in the petty retail trade have not been included.

TABLE II. WOMEN IN WAGE-EARNING EMPLOYMENT, BY NATURE OF EMPLOYER, 1954-67

Year	Public authorities	Private enterprises	Total
1954 . . .	2 943	3 514	6 457
1955 . . .	4 075	4 856	8 931
1956 . . .	4 068	5 316	9 384
1957 . . .	4 972	5 963	10 935
1958 . . .	5 096	7 213	12 309
1959 . . .	6 836	8 603	15 439
1960 . . .	8 433	8 140	16 573
1961 . . .	9 248	9 259	18 507
1962 . . .	12 851	9 203	22 054
1963 . . .	16 907	9 811	26 718
1964 . . .	21 393	9 801	31 194
1965 . . .	26 068	8 813	34 881
1966 . . .	26 003	8 912	34 915
1967 . . .	23 385	9 561	32 946

Sources: *Reports on the Labour Department* and *Labour statistics* (Central Bureau of Statistics) for various years.

Note: These statistics relate to the month of December of each year and are collected from all establishments irrespective of size. The results are affected by a certain amount of non-response for which no adjustments have been made. The non-response rate is, however, so low that the figures given can safely be considered as indicative of the trends in the level of wage-earning employment. It should be noted that these figures exclude workers on cocoa farms and in diamond mines, domestic servants and the self-employed.

Increasing numbers of Ghanaian women since the turn of the twentieth century have entered the retail trade but there are no reliable figures available as to their total number or their annual turnover. Market trading in Ghana, especially in Accra, gives the impression of being very important both economically and socially. The markets tend to be very

congested and give an appearance of intense activity. Goods of all kinds are sold, for example textiles, headgear, footwear, jewellery and cosmetics as well as foodstuffs both cooked and uncooked, vegetables and even items like drugs. The Market Administrator's office in Accra estimated that in 1959 the total number of traders in the capital was approximately 25,000.[1] In 1970 there were seventeen markets in the Greater Accra Region, twelve in the capital itself and five at Tema.

The market women have formed strong and effective associations for the protection of their commercial interests and the ventilation of their grievances. Some have become comparatively rich and have shown considerable business acumen. Many Ghanaian market women have gone on to assume more important business responsibilities, dealing in local produce or imports. Some run very prosperous concerns and have invested their profits in real estate. The influential position of market women was recognised by the Government when they were given representation in the Constituent Assembly of 1968-69 which adopted the new Republican Constitution.

Table III gives the latest available figures of male and female employees in the various occupational groups.

TABLE III. RECORDED NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES BY OCCUPATIONAL GROUP AND SEX AT END OF 1967

Occupational group	Male	Female	Total
All groups	**328 405**	**32 946**	**361 351**
Professional, technical and related workers	40 655	9 544	50 199
Administrative, executive and managerial workers	10 487	464	10 951
Clerical workers	43 989	8 030	52 019
Sales workers	3 295	711	4 006
Farmers, fishermen, hunters, loggers and related workers	24 567	4 416	28 983
Miners, quarrymen and related workers	7 102	73	7 175
Workers in transport and communications	20 750	1 189	21 939
Craftsmen, process workers and labourers	141 983	5 234	147 217
Service, sport and recreation workers	35 577	3 285	38 862

Source: Compiled from *Labour statistics*, op. cit., 1967.

Statistics of women employed in agriculture are unreliable. Custom generally allows a woman to cultivate an area of land with food crops according to her inclination, the harvest of which she may consume or

[1] Astrid Nypan: *Market trade. A sample survey of market traders in Accra.*

sell. Unconsumed agricultural produce is often carried by head porterage to a distant market.

Incomes of women in employment

Ghana has ratified the ILO Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100) of 1951. In the civil service, of course, men and women have always had the same salaries; this is also true of most of the higher professions such as medicine and law. Since most women seek and secure the lower and more poorly paid positions, however, the principle of equal pay for equal work does not mean that women's earnings are in general as high as men's in the public and private sectors of the economy. This is not the situation in the retail trade where, as has been noted, some women traders have relatively large cash turnovers. Statistics nevertheless indicate that women's average earnings are lower than men's because of the concentration of women in those branches of the economy where the average wage is below the national average. Of the 361,351 persons receiving wages or salaries in 1967, 32,946 or 9.1 per cent were women and they received 8.2 per cent of all wages and salaries.[1]

Table IV shows the earnings of female employees in new cedis per month.

The fact that women generally occupy subordinate positions at work corresponds in many cases to their level of skill, which is often lower than that of men, especially in the executive, administrative, technical and professional occupations. There are however some outstanding instances where women hold important high-level posts, particularly in the medical, legal, academic and teaching professions.

Another reason why the average female wage is lower than the male is that educated women generally tend to follow occupations or professions such as teaching, social services, nursing, secretarial and clerical work. Their perceived field of choice is far more limited than men's and it is likely that this narrow conception of occupational possibilities is formed in girls at a rather early age.

Education and training for girls

Preparation for occupational life starts in childhood when important aspects of the social and work roles of the sexes are learned. There is reason to believe that Ghanaian girls receive less encouragement than boys to embark upon advanced and higher education. In their upbringing stress is laid on marriage and children as the primary goals in life. Although education has been free since 1952, parents with limited resources generally give preference to boys over girls in matters of education, particularly

[1] Derived from *Labour statistics*, op. cit., 1967.

TABLE IV. NUMBER AND MONTHLY EARNINGS OF FEMALE EMPLOYEES, AND TOTAL MONTHLY EARNINGS, 1967 AND 1968

(Earnings in new cedis [1])

Industrial group	1967			1968		
	Number of female employees	Earnings of female employees	Total earnings of all employees	Number of female employees	Earnings of female employees	Total earnings of all employees
All groups	**32 946**	**1 329 551**	**16 508 909**	**35 043**	**1 542 889**	**19 431 110**
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	6 512	150 473	1 363 330	6 384	140 759	1 477 424
Mining and quarrying	693	21 289	1 139 171	571	20 683	1 342 660
Manufacturing	3 567	112 173	2 288 755	4 349	151 043	2 637 108
Construction	881	26 841	1 653 061	1 125	32 979	2 039 024
Electricity, water and sanitary services	288	7 912	479 700	290	8 904	565 858
Commerce	3 200	181 983	2 276 882	3 353	249 665	3 062 583
Transport, storage and communications	1 223	51 040	1 462 858	1 696	67 809	1 911 937
Services	16 582	777 840	5 845 152	17 275	871 047	6 394 516

Source: Compiled from *Labour statistics*, op. cit.

[1] 2.45 new cedis = £1 or $2.40.

higher education. This reflects the idea prevalent in most societies that boys, as future breadwinners, have first claim to education in order to better their chances of employment. Even where special or vocational training is provided in Ghana, girls are less inclined than boys to take advantage of the facilities offered.

During the last decade there has been a rapid expansion of the educational system in terms not only of the number of new schools constructed but also of the number of pupils receiving full-time public education. Noteworthy in this development has been the increasing number of girls receiving an education as well as their position vis-à-vis boys respecting the number of school places taken up.

Excluding university, teacher training, commercial and technical education, there are three main levels—primary, middle and secondary—in the Ghanaian educational system. Primary education normally lasts for six years from the age of 6. Pupils who are successful in a common entrance examination at the end of this stage proceed to secondary school while the others may enter middle school, which provides education for a further period of four years. In 1958, of the number of pupils attending public primary schools [1], 299,346 (65.8 per cent) were boys and 155,707 (34.2 per cent) were girls. A decade later both the absolute and relative position of girls had improved, for there were 594,917 boys (55.5 per cent) and 477,606 girls (44.5 per cent). At the middle school level in 1958, of the total number of pupils receiving education, 93,215 were boys (74.4 per cent) and 32,098 were girls (25.6 per cent), while in 1967/68 the boys had more than doubled to 213,174 (64.7 per cent) and the girls had more than tripled to 116,505 (35.3 per cent). The secondary school level shows a much greater proportion of boys receiving education than girls. In 1958, 8,430 of the pupils receiving secondary education were boys (80.9 per cent) and 1,933 were girls (19.1 per cent). By 1967/68, though the proportion of girls showed an improvement, they still lagged far behind the boys. In this year, 32,589 (74.3 per cent) were boys and 11,300 (25.7 per cent) were girls.[2] It is interesting to note that the proportions of pupils who entered secondary school to those who began their education at primary school, which stood at 1.3 and 2.8 per cent for girls and boys respectively in 1958, practically doubled in both cases by 1967/68.

During the 1960s more attention was focused on vocational training not only by the Government but also by various private concerns. An illustration of this is the vocational guidance service offered by the Labour Department. In a recent annual report, it observed that " 7,905 young persons (5,057 boys and 2,848 girls) were given vocational guidance

[1] The term " public schools " denotes state schools and schools receiving central government grants.

[2] Annual reports and unpublished data of the Ministry of Education.

designed to assist them in choosing and entering suitable occupations which are in accordance with their qualifications and interests and in which they can progress satisfactorily. The vocational guidance was supplemented by talks given to Middle Form IV pupils, school-leaving interviews and film shows dealing with various aspects of vocational training and apprenticeship schemes." [1]

All government vocational training schools and centres are co-educational. Although the majority of those taking advantage of the facilities offered are males, a growing number of females have been attracted and have shown preference for certain courses. Vocational training is also provided by a number of polytechnics and technical colleges. At the Accra Polytechnic commercial studies form part of the curriculum. In 1965/66 there were 24 females and 22 males taking the commercial course and by 1969/70 the numbers had increased to 67 and 49 respectively.[2] An institutional management course for girls only is also provided. This prepares them for the City and Guilds examinations of the United Kingdom. Successful candidates normally obtain posts in hotels, hospitals and schools. The Government Secretarial School in Accra trains both sexes for secretarial posts and demand is high for the limited number of places available. Pupils who possess the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level in English language are trained to become stenographers and private secretaries. A lower-level course is provided in typing for middle school leavers.

A variety of departmental training programmes are available for females employed by the Government; for instance, the Department of Posts and Telegraphs trains its telephonists, the Printing Department its bookbinders and printers, the Department of Parks and Gardens landscape designers and florists, the Social Welfare Department community development and welfare officers, and the Ghana Police for a series of posts requiring certain skills. Nurses' training schools prepare females for the Ghanaian qualifications of State Registered Nurse and State Certified Midwife. The Women's Auxiliary Service Corps trains females to serve as general clerks, signallers, telephonists and pay clerks.

A useful contribution is made by the Young Women's Christian Association at its centre in Accra. At present, it provides a home management course primarily for middle school leavers. Applications are many but limited dormitory accommodation allows only a small intake of about thirty females a year. The YWCA also started a commercial school in 1968 and hopes to extend its training programmes to the regions. Private vocational training centres exist for females in various parts of

[1] *Report on the Labour Department for the period 1st January 1965 to 30th June 1967* (published 1970). This report stated further that " the forty-five Public Employment Centres... received 124,097 applications for employment from 94,574 boys and 29,523 girls; 17,351 young persons comprising 14,205 boys and 3,146 girls were found employment ".

[2] Statistics obtained from the Accra Polytechnic.

the country, providing courses mainly in such subjects as domestic science and sewing; their level of training is not of a high standard. A number of the large private firms, for instance the Union Trading Company, have training programmes for their staff as a result of which many females are trained to become supervisors and salesgirls. A recent development is the encouragement given by the Ministry of Education to the introduction of business studies in secondary schools. The curriculum comprises subjects such as book-keeping, commerce, shorthand and typing and secretarial practice; these are popular among female pupils.

Summary of the present position of women

While increasing numbers of women are joining the wage-earning labour force, many more are still engaged in agriculture as unpaid family workers. Many thousands are also active in trade as self-employed people. Where women are engaged as wage and salary earners the principle of equal pay for equal work for men and women is assured by law. To help women workers a directive was issued by the Ghana Government in 1958 instructing Heads of Departments to endeavour to post married female government officers to the same region and if possible to the same station as their husbands.

Attention needs to be focused not only on the full enforcement of the law but also on determining why, even when there is no infringement of the law, women do not in fact enjoy full equality in employment. Some employers find that the productivity and efficiency of their establishments are lowered if women holding important positions have recourse to frequent maternity leave. The tendency, therefore, is to employ women in less important positions which carry lower salaries and wages. It is also maintained that the rate of absenteeism is lower among men than among women.

In Ghana both private and public day-nurseries exist but they are few in number and the need exists for more and better ones. Most women who are fortunate enough to have relations ready at hand rely heavily upon them to care for their children while away at work.

The most important immediate way in which to improve the occupational participation and advancement of women appears to lie in the field of education, more specifically by adequate vocational training facilities. Considerable need exists, too, for more part-time work opportunities, better promotion prospects and the provision of new job openings.

A more serious attitude towards their work on the part of women is required if employers, both government and private, as well as society at large are to accept an increasing and widening role for women in employment. The Government has enacted legislation which protects the

position of women at work and has made it legally binding on all employers to pay the same rates for women as for men. It is now up to women to ensure that not only the letter but the spirit of the law is honoured. The few women who enjoy higher occupational status need to give leadership and advice to those of their sex in humbler positions.
