Now we can speak out

Women’s experiences of political participation in Ghana
Acknowledgements

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Acronyms

BDO  Budget Development Officer
CDM  Community Development Manager
CDO  Community Development Officer
CHRAJ  The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice
CHPS  Community-based Health and Planning Service
DA   District Assembly
DCD  District Coordinating Director (civil servant)
DCE  District Chief Executive (political position)
DDF  District Development Fund
DFID  UK Department for International Development
DOVVSU  Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit
GDO  Gender Desk Officer
GES  Ghana Education Service
GHS  Ghana Health Service
MDGs  Millennium Development Goals
MoGCSP  Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection
MWA  Market Women’s Association
NDC  National Democratic Congress (ruling party)
NPP  New Patriotic Party
NCCE  National Commission for Civic Education
UC   Unit Committee
VAW  Violence against women
1) Introduction

Womankind has a 25-year history of supporting partner Women’s Rights Organisations (WROs) working on women’s participation. Learning from this work highlights the importance of working at different levels – local, District, regional, national and international, engaging a range of formal and informal decision-making structures and supporting both selected individual women and women’s groups.

Womankind and its partners recognise that not enough work has been done to meaningfully bridge the gap between women in political structures and their female constituents; instead many programmes focus on strengthening the skills and capacity of women leaders as individuals. Womankind’s Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women (FLOW) programme (2012-2015), funded by the Dutch Government in Afghanistan, Ghana, Kenya and Nepal, prioritises approaches that improve both grassroots women’s ability and opportunities to raise issues with women leaders; at the same time, it enables women leaders at the local level to hold decision makers to account and to better influence local development plans. It aims to strengthen accountability from national policy structures to local-level structures and from local-level political structures to communities.

The core strategies adopted by the programme include:

i) Work with individual women leaders or aspiring leaders through training, mentoring, and individual empowerment to improve their performance in decision-making structures and their accountability to women constituents;

ii) Establishing women’s groups and working with existing women’s groups to enhance women’s collective voice to raise issues of concern to them and to influence decision makers;

iii) Creating or accessing decision-making spaces/linking people and bringing individual leaders and women together in groups to discuss make/change decisions, raise issues of concern and seek to influence the agenda as well as hold decision makers to account;

iv) Creating a more enabling environment for women’s participation – policy work, media work, building alliances etc.

As part of this programme, a research project was included in the fourth and final year. Through a process of review and reflection, Womankind and its partners agreed that the research should focus on gaining a deeper understanding of what happens when women are able to participate in local-level decision-making spaces or spaces where women meet with decision makers to influence them and in some cases hold them to account. The research was undertaken with Womankind partners in four countries – Ghana, Nepal, Afghanistan and Zimbabwe1 and the methodology in Ghana is explained in greater detail in Section 3.

We know that bringing women together into groups increases their confidence, their ability to raise issues of concern to them and increases the likelihood of them joining other groups.

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1. Although not included in the FLOW programme, Womankind supports Women in Politics Support Unit (WIPSU) to undertake a similar programme in Zimbabwe funded through Comic Relief.
However we have limited understanding of:

- How women’s involvement in spaces where they are linked to decision makers leads to an increase of confidence, agency (an ability to act) and empowerment;
- What difference the space makes to different women and who benefits most from participating;
- What women’s participation in the space enables women to do. The aim is to understand what participation means to women on a personal level and what it means for their communities, and to explore whether being part of these spaces and accessing opportunities for influencing and meeting with decision makers enables women to go on to participate in other decision-making structures, beyond the community level.

The research explores the barriers for women around their participation, the kinds of concerns they are able to raise with decision makers, the actions they are able to take individually and collectively, and identifies what is enabling change.

In each country selected, the research targets a particular kind of space and involves visiting two of these spaces in different locations to undertake qualitative research. The research understands spaces as either formal or informal groups or meetings in which women participate; they can be established by Womankind’s partners, other NGOs, Government or set up by women themselves. In the FLOW programme, these are spaces where women meet with each other and with decision makers. This conceptualisation of spaces draws on Andrea Cornwall’s work in which she defines different types of spaces as follows:

- Closed spaces: hard to enter, decisions taken by specific set of actors behind closed doors, non-participatory;
- Invited: spaces created by external agencies in which people are invited to participate; the rules are framed by those who create them. They are often constructed opportunities to participate;
- Claimed/organic spaces: created by people from/against power holders; united around a common cause; collective and popular space.2

The research examines what happens in the selected spaces, including what participants understand to be the purpose of these spaces, who is included or excluded in the space, what enables issues to get taken up by the group, and what enables women to make the shift from their personal issues to community and political issues. How is collective voice3 understood and achieved and are women seen as more legitimate by decision makers and the wider community if they are part of a group? It also explores to what extent participating in informal decision-making spaces is indeed providing a stepping-stone for some women to participate in more formal governance structures. For each location it is important to build an understanding of the local and country context and how this influences or shapes the decision-making spaces and women’s experiences.

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3. Womankind understands this to mean having shared principles, speaking for each other and supporting each other speaking.
In Ghana, the research focuses on a quarterly meeting space established by Womankind’s partner the Gender Centre, where they bring women representatives of different community groups and associations together with District-Level decision makers and women District Assembly (DA) members and other women professionals aspiring to leadership roles, to enable women to raise issues with decision makers and to promote women’s leadership.
2) Womankind’s work with Gender Centre and the FLOW project

Womankind’s Ghana programme has been operating since 1989, building partnerships with nine key women’s rights organisations. Over this period the focus has been primarily to address women’s economic empowerment, reduce violence against women (VAW), increase women’s civil and political participation and strengthen the women’s movement. Womankind has been working in partnership with the Gender Centre since 2002, initially with funding from Comic Relief to support the Community-Based Anti-violence Team “COMBAT” approach to implement an anti-violence project and later on a DFID-funded project to reduce women’s susceptibility to HIV and AIDS.

The FLOW project in Ghana

The goal of the FLOW project in Ghana is, “To Strengthen Women’s Leadership in Ghana” to ensure that the women the Gender Centre (GC) work with have increased skills, resources and opportunities to contribute towards the achievements of MDG3 to promote gender equality and empower women, and the eradication of poverty in Ghana. The project outcomes include:

- Increased number of women actively and effectively participating in political parties and decision-making in the areas where Gender Centre is working;
- Improved accountability by those in decision-making structures to their female constituents.

Main strategies implemented by the Gender Centre in the FLOW project include:

i) Creating a quarterly meeting for women’s groups to engage with District decision makers and present issues of concern. The meetings involve between 60-80 women (leaders and one or two other representatives) from different groups or Associations and women District Assembly members. The meetings involve some awareness raising on women’s rights issues by the Gender Centre, provide an opportunity for all women present to raise their concerns and for decision makers to respond, and to share information on actions they have taken. Both the women and decision makers make commitments to various actions during the meetings; these are followed up in subsequent meetings.

ii) Advocacy activities undertaken at both District and national level. At the District Level, the Gender Centre supports the women’s groups who attend the quarterly meetings to get their issues addressed. The national-level advocacy focuses on a coalition developing an affirmative action law.

iii) Training of 45 aspiring leaders (described as trainee aspirants): these are women from different Government agencies selected for training by the Gender Centre. The women also attend the quarterly meetings with the grassroots women and District Level decision makers, commit to organising sensitisation activities in their respective communities and are supported to produce radio programmes to share information on specific women’s rights issues.

iv) **Work with the media:** annual training of 30 media professionals from both print and electronic media is undertaken to ensure that reportage of women’s issues demonstrates strong analysis and clear understanding of the issues.

v) **Community sensitisation:** this activity includes creating awareness on critical gender equality issues, family laws, violence against women as well as the importance of women’s participation in governance and the need to vote for women during elections. This activity is carried out by the Gender Centre staff organising meetings in communities and involves collaboration with the trainee aspirants.

vi) **Training of 209 young women:** these are students selected from three second-cycle institutions (Mpasatia, Koase and Ada Senior High Schools) and two public universities (University of Ghana and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology) and trained by the Gender Centre. These trainees are also members of the young women’s leadership clubs (established in these schools under the FLOW project); they carry out sensitisation meetings in their respective schools with other students as well as members of the clubs to share information on leadership, gender and women’s rights.

The Project is implemented in three Districts: Ada East (in Greater Accra Region), Wenchi (in Brong Ahafo Region) and Atwima Mponua (in Ashanti Region). These Districts were selected because the Gender Centre had already implemented projects in these Districts on violence prevention and HIV and AIDS and the FLOW activities intended to build on their previous and existing work on women’s empowerment. At the time of developing the FLOW proposal in 2011, Atwima Mponua had a female District Chief Executive (but she was transferred to another District in 2012) and Ada East had an aspiring Female Member of Parliament (now an elected MP).
3) The research methodology and limitations of the research in Ghana

The research methodology was based on the use of participatory exercises to explore a set of core research questions related to the selected spaces in which women participate. Definition of the core questions evolved through the lead researcher facilitating a number of meetings with Womankind staff, review of the wider literature, project documents and skype conversations with the different Womankind partners involved. The core research questions are included in Figure 1.

In Ghana, the focus of the research was on the quarterly meetings – the spaces where women come into contact with decision makers and are able to influence them and hold them to account. Hence the research questions were revisited with the Gender Centre staff in relation to this particular space, in order to determine the key questions. Prior to the research visit, in consultation with the Gender Centre, the two research sites of the Ada East District in the Greater Accra Region and the Atwima Mponua District in the Ashanti Region were selected. These represent two out of the three Districts in which the Gender Centre implements the FLOW project.

A key group consulted in the research in both Districts were a selection of women who attend the quarterly meetings and who gave a day of their time to the research meetings. These women were drawn from a larger pool of between 60-80 women who attend the quarterly meetings. The Gender Centre and the local resource person in each District determined which women to invite to the research meetings. The criteria were to include a broad range of women from the different associations and groups who attend the quarterly meetings and who have attended regularly over the three years of the project. Clearly this selection was also dependent on who was able to give two half days of their time in Ada East and who was able to attend for a day in Atwima Mponua. The researchers did not know until arriving in the District which associations and groups the women would be representing. In Ada East, there were 17 women, with a predominance of women from the two Market Women’s Associations (MWAs) in the District (nine in total), although some of these women are also members of other associations such as Salt Sellers, Cassava Sellers, Tomato Sellers etc. There were also representatives from the following Associations: Hairdressers, Dressmakers, Fishmongers, Farmers, and two DA members. All women are also members of church groups but only one saw herself as also representing this group in the meetings.

In Atwima Mponua, there were 21 women, including six women representing various women’s church groups, five members of the MWA, two women who are organisers in the women’s wing of the ruling party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and one who is an organiser with the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and three women who work for the Ghana Education Service (GES), two farmers, one hairdresser and one Muslim woman from a Zongo Women’s Association. Two of these women were also Assembly members and the Market Queen\(^5\) and GES officials had participated in the leadership training with the Gender Centre. A detailed summary of the different groups and individuals consulted is included in a table in Annex 1.

\(^5\) Market Queen – Head of the Market Women’s Association.
In addition, a selection of members of associations were also consulted: fishmongers and dressmakers in Ada East, church groups and Market Women Association members in Atwima Mponua. These women do not attend the meetings but hear about the meetings through the leaders of their associations. In each District individual interviews were held with different Government officials, Chiefs and Queen Mothers. Meetings were also held with the Gender Centre’s Programme Manager, two Programme Officers and the Executive Director.

A range of participatory exercises were discussed with the Gender Centre at the beginning of the research visit in order to identify which would be most appropriate for the different groups being consulted based on literacy level, time available with each group and number of women in the groups. The exercises used during the research included mapping, spectrum lines, exploring individual and community problems and changes, bullseye of problems, role play and wellbeing ranking. The individual interview questions for District officials focused on their role, the concerns of women and girls in the District, actions prioritised by the District Government, their reflections on the quarterly meetings etc. These interviews were also informed by the learning emerging from the group exercises.

**Limitations of the research**

The time spent on the research overall was short, involving three-four days in each District. In both Districts the majority of the research meetings took place in the District Assembly rooms. Considerable flexibility was required in order to respond to the varying start times of meetings and adapting to the different facilities available. The researchers were heavily reliant on working closely with a local interpreter to be able to facilitate the participatory exercises with the women and in the discussions following the exercises. In each District the interpreter was the local focal person for the project. There were both advantages and disadvantages with this approach; the local women were comfortable with the arrangement as they know the local focal person well, however in Ada East District, because the focal person also works for the District Government as the Community Development Manager (and has recently also assumed the role of Gender Desk Officer), it was sometimes difficult to distinguish whether the women were referring to changes resulting from the quarterly meetings or related to initiatives taken forward in her role as Community Development Manager.

In one District there was no opportunity to meet with and orient the interpreter in advance of the meetings and the interpreting in this location was also challenging due to the level of English spoken. In the second location, the Gender Centre staff were able to support with translation which meant that the large group of women could be split into smaller groups to enable deeper discussions.

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6. Queen Mothers play a central role in traditional governance in communities; they are the mothers of the community and advise on the social conditions of the community.
Fig. 1 Core research questions shared with Womankind partners:

1. Who created the space and who set the rules? How do these shape what takes place? How often do meetings happen and how are the meetings conducted? The rules? Who is linked in this space?

2. Purpose of the space: participation, voice, creating leaders, accountability, information sharing, influencing, meeting with decision makers, stepping stone to access other decision-making spaces etc. Is it specifically aimed at governance changes or other issues?

3. Who attends? Who does not attend? What motivates women to attend? Which women access/do not access these spaces? How do they work together? Are they developing a collective voice or not? Do they see themselves as representing other women?

4. How is the space structured and organised? Whose voices get heard? Who does not get heard? How are differences negotiated? Who performs well/less well? How are hierarchies of power managed?

5. What happens in the space – What issues are raised? What do community women want leaders to attend to? What do leaders want from these discussions? What decisions get made? What actions are taken and what changes as a result? What changes for women members on an individual, family and community level? How are leaders/decision makers held to account?
4) Ghana country context

Women form 51% of the total population of Ghana, yet their representation and participation in decision-making processes and structures is low. It is generally acknowledged that the economic and social inequalities between men and women in Ghana, in addition to certain cultural beliefs and practices which disadvantage women, together hinder women’s ability to enjoy their rights and participate actively in political processes and structures.

Ghana introduced a multi-party system in 1992, since which time high numbers of Ghanaian women have voted in national elections every four years. However, various studies show that while many Ghanaian women vote in elections, a high proportion are not members of political parties and do not hold office at any levels in parties. The low participation of women in political parties, coupled with the increasing monetisation of politics and political campaigns, and political violence and intimidation, creates insecurity for women and builds resistance to their participation from their husbands and other family members. Interventions by Government and other development partners aimed at addressing the downward trend in women’s participation tend to be too close to elections to make an impact, and are often not sustained after elections.7

At the highest level of Government, women make up 29% of Ministers and 22% of Deputy Ministers.\textsuperscript{8} Ghana’s MDG report (2012) notes that in the Judiciary, 29% of Supreme Court Judges and 25% of High Court Judges are women. In the Civil Service, 24% of Chief Directors are women.\textsuperscript{9} The Ghanaian Constitution enjoins the state to make democracy a reality at all levels through decentralisation, and to promote gender balance in recruitment and appointment in public office.\textsuperscript{10} Assemblies are the highest political and administrative authority at the District Level, with the power to deliver local development that is responsive to and inclusive of all sections of the population. The District, Metropolitan and Municipal Assemblies are composed of 70% elected members (these can be male or female, depending on who is elected) with one member from each Local Government electoral area, and 30% of its members appointed by the Government. The Government has allotted 30% of the seats of the appointed members to women (i.e. only 30% of 30% of members are guaranteed to be women, in other words – 9%). Between 2002 and 2006, although the number of women standing for elections to District Assemblies almost doubled, only 10% of those elected were women.\textsuperscript{11}

This under-representation of women in political life reflects the wider issue of the low status of women in Ghana, which is particularly the case in rural communities. Women face higher poverty rates, women workers are more likely to be engaged in vulnerable employment than their male counterparts and are more likely to be engaged in part-time, seasonal or low-paid jobs in the informal economy; asset distribution favours men, with men holding more land than women.\textsuperscript{12} Women in rural areas, particularly older women are less likely to be educated than men and have traditionally not been involved in decision-making processes. Cultural norms further contribute to the broader marginalisation of women and girls in society.

The African and Beijing progress report for Ghana (2014)\textsuperscript{13} highlights some achievements in relation to “women in power and decision-making” in recent years noting that there are now ten regional associations of the National Paramount Queen Mothers Association in all ten of Ghana’s Administrative Regions and through these associations the Queen Mothers discuss and address women’s welfare. The process is underway to integrate Queen Mothers into the regional houses of Chiefs and the National House of Chiefs\textsuperscript{14} – constitutional bodies with powers and functions related to customary law and practice. Gender mainstreaming is also being implemented in sector programmes of Ministries, Departments and agencies.

\textsuperscript{14} This is significant given that in the past, in the traditional chieftaincy sector of Ghana’s political organisation, Queen Mothers have been excluded from the Local, Regional and National Houses of Chiefs.
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For example, through the Land Administration Project, women’s representation and participation in decision-making has increased at the formal and customary levels and the capacity of a number of Queen Mothers has been strengthened in order to improve their participation in decision-making related to land issues. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) is institutionalising gender-responsive budgeting and has initiated gender focused programmes on women’s rights and welfare. The Ministry has also established regional offices and intends to establish gender desks in all sector ministries at the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies. A National Gender Policy has also been drafted.

The Beijing report cites key challenges in relation to institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women including ineffective implementation of laws and policies affecting women, and the need to address socio-cultural beliefs, practices and institutions which are discriminatory towards women and girls. Other important challenges cited in the report are girls who do not attend or drop out of school, teenage pregnancies and violence against women and girls.

- Findings from the Pathways to Empowerment Programme in Ghana\(^\text{15}\) highlight that women face a number of challenges if they are to enjoy their rights and actively participate in politics;
- Leadership roles are still seen as being more masculine and there is the notion that societies should be led by men, which relegates women to the background of community life;

In spite of Government policies to increase women’s role in governance, much more should be done to empower women and involve them in decision-making processes.

- Oppressive cultural and religious views of women’s roles in society, which can serve to limit women’s involvement. Also a woman’s own belief in herself and her role can influence her participation in politics;
- Husbands and partners can restrict a woman’s activities and can stop her from participating, sometimes through insults and threats of violence;
- Women’s multiple responsibilities, especially in the home, can overburden women and leave little time for active participation in politics;
- Women’s economic situations can limit their participation, as funding campaigns and running for politics can be expensive. For example, paying for posters, leaflets, t-shirts, registration. Women tend to work in the less well-paid areas of employment in Ghana, and as such earn lower incomes with little job security;
- Education levels are lower for Ghanaian women than men. For older generations of women their education was restricted by society’s attitudes to girls’ education. Whereas, for younger generations, their education is constrained by financial difficulties and the need to pay for education.

The conclusions of this research were that in spite of Government policies to increase women’s role in governance, much more should be done to empower women and involve them in decision-making processes. The Pathways researchers emphasised the need to improve women’s access to and use of political institutions and to improve women’s awareness of their own value and contribution to society. Enabling women to understand their rights is seen as key to empowering women, at the same time as challenging the social, economic and cultural limitations to women’s empowerment.

Clearly the barriers are many and the work required to overcome these is significant. The Womankind research reveals that the Gender Centre’s approach in the FLOW programme has served to change the views of the women it has engaged with around women’s leadership, enables women to understand and access District Government institutions, helps women develop knowledge of their rights and gives them the confidence to raise their concerns with decision makers. It has inspired some women to galvanise others and take action to solve issues for themselves, as well as finding different strategies to influence decision makers. It has brought decision makers, usually male, into contact with a diverse group of women and there is recognition on their part of the importance of consulting women and some commitment to address many of the issues raised by women, most often when these fall within the remit of Local Government.

It has inspired some women to galvanise others and take action to solve issues for themselves, as well as finding different strategies to influence decision makers.
5) The context of the Districts selected for the research

5.1) Ada East District, Greater Accra Region

Ada East District is located in the South East of Ghana in the Greater Accra Region close to the border with Togo where the river Volta meets the Gulf of Guinea. During project inception and the first year of the FLOW project, Ada East and West were both part of the same District but were split in 2012 before the General Election. The project, therefore, includes beneficiaries in both Ada East and West Districts. The District capital of Ada East is Ada Foah; the District also includes two other towns, Big Ada and Ada Kasheh each divided into area councils. The MP for Ada is female and a member of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) party, the ruling party of Ghana.

The majority of people living in Ada East belong to the Ga-Adangme ethnic group which is patrilineal. A major feature of the local area is the annual Asafotufiam festival which attracts visitors from across Ghana each August to Big Ada and Ada Foah. Aside from organising the festival, the Chiefs do not have a legally recognised role in local governance. Much of their role such as banging the gong-gong to call for communal labour\(^\text{16}\) is now performed by the decentralised Government structure and the majority of those consulted noted that the leadership role of the Chiefs has generally declined. The majority of inhabitants are Christian and/or observe traditional religions.

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16. District Assembly Bye-law “Beating of Gong-gong and Communal Labour” (2004). Communal labour includes any work or service exacted in cases of emergency, calamity, war, fire, flood, epidemic, famine, invasion by animals or vegetable pest or during an emergency of any kind the threat of which the community considers imminent; and direct labour in the interest of the community in the construction of school blocks clearing of market places and paths, digging of wells, pit latrines, clinics, community centres, or any project that is to the benefit of the community.
The Director of the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) estimated that 90% of the cases they deal with are related to child maintenance since most of the time men are not formally married to the mother and therefore do not take responsibility for the children.

The division of the District into Ada East and West has had an impact on the local economy since the Songor lagoon, which is a big source of income from both salt and fish, is located in Ada West. The economy of Ada East relies predominantly on farming and fishing. There is the potential for salt production according to the Budget Officer in Ada East, but this needs to be developed. Along the coast, most of the men are involved in fishing and small-scale farming and the women sell in the markets, and those in fishing communities smoke fish, as well as assisting with the farming. There is a main market in Kasseh, which lies on the main Accra-Togo highway and a smaller market in Ada Foah. The Chief of Ada Foah in Ada East is trying to build the Ada Foah market up again due to the impact of the division of the two Districts. Kasseh market is a source of revenue for the District Assembly and they also receive income from business rates. Ada is only 120km from Accra and is located on the Volta river estuary; the District contains a number of luxury hotels making it a popular destination for day trips or weekend getaways from Accra for the growing Ghanaian middle class.

Among the fishing communities along the coast, polygamy is common. The Ghana Education Service (GES) School Health Coordinator saw this as a big problem which is linked closely to teenage pregnancy and school dropouts, “Fishermen want many wives and many children. Once a woman gets pregnant she is considered a man’s wife.” Education is also not highly valued in these communities. The Chief also mentioned that one of the main issues in many communities is that men are careless and don’t care for their children. The Director of the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) estimated that 90% of the cases they deal with are related to child maintenance since most of the time men are not formally married to the mother and therefore do not take responsibility for the children. In general, the issue of teenage pregnancy was viewed as being higher in the coastal communities than in the inland communities. The Community Development Manager (CDM) estimated that in the coastal communities, men may have up to six wives but most have three or four, whereas in the inland communities, most men would only have one or two wives. She noted that the Local Government is not addressing the issue of polygamy.

The GES Coordinator also noted that child labour is a problem in the District; since there are many single parent families, mothers will take their children to the market with them to sell their wares during school hours.

According to one of the Fishmongers’ Association members, school dropout is a particular problem for boys who go to work as labourers in the fields rather than going to school. Within the coastal communities, coastal erosion is a serious problem and “the sea has eaten the land” (according to the CDM) in many of the fishing communities. This has also caused problems with the water supply since wells have become salty. There is, however, an ongoing coastal defence programme in Ada East.

According to the Chief in Ada, widowhood rights are less of a problem in Ada than they are in Ashanti regions, this is also reflected in the comments of women where fewer women in Ada discussed the problem of land rights and the need to prepare wills.
The trainee aspirants and Community Development Manager both mentioned the recent increase in prayer camps in Ada East where many people go for spiritual healing – there are as many as 45 around Ada East and some people stay for up to a year at a time and pay money to the pastors to do so – they were concerned about pregnant women going to the camps to give birth instead of seeking help from professional doctors.

5.2) Atwima Mponua, Ashanti Region

Atwima Mponua District is located within the Ashanti Region of Ghana. It is the westernmost District of the Ashanti Region and the District capital is Nyinahin, which lies around 64km west of Kumasi, Ghana’s second largest city. The majority of the inhabitants of Atwima Mponua are from the Ashanti ethnic group. The Ashanti are a matrilineal society meaning that inheritance and descent is through the mother’s line. The nuclear family structure is considered to be the mother; her children and the children of her daughters but the children of her sons are not included as members of the mother’s family. If a male dies, even if he has a widow, his sisters’ sons will inherit the land, if there are no sons then his sisters’ daughters will inherit the land. Men still have some precedence over land rights (sons of the mother and her female relatives inherit the land), but women do have status and value is placed on the female line. The issue of inheritance was raised in consultation with many of the women as well as the strong social norms which see women’s role as limited to the household. Traditional governance is strong, Chiefs command a lot of respect “the Chief has the most power,” they are consulted for advice and if outsiders want to hold community meetings and are respected by Local Government. Before the District Chief Executive (DCE) or other District Assembly (DA) members organise events in the community, the Chief is consulted in advance.

The majority of the population in Atwima Mponua has Christian and/or traditional beliefs. There is also a “settler” community of people from the North, often Muslims who have come to the Ashanti Region in search of work in the cash crops or mining industry. Women consulted placed some of these people outside their communities since they are lodging locally just for work and have families in the North. The women also acknowledge that many settlers have stayed for a long time in Atwima Mponua and are now part of their communities.

The MP of Atwima Mponua is male and a member of the National Patriotic Party (NPP), the main opposition party. Atwima Mponua was a target District in the Gender Centre’s previous anti-violence project, which supported Community Based Anti-Violence Teams (COMBATs) to address and prevent domestic violence. In their analysis, the Gender Centre has found that Ashanti women are generally more confident and driven than the women in Ada. The District is also considered to be richer than Ada East, it is more food secure. There are cash crops in Atwima Mponua, particularly cocoa and palm oil as well as market crops such as cassava. There are also both formal and informal artisanal gold mines (galamsay). As a result of these cash crops there are external companies and associations present within Atwima Mponua as well as mining companies and logging firms. Since the Chiefs hold an important role within the Ashanti Region, these companies consult with the Chiefs in order to purchase or lease land for logging and mining.
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The issue of domestic violence is a problem in Atwima Mponua which women linked to men neglecting women and children as well as alcoholism amongst men. Other issues within the District include lack of clean pipe-borne water (it gets polluted as a result of the galamsay) and lack of toilets. One of the issues raised frequently by the women consulted was in relation to credit. Many of the women consulted were engaged in farming of some sort, either cash crops (palm oil/cocoa) or other small-scale farming such as cassava growing. Since cocoa only has one major harvest a year (sometimes accompanied by a second smaller harvest), it is very challenging for women to maintain an income throughout the year solely from cocoa. The market is an issue for women consulted in Atwima Mponua but less so than in Ada East where most of the women consulted depended on the market for their livelihood. One explanation for this may be because cocoa is sold to the Cocoa Marketing Board at a fixed price and does not pass through the market. The main sources of income for the DA are revenue from taxes from the mining industry and cocoa production.

Teenage pregnancy is also an issue in Atwima Mponua but for slightly different reasons than in Ada East. The influx of logging companies has meant that girls may become involved in providing sex for money in Atwima Mponua and women also raised the problem of parental neglect as a key problem in their community in the same way as described in Ada East. School dropout is a problem, girls drop out often due to teenage pregnancy and both girls and boys are also involved in child labour in the goldmines. Previously they would work in the cocoa industry but as this is now more regulated they are working in the galamsay.

In both Districts the Government is implementing a programme on adolescent reproductive health education through GES working closely with the Health Service. This involves GES officials visiting schools to talk to adolescents about reproductive health and the risks of teenage pregnancy. Many of those consulted see parental neglect as a key cause of teenage pregnancy and this neglect is considered to be the result of the breakdown of traditional kinship systems, the rise of the nuclear family and migration of families in search of work. Adults also spoke about bad influences on children from their peers and children not respecting their Elders.

School dropout is a problem, girls drop out often due to teenage pregnancy and both girls and boys are also involved in child labour in the goldmines.
6) The quarterly meeting space

6.1) How the meetings were established and function

The quarterly meetings are a critical part of the Gender Centre's strategy to address women’s participation, initially conceived as a method of ensuring women’s participation in local-level decision-making and improving the accountability of Local Government to women’s issues. Figure 2 outlines the Gender Centre’s conceptualisation of the key inputs, actors and intended outcomes of the quarterly meetings. The Gender Centre sees the meetings as a platform to bring women together with decision makers. The meetings are facilitated by the Gender Centre staff and a local focal person in the District and take place in the District Assembly rooms; they are structured so that there is time to provide information and practical guidance on women’s rights issues, as well as encouraging women to take up leadership positions.

Over the three years of the project, the meetings have increased in frequency. Initially they were only planned for twice a year but Womankind and the Gender Centre realised that this was not sufficient at the end of the first year and the meetings increased to four times a year. It was also initially conceptualised to have an open meeting with different women participating at each meeting but for purposes of monitoring, it was decided to have the same group of women over the course of the four years.

In Atwima Mponua, the meetings have always been held in the District Assembly (DA) hall except on one occasion when this was not available. In Ada East, the meetings were held at the Ada radio station until 2014 because the DA hall was not available during this time, however for the past year, the meetings have been held at the DA hall which is more spacious than the radio station. In Wenchi District, meetings have always been held in the DA hall with the exception of two occasions, where they were held at the meeting space belonging to the GES, because the DA hall was not available at the time.

The structure of the meeting

The Gender Centre staff explained that the meetings take place in the District Assembly halls. They last two hours but can often take longer as not everyone arrives on time. There is a table where the decision makers (DCE and District Assembly Officials) sit and the community women sit in the main part of the hall. The Gender Centre prepares the agenda and facilitates the meetings. The Gender Centre staff do not find facilitation challenging because everyone is patient and wants to see the results or hear the DA people speak. At the start, representatives from each of the associations report back on what has moved forward since the last meeting and what their concerns are. The different decision makers then respond to these issues and report on actions they have taken in the last three months. The Gender Centre stated that all groups have the opportunity to raise issues of concern to them. Agreements are reached on the next steps by the end of the meeting and at the beginning of the next meeting these agreed actions are re-visited. In addition, the Gender Centre staff write up the notes of the meeting; these notes are referred to in a follow up meeting with the DCE which is scheduled immediately after the quarterly meeting. This is done to ensure the DCE is clear about the commitments made during the meeting.
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Gender Centre’s focus in the space

**Practical information** – wills, laws, marriage, forming associations, technical information for different groups

**Women’s rights and responsibilities** – women equal to men, raising boys and girls equally, right to participate and be consulted, women’s responsibility to contribute financially to the family

**Motivation to assume leadership roles** – encouraging women to contest for leadership, role models, learning to speak in public, dress appropriately

What happens in the space?

**Accountability** – women learn about the role of the Assembly and decision makers, raise issues with decision makers, listen to their responses

**Solidarity and support** – sharing, learning from each other, getting to know others

Who attends the space?

1) **Women from different communities and groups** – including leaders of associations / church groups and some members

2) **Trainee aspirants** – teachers, health professionals, women Assembly members, women staff in District offices

3) **Decision makers** – District Coordinating Executive (political), District Coordinating Director (Civil servant), Planning Officer, Budget Officer

What happens in the space?

**Outcomes for women?**

Gain confidence, voice, know who to go to, demand actions from decision makers, motivated to take actions and to help others, some become leaders

Individual action

Collective action
The Gender Centre provides food, water and transport allowance to the community women who participate in the meeting.

In both Districts, the women attendees agreed that everyone has a chance to speak and listen, “we have to raise our hands.” Some women in Ada East said that sometimes the meetings are too long because people repeat what others have said and the meetings don’t start on time. The GES representative said that the meetings should start on time even if people come late – she went to a meeting that was due to start at 10am but did not begin until 1pm. The hairdresser representative stated that the allowance should be more because she loses income while she attends the meetings, however other women did not raise a loss of income as a problem.

The Gender Centre has also established committees of five women in each of the project sites to coordinate the meetings and mobilise more women within the communities. They said the role of these Committees also includes thinking about how to ensure the sustainability of the meetings beyond the project timeframe. In Ada East for example, the committee is formed of the CDM, GES SHEP Coordinator, Assembly member, Aspiring Assembly Woman/Woman’s group member and one of the Queen Mothers.

6.2) The purpose of the quarterly meeting space

For the Gender Centre project staff the purpose of the meetings was to, “raise the voice of women to champion issues and hold their leaders accountable.” The Gender Centre intended that the leaders of associations should go back to their groups and communities following the meetings to share what they have learnt, inform others what decision makers are doing and mobilise their group members to take actions. However, they have found it difficult to track what happens when women go back to their groups and to what extent women are being mobilised to become part of a collective force.

During consultation with each of the groups of women, they were asked what they believed the purpose of the quarterly meetings to be. The women consulted defined the meeting purpose in a number of different ways.

In both Ada East and Atwima Mponua, women raised a practical side of the purpose of the meetings, seeing it as a place to gain knowledge which they can put in to practice. In Ada, one of the market women who attends the meetings felt the purpose was “to learn about how to care for our children.” In Atwima Mponua, one of the women attendees at the meetings stated that the purpose of the meeting was that, “now we have been educated on the laws. Before I didn’t know about women and men making wills” (Market Queen, Atwima Mponua).

The female attendees in Ada East in particular spoke about the meetings as allowing them to understand their rights and to be better organised in their groups:

“To discuss our rights and how to move forward.”

(Market Woman, Ada East)

Women in both Districts also saw the purpose of the meetings as being about understanding that women have the right to speak out amongst men. One of the trainee aspirants in Ada East stated that the purpose was “to open the eyes of women on how to communicate with men and not be afraid to speak the way that men are speaking.”
In Atwima Mponua one of the women also mentioned that the purpose was “as per the Constitution of Ghana to know what men can do, women can do the same. There is no discrimination” (elected DA member).

In Atwima Mponua, many of the women saw the meetings as being about promoting women’s leadership in different spheres including Local Government. This was mentioned far less in Ada East.

“To be able to take up leadership positions as women.”
(Church Council Member, Atwima Mponua)

“To empower women to take up leadership positions and make women self confident.”
(SHEP Coordinator, GES, Atwima Mponua)

“To participate in governance and take up leadership at the DA, Unit Committee and national Parliament.”
(Women’s organiser for NDC, Atwima Mponua)

Finally, in Atwima Mponua the purpose of the meeting was seen by some as an opportunity not only to apply for leadership positions themselves, but support other women leaders, to, “rally support behind women e.g. Assembly women and other women leaders” (church Council Leader). In this District, the market women who do not attend the meetings stated that the Market Queen tells them it is time to take up leadership positions and to work in unity. She has told them that whatever a man can do a woman can do.

From the decision makers’ perspective, the meetings provide an opportunity for women to raise their issues: in Ada East, “women raise their problems and come to me to see how I can solve their problems” (DCE Ada East) and in Atwima Mponua: “it is an eye opener to most of the women in the District to let them know that the DA is supposed to support them” (DCD Atwima Mponua). One of the purposes of the meetings is, therefore, to ensure women know that the local decision makers should be listening to them.

The NCCE staff member in Ada East was clear that the purpose of the meetings is about accountability, “Mainly the meetings are to let women know that they are part and parcel of good governance.” He also highlighted a separate issue which many women mentioned about leadership, “they can deduce that if they take up leadership positions they can sometimes do it better than men.”

The Director of CHRAJ in Ada East said that the purpose of the meetings was, “to know the problems of the market women, the dressmakers and hairdressers and see how to resolve them.”

There are some notable differences between the two Districts in that more women in Atwima Mponua emphasised the meetings being about promoting women’s leadership, whereas in Ada East women saw the meetings being more about understanding their rights and organising themselves as women’s groups. These differences are discussed further in section 7.
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“As per the constitution of Ghana to know what men can do, women can do the same.”

6.3) Who attends the space?

6.3.1) Which women participate?

Gender Centre’s intention was to reach a diverse group of leaders from different associations and groups to ensure that they would reach different pockets of their communities. Whilst this intention has been broadly met, the research did not clearly identify if some sections of the community were not represented. Associations are organised groups of women, usually around a particular trade or church or community groups. The groups who attend the quarterly meetings include those formed by individual growers including: cassava growers, tomato growers, palm oil growers and the Market Women’s Association that represents all of the traders within a particular market. In addition, there are women with other vocations outside of the market including: dressmakers and hairdressers. There are also representatives from church fellowships, women’s organisers from political parties, local women’s community groups and Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs). The women attendees consulted in the research in Ada East mainly saw themselves as representing their associations. In Atwima Mponua women talked about representing their communities first and foremost and then different groups (community and political) and associations for example PTA, NPP and church groups. Hence these women saw it as their responsibility to try and resolve problems in their communities. The women who were from the women’s wing of different political parties were also understood to be united around common issues in their communities and spoke of mobilising people in their communities, not only within their political groups.

It is generally the leaders of groups and associations such as the Chairs, secretaries and treasurers who attend the meetings. In total, the Gender Centre staff estimated that around 60 – 80 women from associations attend the quarterly meetings (one-two per association). The leaders attend but may also take one other group member with them. These women were first invited to the meetings by the Gender Centre, following a project inception meeting for a range of stakeholders in the District, where the project and main activities were introduced. It is clear that these women have some level of status being leaders of different groups and associations, however the women are not necessarily formally educated and there is no bias against illiterate or poor women.

The Gender Centre considered the women consulted in the research, as representative of women who attend the quarterly meetings. They varied in age from 26 to over 55. Overall, the group in Atwima Mponua had more younger and fewer older women.17 In Ada East, all except two of the women were married, in Atwima Mponua, all except four were married. The women come from different communities and some have to travel quite a distance to attend the meetings in the Assembly rooms. The meetings are organised on days which do not clash with the local markets.

17. In Ada East, out of the 17 women involved in the research, only two women were aged 26-35, five were between the ages of 36 and 45, three aged 46-55 and six were over 55. In Atwima Mponua, out of the 21 women, five were aged 26–35; seven were between the ages of 36 and 45 and six from 46–55, with only three women over 55.
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The women in both Districts were mainly involved in informal work as traders, farmers, hairdressers, and dressmakers. The Gender Centre reports that the education level of the majority of women who attend the quarterly meetings is fairly low. They may have reached Junior High School (JHS) but not all would have completed this level. Generally, the older women tended to be less educated but they are respected due to their age. Many of the older women consulted, particularly from the fishing communities in Ada East, were not literate. In Atwima Mponua, the three women who worked for the GES were more educated than the others and were in formal employment. In Ada East the two Assembly members appeared to be more educated (in terms of literacy) than the other women and in both Districts these more educated women were seen to have more status in the group.

There were a few examples of meeting participants who heard about the meetings from other women or from being around the Assembly and who had decided to attend and these were not necessarily leaders of groups. Hence the women who attend already have some status within their groups and community, even though many of them said their groups were not active or organised and they themselves were not confident to be leaders or speak in public and mobilise others.

In both Districts, female DA members also attend the meetings. Those the researchers met in Ada East were confident and somewhat more articulate than other women. In Ada East, one of the DA members tended to speak on behalf of other women, however they did not necessarily agree with her and were able to challenge her.

The Gender Centre works with a total of 45 trainee aspiring leaders in each of the three project locations (15 in each) who also attend the meetings. These women are usually professionals working in the health, education or social services sectors in Local Government. Some of them are leaders of their associations or they are District Assembly members. For example in Atwima Mponua, the Market Queen is also a trainee and in Ada East one of the women elected Assembly members is a trainee. These women receive training on a range of issues related to women’s rights and leadership from Gender Centre. The aim is for them to assume leadership positions in different arenas. The involvement of these trainees in the quarterly meetings is a key part of Gender Centre’s approach as the intention was always that the trainees would support the other women in these meetings, through working with them to share learning on women’s rights and leadership in their communities. It was clear that the other women see the trainees as role models and are keen to hear what they have learned in their training. The trainees are sometimes invited to take on a role as a resource person in the quarterly meetings, which serves to motivate the trainees themselves and the other women participants.

District decision makers who attend include the District Coordinating Director (DCD) who is the highest level civil servant in the District and/or the District Chief Executive (DCE) (political head of the District), the Budget Officer and the Community Development Officer. The DCE in Ada East attends each quarterly meeting and in Atwima Mponua, the DCD said that he sometimes attends the meetings but that he cannot attend all of them because he is busy. It was not possible to interview the DCE in Atwima Mponua during the research but it was understood that he also regularly attends the quarterly meetings. The Chiefs consulted in Ada East and Atwima Mponua both said that they do not attend the meetings. Some Queen Mothers in Ada East participate, religious leaders do not.
Representatives of Government Agencies. In Ada East, representatives from Local Government agencies have attended one or two of the meetings agencies including CHRAJ, GES, GHS, NCCE and Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) which were mentioned by women attendees. The CHRAJ representative here acknowledged that other representatives have talked at the meetings about problems in the District and discussed how these can be resolved. In Atwima Mponua, there is less representation from Local Government groups; CHRAJ, NCCE and DOVVSU do not attend and do not give talks at the meetings; however in Atwima Mponua some women who work for Government agencies are invited as participants, i.e. women from the GES, which creates a different dynamic as in Atwima Mponua they see themselves as invested in the meetings and build relationships with the women over time, clearly a different level of interaction than as a visiting speaker.

6.3.2) What motivates women to attend?
As noted above, many of the women were invited to the meetings following the project inception meeting and most have continued to attend during the three years of the project prior to the research, although some of the fishmongers said that they had stopped coming in the past year. A few women were self-motivated to be involved, particularly in Atwima Mponua where they had heard about the meetings and become curious as to their purpose:

“I do petty trading, I sell around here. I heard that people were having a meeting and I enquired about it and how I could join. I wanted to talk about women’s issues to get an education and learn from women.”
(Church Council Member, Atwima Mponua)

“I heard that they were appointing people to go and they needed people. When I started going I realised the importance of the meetings.”
(Women’s Fellowship Member, Atwima Mponua)

“I visited the Assembly one day and was eavesdropping on the meeting and I was really interested. This made me join the group of attendees.”
(Women’s organiser, NDC, Atwima Mponua)

It was evident from those women consulted that they value the meetings in many ways which are discussed in section 7, hence they are motivated to continue attending them.

6.3.3) Who does not attend
The project has not targeted the most marginalised and excluded women because the intention is that the women who are leaders in their groups will go back and share their learning with their group members and others in the community, including the marginalised groups. Also by targeting women leaders, it is intended they will be encouraged to take up other leadership roles.

It was not possible within the research framework to explore which women are most marginalised in different communities and how the meeting participants connect to these. For example, in Atwima Mponua there are settler communities in some areas but the research did not explore the concerns of settler women nor how they raise these.
In Ada East, it was understood that some of the fishing communities are very marginalised and these communities have high rates of teenage pregnancy, early marriage and polygamy.

It was difficult to get a sense of the number of women in communities who may not belong to any kind of association and through what channels they can raise their concerns since, as stated by the Executive Director of the Gender Centre, “you need to be in a group to have your voice heard.” The Gender Centre staff did not identify any representatives from groups that do not attend the meetings but felt that they have not collaborated as much as they would have liked with other NGOs/CBOs working in the Districts. They also recognised that they have not engaged with church groups in Ada East until recently. In Ada East, women mentioned that bakers, caterers and mat weavers don’t come to the meetings. They used to come at the beginning, but not any more. They also mentioned that there are very few Muslim women in the District and they don’t come to the meetings, whereas in Atwima Mponua the researchers met with a Muslim woman from a Zongo community who attends the meetings.

In Ada East, when the women attendees were asked how women who are not members of associations raise issues, one of the women leaders who runs her own community association stated “if women aren’t in a group then we advise them to join one.” She also mentioned that if women are not working, then they would normally be reached by community association leaders. A few of the women gave examples of providing support and advice to women with problems in their communities, such as help with school fees or advice on domestic violence issues, however this seemed to be an occasional rather than a regular activity. Some gave examples of conducting meetings in their communities and with their congregations but these activities are not particularly targeting marginalised women. The Community Development Manager in Ada East stated that she does outreach work with groups of disabled people and encourages them to attend the quarterly meetings.

A few of the women in the Fishmongers’ Associations who were interviewed in Ada East said that they too would like to participate in the quarterly meetings like their leaders because they would like to benefit from the learning and this was a view shared by the church Council representatives consulted in Atwima Mponua. The Gender Centre themselves have reflected at various times during the project, on whether they should invite different women to each quarterly meeting, so that a greater number of women have the opportunity to participate but they remain undecided on this issue. Many of the women saw their continued involvement in the meetings as key to building their confidence, relationships and developing their leadership skills, indeed some of the women in Atwima Mponua said they would like to meet monthly rather than quarterly because they value the time spent with other women and discussing issues.

Aside from the decision makers and representatives from Local Government institutions, all of the attendees are women. The Gender Centre acknowledged that this has been a challenge, “The men want to know why they are not involved” (Project Officer), the men say that they are the ones that would be able to influence others in their communities so they are the ones that should be invited.

18. Zongo is an heterogeneous community with a unique cultural practice, completely different from any community and ethnic group in Ghana, the people in Zongo communities are bound together by Islam not ethnicity.
The Gender Centre staff believe that women are now able to make changes in their communities but the men are threatened by the women being empowered, which is why they have started to say that they need to be involved. When this issue was raised by some of the male decision makers consulted in the research, the Gender Centre staff highlighted that women have been in the background for so long and that is why effort is needed to support women’s participation.

In Ada East, the women attendees brought up the fact that men should attend. Around half of the 17 women consulted thought that men should be invited and that they would feel comfortable to have men in the meetings. They said that they go back to tell their husbands about what they have learnt but that they don’t understand it:

“Men need to know how far we have reached and that it is the time for women.”
(Market Woman, Ada East)

“Men have to know how far we have come, they have to be in the know, we have come so far.”
(Market Woman, Ada East)

One of the Queen Mothers in Ada East also said that men should be invited, so that men can hear what the women are learning from another source because they won’t believe their wives. She thought there is a danger that men will feel threatened by the meetings because their capacity is not being built. The Chief in Ada East has not been to the meetings himself but he also thinks that men should be invited. The women in Ada East who wanted to involve men said they were now confident so they would be comfortable for men to participate in the meetings.

6.3.4) Who has the strongest voice in the meetings?

Amongst the quarterly meeting participants everyone has the chance to speak, emphasis is placed on people solving their problems and going back to associations and groups and mobilising others. The CHRAJ representative in Ada East stated that “of course everyone has the chance to speak. The Gender Centre staff are not from here but the focal person is able to understand the questions and throw it back to the officials. I like that each person from the group gets to talk.” The DCD in Atwima Mponua stated that anyone can go to the meetings19 and has the right to speak, “there is no cut off, they can listen and add their voice.”

In Ada East, it was felt by the women consulted that the market women had the strongest voice and because so many women are connected to the market, even those in other traders’ associations, the women see this strength as positive because they can unite behind their demands for the changes needed to the market. It was not the Gender Centre’s original intention to focus on market women, the Executive Director explained, “We didn’t set out to do it but if you go to the Districts these are the issues which predominate and we also found this out in the project baseline.”

19. Although the GC has invited leaders and representatives from various groups and associations to attend the meetings, over the project period a few other women have come to the meetings because they have heard about them and have been interested to attend or invited by meeting attendees to come along. In this sense the meeting are seen as open to all.
The Programme Officer added that aside from farming and palm oil production, everyone has to sell and they do that in the market. In addition as many of the women explained, everyone has to buy in the markets, so they are an important part of life.

In Ada East, a representative of a church organisation has only recently begun attending the meetings. One of the women in this group who is the Women’s Convenor for the DA and Chair of the Sub-Committee on Women and Children’s Affairs felt it was a missed opportunity not having involved more church groups in the meetings, particularly as they are well linked to community members and are therefore a good channel for sharing information. Given the findings from Atwima Mponua, where many of the women participants are from church groups and have gone back to share learning with their congregations and to initiate other actions in their communities, it would suggest that involving women from different church groups is certainly important, particularly as these women in Atwima Mponua saw themselves as representing their communities.

“You need to be in a group to have your voice heard.”
7) The power of the space for the women

This section reviews the research findings relating to the benefits women perceive from their involvement in the space and what they have been able to do as a consequence. The 38 women who were consulted in both Districts identified a number of important changes on a personal level and in relation to their families or communities, which they perceived as being a result of their participation in the quarterly meeting spaces. These changes are summarised here and then presented in greater detail in the sub-sections below.

Everyone had something to say about the benefits of the meetings. Many of the women talked about the meeting space as a platform which sparks ideas, gives inspiration, lets them know you have a right to be heard etc. Clearly the women already participated in other meetings and spaces before coming to the quarterly meetings – some of these mixed spaces such as the PTA and the church council, others for women only, such as women’s wings of church councils and political parties. There are also other decision-making spaces where women do not usually participate, such as meetings of the Elders. Many women talked of attending PTA meetings in schools, others spoke of church groups where they also learn about family and caring for children but a difference in the quarterly meetings is they are learning about women’s rights and about how they can make individual changes and demand action from decision makers. Also the quarterly meetings offer them an opportunity to come together and meet with women from different communities, groups and trades. It enables a diverse group of women to understand that others share many of their concerns, that the Government has a responsibility to listen to their concerns, that together they have a greater chance of being heard and that they have a right to hold the Government to account.

The women come across as strong and articulate and clear about their priorities and what they want decision makers to do and how to raise issues with them. Inspired by the meetings the women go back to their groups to discuss issues and organise and some have continued to approach Assembly members and the DCE to raise their concerns which again reinforces their confidence. Many spoke of learning that they themselves need to take initiative and action; they come away from the meetings with practical ideas of how to do this and through their actions they see that they can bring about changes in their communities that are valued by others.

Many spoke of valuing the unity and solidarity of coming together as women and learning that they are equal to men and can do the things they always thought only men could do. This suggests that coming together as women is an important aspect of the meeting space giving them the freedom to talk about their concerns and to build confidence and skills together. They said they valued having the opportunity to discuss amongst themselves how they can resolve problems.

“Sometimes when you meet together with other people and talk together there is something inside you that opens up and others can help you.”

(Teacher, church Fellowship member and trainee aspiring leader, Atwima Mponua)
"It is good to have it. Women are coming together to network and sit to address issues together as women."
(Women’s NDC organiser, Atwima Mponua)

Others highlighted the importance of unity, solidarity and learning from each other:

"I enjoy the unity, voice, supporting each other and sharing ideas."
(Queen Mother, Ada East)

"Most of all I have made new friends and learnt about other communities – before I didn’t know about others and this has helped me in my work."
(Girl Child Coordinator, GES, Atwima Mponua)

Some feel empowered and inspired to take on leadership roles. The women meeting participants are exposed to professional women in the form of the project trainee aspirants. They also see women from the Gender Centre facilitating the meetings and learn how to articulate issues, they hear from women Assembly members and learn about their role. They highlight that this process of learning together, sharing with other women, being listened to by decision makers, has helped raise their confidence and self-esteem.
The women were asked in particular to reflect on their confidence to speak out, whether their concerns are listened to by decision makers and whether decision makers take action in response to their concerns. The majority said that they were not confident initially, were not informed on many issues and did not know who to raise issues with. Many also said they were not aware that they have a right to be consulted by Government. The majority of women said that they felt that decision makers did not listen to them before they became involved in the project and that decision makers did not take action in response to their concerns. Following their involvement in the meetings, all the women consulted reported feeling confident to speak out about issues which affect them, they felt that decision makers do now listen to them and they know who to approach in relation to different concerns. Many also felt that decision makers (District Government, traditional leaders, staff of Government agencies) are now taking action in response to their concerns. Two to three women in each District felt this had not changed, noting that the Local Government is over burdened with responsibilities and is short of funds.

Decision makers observed that more women have been coming to them to speak about issues as a result of the meetings. This is interesting given that the meetings only happen four times a year, but the women claim it has been sufficient to bring about these changes. Many of the women continue to meet in between the meetings for example in the market place, in their associations, some are from the same or neighbouring communities, in their churches etc. so there is opportunity to continue to discuss and share ideas beyond the meetings.
Whilst the research was not a comparative study between the two Districts, there were some notable differences between how women in both Districts saw the quarterly meeting space and what they reported it enabled them to do. Those in Ada East were united around their interest in the markets and the need to strengthen their associations. They highlighted that they had learned that it is important to be organised in an association as part of the quarterly meetings and that through being organised they are better able to raise issues with the DCE through their association leaders and that as a group they have more influence. They also placed more emphasis on the quarterly meeting space being a place to raise issues about which they wanted District officials to take action. For some it was important that as associations they have also been able to access technical training through Government and NGO programmes and in some cases they have been able to access credit.

In the Ada East, many of the achievements important to women related to improvements made to the Kasseh market by the Local Government and through the women themselves taking collective action, such as communal labour or becoming market toll collectors, which has resulted in increased revenue from the market for the District Government’s Internally Generated Fund (IGF). This fund consists of locally generated taxes and makes up part of the District Government’s budget in addition to the funds they receive from Central Government and donor funding channelled through Central Government.
In Atwima Mponua, the women saw the meetings more as a source of knowledge and inspiration for women’s leadership. They placed an emphasis on having gained the understanding that women can also become leaders and many talked about the knowledge they had gained on issues such as wills and marriage and being able to share what they have learned to help other women in their communities. They also gave examples of different strategies they had employed to raise issues with District decision makers and Chiefs in order to ensure actions are taken. Women in this District talked less about the importance of being organised into associations. The actions they were demanding from District decision makers and Chiefs included establishing healthcare and sanitation facilities in their communities, building roads and school facilities. They also stressed the importance of taking actions themselves and not waiting for others to address their needs.

The findings in relation to key areas of change defined by the women are discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

7.1) Women have gained confidence to speak in public

Many of the women consulted from the different groups and associations in both Districts talked about having gained confidence through participating in the meetings which are women only, apart from the male decision makers who are invited to attend. In particular the women talked about now having confidence to be able to speak in public. They find the meeting space supportive and value the approach of representatives from each group and association being given the opportunity to speak in turn. They also spoke about learning from other women in the meetings in relation to how to express issues and how to present themselves and dress appropriately for meetings and public speaking. Some of the members of women’s associations consulted in the Fishmongers’ Association in Ada East spoke of their association leaders as having become empowered as leaders through attending the quarterly meetings.

In both Districts, two of the women Assembly members who participate in the quarterly meetings said they were already confident to speak out before they got involved in the quarterly meetings as they have experience of speaking in Assembly meetings. Many women explained that in the past when the Government holds consultation meetings in communities, that it is only men who speak in these spaces (an observation that was also confirmed by Government officials), but that now because they have confidence to speak, they are not afraid of talking in front of men in these and other types of meetings. The women gave examples of having gained confidence and courage to speak to the Chief in their communities or to church leaders, as well as the DCE; they shared examples of speaking in community, PTA and church meetings to pass on what they have learned in the quarterly meetings.

“Formerly market women didn’t have confidence to speak, I myself didn’t have confidence. I am now confident as a result of the gender meetings. The meetings gave us confidence to organise and discuss among ourselves.”

(Member of Market Women’s Association, Ada East)
“I was confident before but I didn’t have a platform to raise my issues. Without the platform I was left with silence. Now the Gender Centre has given me a platform and through the meetings I have received encouragement and education. They have taught me I can go forward.”
(Women’s organiser NDC, Atwima Mponua)

“Before I wasn’t confident to speak. In meetings there were issues I didn’t understand. Now I can speak and now I want to be an Assembly woman. When there was a meeting with men, men would shut me down but now I can speak out in meetings with men.”
(Member of Market Women’s Association, organiser of women’s group in her community and aspiring assembly member, Ada East)

Feedback from District officials also recognised women’s increased confidence and ability to speak out and voice their concerns:

“Now women boldly come and tell you seriously about their issues. The women are serious with their issues and want results.”
(DCE, Ada East)

“The meetings have really encouraged women to raise their voices in public. Women now feel free to express their views and don’t feel any shyness. Now if we go to a community to talk about issues such as water, the women will work together and be involved in decision-making.”
(Gender Desk Officer, Atwima Mponua)

Four out of eight trainee aspirants in Ada East and six out of 11 in Atwima Mponua, when highlighting important personal changes for them as a result of involvement in the quarterly meetings, said that they had gained confidence to voice their ideas and speak in public.

7.2) Women have been able to organise in associations or strengthen their existing associations

Many of the women in Ada East spoke about learning how important it was to organise and be part of an association in the quarterly meetings. It was clear that the District Community Development Manager who also acts as the project focal person in the District who organises the meetings and interprets for the Gender Centre staff who attend the meeting, sees the formation of Women’s Associations as a key component of her community development work. She has therefore followed up with many of the women attending the quarterly meetings to support them to reinvigorate or strengthen the organisation of their associations. Hence many women spoke of their associations as having been inactive before the project and now being active, and 10 out of the 12 women said their particular association had been inactive before and is now active.
The Community Development Manager for the East Ada District helped to form the Kasseh MWA in 2012 and the MWA for Ada Foah market in 2014; in the same year, she also formed the Fishmongers’ Association. The groups of fishmongers existed in communities but were not joined in one association, however now they have one executive at District, Regional and National Levels so that the Government can link with them through the Department of Fisheries. Other Community Development office staff are responsible for other Associations e.g. the Dressmakers’ Association, the Hairdressers’ Association, the Salt Producer’s Association. For some of these groups e.g. the salt producers and fishmongers, the CDM has helped them form a savings and loans association. She uses the approach implemented by CARE as she was previously involved in a CARE village savings and loans project.20

“Through the Community Development Manager we learned about unity. When we came to the gender meetings we didn’t know women have rights. We realised that through working together we can do a lot of things.”
(Representative of the Salt Producers Association, Ada East)

“Before we were not organised, now we are saving. Through the Gender Centre we have learned to organise ourselves in the gender meetings – we have learnt how to market fish and have learned there is no support from anywhere so we have to help each other.”
(Fishmonger, Ada East)

“The MWA was not active three years ago, the sellers were there but had no organisation. Now we have a constitution and registration and bank account.”
(Aspiring DA Member, Ada East)

In Atwima Mponua, some women also talked about their associations having been less active in the past and having become more organised through their involvement in the quarterly meetings, however they raised this issue less. A leader from the Hairdressers’ Association explained that her association was established only this year with 20 women and five men and has been linked to a Government youth employment initiative. As a result of confidence gained through the meetings, she has approached the National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO) to ask them for equipment – hairdryers for apprentices and to access credit over a two-year period – as part of the Government’s Youth Employment Programme which was delivered through this agency. It was not clear why the women who were growing cocoa in Atwima Mponua were not part of any association.

Others in Atwima Mponua spoke about the MWA which has existed for 10 years, but the leaders were less confident in the past. They said this has changed through what they have learned in the quarterly meetings and their Chair (Market Queen) is also one of the trainee aspiring leaders. Now members said they are aware that being in an association is a means to access credit and other kinds of support.

20. The Village Savings and Loans (VSLA) model is a self-managed and self-capitalised microfinance methodology developed by CARE International in Niger in 1991 and has spread to at least 73 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, with over 11 million active participants worldwide. (See http://www.vsla.net for more information).
“The Market Women’s Association was not active before and now they are. For example we have acquired a credit facility when we weren’t bold enough before. Now we have received an education on how we can sell and increase our income. We need to be in a group to access a loan.”

(Market Queen, Atwima Mponua)

7.3) Women have been inspired to contest for and take on leadership positions

In both Districts, though more so in Atwima Mponua, the women consulted highlighted having learned through their participation in the meetings that women can take up leadership positions:

“The platform is an eye opener. We thought men should take leadership positions, now we realised that women can take part. The space is important for us.”

(Market Queen, Atwima Mponua)

“Initially I thought leadership was a man’s world. Now because of the meetings I realised that women can do what a man can do. Not just what men can do, more!”

(Member of fish traders’ association, Atwima Mponua)

Some spoke of leadership as being able to guide others in their communities and to act as role models and gave examples of how they do this. A women’s organiser for the NDC in her community in Atwima Mponua reported that she has gained a lot from participating in the gender meetings and she now wants to share her knowledge with others e.g. how to generate an income and manage money. She explained that now people know who she is because of the meetings and they come to her and she can offer them advice. Another woman in Atwima Mponua District who is a member of the Women’s Fellowship Church Council explained that she raises awareness of the importance of girls’ education because this is a responsibility of both parents to take care of their children; she holds a community meeting with men and women and goes to the church to sensitise the whole congregation.

Many of the women in both Districts as noted above, are already leaders in their associations and groups but they spoke of having more awareness of what this leadership role involves in terms of taking different kinds of actions and sharing information with others. For example a Zongo Muslim woman in Atwima Mponua explained that the main problems in her community are that women are relegated to the background and have been suppressed. After the quarterly meetings she meets with members of the Zongo women’s group in her community and encourages them to be more independent economically and to raise capital to start businesses, “currently most of the women in my community are unemployed, I am the one leading them.”
Some of the women had been inspired to stand for or take up other leadership positions such as in Unit Committees, the District Assembly and church associations. In Ada East, two of the 20 women consulted who regularly attend the quarterly meetings were planning to stand for the DA elections which are now due to take place in September 2015, having been postponed from March. One woman in this District who already leads a women’s group in her community spoke about having acquired the confidence and the idea to become an Assembly member from the gender meetings. She wants to do this because she wants things to be better for her community, “men will stop us so we have fear but through the gender meetings I know I can do it.” She thinks the men in her community will vote for her, this was supported by her Uncle who was present for part of the interview with her, who said that he and everyone else would vote for her. The majority of the women consulted in this District however spoke less about taking up different leadership positions but placed more emphasis on being more organised in their associations and the need to strengthen these associations to benefit their livelihoods.

21. The Unit Committees are situated below the sub-metropolitan District councils, urban or zonal councils, town or area councils in the Local Government structure, and represent the community level. The District Assemblies may delegate any of their functions, excluding the power to legislate, levy rates or borrow money, to sub-metropolitan District councils, town, area, zonal or urban councils or Unit Committees. Unit committees are partially elected bodies. Their membership consists of 10 elected members and five Government appointees.
In Atwima Mponua, three of the 20 women participants consulted were intending to stand for election to Unit Committees (UCs):

“When nominations opened I wasn’t confident to pick up a form but now I am bold and will apply for the Unit Committee.”

(Women’s organiser NDC Atwima Mponua)

A women’s organiser for the NDC party in Atwima Mponua said she also got the idea of becoming a UC member through her involvement in the gender meetings, “Most UC members are men and if you want to send an issue to the Chief, women’s issues are not discussed so I see it as a way to raise women’s issues at community level.” She sees becoming a UC member as a useful step to becoming a DA member, “it helps, as you gain popularity and you are visible in your community.” Her aim is to become an Assembly member and if she were able to be better educated, she would like to become an MP.

In Ada East, Government officials noted that a greater number of women are standing for Assembly elections this year (eight women are known to be standing for election) and in Atwima Mponua for UC and DA elections, an increase that was mainly being attributed to the Gender Centre’s work in the District. The Gender Desk Officer in Atwima Mponua reported that she had held a sensitisation event to encourage women to participate in decision-making and that this along with the Gender Centre’s work has meant that there are more women running for the DA: Previously there were only three women in the Assembly and now there are 21 standing for the District Assembly and Unit committees (including seven for the DA).

Women in Atwima Mponua also gave examples of other types of leadership roles they had taken up:

“I can now speak in public. There was an election in our church and I stood for a leadership position.”

(Women’s organiser NDC and Government appointed Assembly member and project trainee, Atwima Mponua)

“I set up an association ‘God is alive’ made up of community women. Being an Assembly member I was able to lead the group to access the MASLOC (Microfinance and Small Loans Centre) credit facility.”

(Elected Assembly member, Atwima Mponua)

Amongst the trainee aspiring leaders consulted in both Districts there were many examples of different leadership roles that the trainees had taken up since the beginning of the project. Clearly the trainees have benefited from specific training focused on preparing them for leadership roles in addition to attending the quarterly meetings; hence taking up new leadership roles was a key objective of the Gender Centre’s work with them. For example, in Ada East “leadership” received the highest number of mentions of important personal changes (six) amongst the eight trainees. Of the 11 trainee aspirants in Atwima Mponua, eight had taken up leadership roles in different church groups and Committees, one had taken up a role as School Porter and one was aspiring to be a UC member and another a DA member.
Of the eight trainee aspirants in Ada East, one had founded an NGO, another had become a leader in the National Union of Teachers, one had taken up a leadership role in her workplace in CHRAJ and others in church and associations. The table in Annex 1 shows details of the women’s existing roles and the leadership positions they have taken up or are contesting.

7.4) Women have gained knowledge on specific issues enabling them to take individual action and share learning with others

The women in both Districts talked about the quarterly meetings being an important space for learning on issues including women’s rights, leadership, technical information relevant to their associations and on specific topics such as the Intestate Succession law, wills, marriage and child care. In Atwima Mponua, the women placed considerable importance on the learning from a recent meeting on wills. Being able to make their own wills was particularly important to women in this District and some of them have taken action and made a will.

“At the last quarterly meeting they talked about the Intestate Succession Law and the Wills Act and I realised I can make a will even if I am not old. I talked to my parents to ensure they make a will.”
(Market Women’s Association member, Atwima Mponua)

“In relation to wills, usually when we marry we write Mr and Mrs X (which is the surname of the man), however we have learned we have to write our maiden names as if our husband marries again there will be another Mrs X, so we need our own names to ensure we are owners of property.”
(NDC organiser, Atwima Mponua)

In Ada East, speakers from other agencies such as NCCE and CHRAJ were invited to speak at the quarterly meetings on specific topics such as voter education, the constitution and women’s justice issues. The speakers valued this as they saw it as a way to better understand the issues and concerns of women in communities. The women participants found it useful to understand the role of different agencies and to be better informed about how and where to seek help. The Director of CHRAJ explained, “different people talk at the meeting – I have talked, the police have, the GES. They talk about the problems in the District and discuss how these can be resolved. This is helping make changes in people’s lifestyle. Those who come to the meetings are getting the message. After the meetings some women come to my office. Before they didn’t know where to go with their problems. Some come to clarify information and others want support for problems.”

In both Districts women talked about having a better understanding of marriage and the rights and responsibilities of men and women within marriage. Some of the feedback from women on what they have learned in the meetings is included below:

“It helps us with our families. This is the biggest problem we all have today. Before if we got beaten we would hide, now we know it’s not right because of the gender meetings.”
(Women’s fellowship member, Ada East)
Now we can speak out: Women’s experiences of political participation in Ghana

“It has been an eye opener – when women were beaten I thought it was discipline. Now I know I can report it. I thought sex was an obligation, now I know that if sex is forced even within marriage, then it is marital rape.”
(NDC organiser, Atwima Mponua)

“The meetings even enter into our marriage; we have learnt how we need to work together at home. We have been educated on marriage and divorce. I now counsel other women on their marriage problems.”
(Chair of Anyakpor community Fishmongers’ Association, Ada East)

Some women talked about learning to be independent as being important for them. They also talked about learning that women should take more responsibility to support their families financially, as traditionally this is seen as men’s responsibility:

“I have learned to be independent and not rely on my husband. Initially the perception is that the man should take care of the family so even as a woman you shouldn’t need to support him but I now realise I should do. In the churches we have fundraising events – mainly the men donate but once economically empowered, women can also contribute.”
(Women’s Fellowship Church Council and farmer, Atwima Mponua)
Now we can speak out: Women’s experiences of political participation in Ghana

As a result of the knowledge the women have acquired through the meetings, they explained that they are self motivated to go back to their groups and communities to share what they have learned – some speak to their church congregations or organise meetings in the community. They speak on a range of issues including marriage, domestic violence and women’s financial independence. One woman spoke of joining with another participant from the meetings to share learning:

“We go house to house or go to the church and ask to speak to the church members. We even go to neighbouring communities. I speak about women’s leadership, marriage in terms of women not being active to support husbands – they should be more active and take more responsibilities, women need to support husband to take care of their children. We used to think we didn’t have to provide for the children financially and that this is only the responsibility of the men.”

(Women’s organiser NDC, Atwima Mponua)

The Chair of Anyakpor community fishmongers’ association, Ada East explained how she has taken action in relation to domestic violence in her community:

“We also learned about domestic violence at the gender meeting. Formerly men beat their wives, now this has come down. We are hoping it will go altogether. We organised a meeting in our community and decided that if someone beats their wife then we have to send the issue to our Elders and fine them so that they don’t do it again. Both men and women together attended the meeting to decide on this community bye-law.”

A member of this Fishmongers’ Association who was consulted during the research reported that the Chair feeds back to the members, noting that she has talked about domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, care of children, and the education of children. The Chair also briefs them about the Assembly and tells them to get closer to the Assembly through different means, although it was noted that they don’t hear back from the Assembly. A fishmonger from a different community said that from her association’s leader who attends the gender meetings, she learned that children need to go to school and wear clothes (many children in their community do not). In addition, she learned about improved hygiene of fish preparation for smoking fish, so as to better preserve fish. Other fishmongers who attend the quarterly meetings also highlighted this issue, noting that they are able to share and discuss technical problems like these at the meetings.

Members of church associations in Atwima Mponua shared some of the feedback they hear from their leaders who attend the quarterly meetings. Their examples cover a range of different topics:

“Initially I saw leadership as just men but now I know women can be leaders. We can go to the District Assembly and we can be those people.”
Now we can speak out: Women’s experiences of political participation in Ghana

- We learnt about wills and learnt about women taking up leadership positions;
- Initially I saw leadership as just men but now I know women can be leaders. We can go to the District Assembly and we can be those people;
- We learnt about taking care of our children and hygiene;
- We do not need to wait until a man dies to make a will. If women are not properly married we need to find a way of making the man formalise the relationship.

The trainee aspirants also go back to their communities and share what they have learned in their training sessions and in the quarterly meetings, through organising regular community sensitisation meetings, which are open to men and women. They hold radio discussion programmes on a range of women’s rights issues. They have committed to these activities as part of the FLOW project and Gender Centre monitors their activities.

In Atwima Mponua, all the trainees consulted said they speak on the radio, “not everyone has a radio but you don’t need it because we use the information centres within the communities in the evenings so that everyone can listen to what we say.” Another trainee explained that on the radio they talk about what they have learned – why women should stand as leaders, wills, child rights, equality:

“We educate them that boys and girls are equal in relation to housework – boys can cook and fetch the water. In the past, sometimes we separated the boys and girls and let the boys play football whilst we sent the girls to the kitchen. Now we know the boys can help in the kitchen; the boys have to sweep up in school so they can also sweep in the home. At first people aren’t sure but we are trying to educate them.”

(Teacher trainee, Atwima Mponua)

Another trainee in Atwima Mponua added that in the past, she would not give her children equal opportunities but her attitude has changed. She is also a teacher and explained that girls were discriminated against in relation to the courses offered them for study. Both these teachers said they are trying to change the attitudes of their fellow teachers so that they treat boys and girls equally in schools.

7.5) Women have raised issues with decision makers and have taken action

In both Districts, the women shared a number of examples of issues they had raised with District decision makers as a result of being empowered through the quarterly meetings. It was clear that they are taking up a wide range of issues in different ways both individually, in their homes, communities and through working in groups to leverage voice. They are using their new knowledge of who to approach in relation to different issues and some are working with other women to influence decision makers and get things done. In some cases, they are not waiting for decision makers to act but are taking actions themselves through mobilising others. A GES representative in Ada East said in her view women are now empowered to come out, “they come to the directorate to lodge a complaint. In our community before women didn’t talk. Now they are coming out. Outside of the gender meeting women’s voices are now being heard. They are going to the DA themselves. Now when Assembly people are campaigning, women ask questions. Women are confident.”
The kinds of issues raised with decision makers and actions taken by the women in the Districts differed to a certain extent, with women in Atwima Mponua raising and taking action on a greater range of community problems than those in Ada East, who in the majority were focused on the problems in the markets. The Gender Centre noted that the women in Atwima Mponua are Ashanti women who are traditionally strong and active and command a certain amount of respect as a result of the matrilineal culture, under which property is passed through the female line. Under the system, although women command respect, a man’s wife and his children are not considered part of the man’s customary family and therefore will not be entitled to any of his property when he dies which is perhaps why many of the women highlighted how important it was to learn about wills. Many of the women in Atwima Mponua were small scale cocoa growers in addition to being market traders. Those in Ada East were predominantly traders, a number of them were from fishing communities and there were also farmers. Deeper analysis would be needed to understand how cultural issues, livelihood factors and educational background of the women in the two Districts affect women’s priorities and how they are able to act on these. The research has not addressed the differences between the resourcing of the two Districts, the Government’s commitment and capacity to address gender issues and the extent of consultation with women in the Districts.

In both Districts, there were examples from women referring to the quarterly meetings as helping them to understand who to raise concerns with:

“\textit{We didn’t know where to channel our issues. We know now that for some issues we should go to the Social Worker before going to the Chief or the Queen Mother.}”

\textit{(Market Queen, Atwima Mponua)}

An aspiring DA member in Ada East said that they learnt in the gender meetings that they should go to the Unit Committee to raise issues. However most of the women consulted in Ada East did not know their UC members or even if they exist. This was different in Atwima Mponua, where women talked about consulting UC members.

One or two women in both Districts explained that prior to the quarterly meetings they already raised issues with the DCE through writing letters and others spoke of raising concerns individually with their respective DA member in their communities. However the majority of women in Ada East said they did not know how to resolve their concerns relating to the market before:

“\textit{Before when we went to the market, we had lots of problems but didn’t know how to resolve them.}”

\textit{(Secretary of MWA, Ada East)}

Others spoke about not knowing where to raise issues and not having the courage to do so:

“\textit{As a woman when you have issues there is nowhere to discuss them, now we can go to the Assembly people.}”

\textit{(Participant in quarterly meeting, Ada East)}
“Before we used to go to the District officials but didn’t have the courage to wait to meet them. Secretaries would stop us and we didn’t have the confidence to challenge them. Now we go confidently.”
(Teacher, trainee aspirant, Atwima Mponua)

The DCE and other District officials participate in the quarterly meetings so the women have had contact with them there and then are confident to follow issues up with them in separate meetings. There were several examples of leaders of the Market and Fishmongers’ Associations in Ada East visiting the DCE to follow up on their concerns. As a result of the quarterly meetings and coming into contact with the market women, the DCE and Budget Officer reported having held meetings in the market with a number of the market women. This was also highlighted by some of the women:

“The DA organises meetings in the market every one-three months. Formerly (two years back) we didn’t have access to the Assembly but through the gender meetings, we were able to influence the Assembly to have meetings in the market.”
(Queen Mother who attends the quarterly meeting, Ada East)

Very few women spoke about raising issues with their MP, although in Ada East there were some examples of interactions with the MP, who is a woman. Some said the DCE transfers their problems to the MP. Two of the women felt the MP is becoming closer to them and others said issues they have raised include the need for toilets in the market and a children’s Ward in the hospital. It was explained that the MP for Ada has provided funding for the gravelling of the Ada Foah market site. “Because of the MWA, the MP has now seen the grief of the women” (woman DA member). They also explained that the MP is trying to organise the Queen Mothers into an Association so she can go to them and involve them in decision-making.

Women also spoke about the importance of working together in groups and having greater influence through collective action:

“From the quarterly meetings we understand that we can mobilise as a group and present issues as a group. We know that we can fix an appointment at a future date.”
(Member of Fishmongers’ Association, Atwima Mponua)
7.5.1) Types of issues raised by women with the DA and District officials and actions taken

In Ada East, it is mostly market related issues that are raised, with specific demands for action by the District Government, such as the need for security gates in Kasseh market and improvements to the drainage to prevent flooding. Other issues spoken about in the meetings are of concern to women in this District, in particular teenage pregnancy, but women did not mention pushing for any specific action on this and there were only a few examples of women taking action themselves in this area. For example, one of the Queen Mothers who attends the meeting said that they discuss market issues, “we are market women, people steal our goods so we reported the issue to the assembly and the DC authorised gates to be installed for the market. We are now raising issues about animals coming in to the market area with the DA.” She said that they also talk about teenage pregnancy in the quarterly meetings. She reported she raised this issue with the local Assembly man in her area but no one seems to be taking any action on it, although she herself was able to talk about teenage pregnancy on the radio through the Gender Centre project to educate children.

The leaders of the MWAs for both Kasseh and Ada Foah explained that the leaders of the MWA go together to see the DCE in his office. In addition, the market women also attend town hall meetings where they talk about what they want the DA to do. The DCD explained that the market women have influence and the DCE is compelled to listen to them. “They have influence because they can refuse to pay their tolls so the DCE has to listen to them” (DCD). There were not however many examples of women approaching assembly members in their communities to get actions taken, some women explained that accessing the DCE directly would give them more leverage, for others it was preferable to solve problems themselves:

“**We have a male assembly member, we won’t go to them, we will solve the problems ourselves.**”

(Teacher, trainee aspirant Ada East)

In contrast, in Atwima Mponua a broader range of issues were raised with the Assembly members in their communities and the DCE – these included building toilets, roads, installing water points, providing health facilities. Also in this District, women reported using different strategies to raise particular issues, sometimes going in groups to the DCE, or raising concerns in groups or individually with the Assembly member in their community and also approaching their Chiefs. In some cases when help has not been forthcoming from the Government, the women have found other ways to resolve problems. The Market Queen in Atwima Mponua gave an example of engaging with the DCE about toilet issues; she also went to the building contractors to see if they could help, “we all went together as a women’s association.” Another woman added, “the toilet in our community is full. We engaged with the DA member but he said we would have to wait. So I mobilised the community to make small contributions and asked them to come on board to help.”

In Atwima Mponua, the Market Queen also talked about trying to address problems in the hospital. She explained that the hospital board experience water shortages. “We wrote a letter to the Assembly about the hospital to develop the water system. Apart from the water there are no quarters for nursing staff. The female staff get harassed by boys on their way home at night.
We went to the contractors to try and get help from them because the DA said they would do something but haven’t. I have been in contact with the contractors since last year. At the gender meeting we learnt about leadership, we understood that we have to look for resources and I realised that I have more self-confidence and can go to people and ask for help. The contractors listened to us but their profits from timber are going down so there is a lack of funds and they asked us to wait.”

A member of the Fishmongers’ Association in Atwima Mponua explained that the clinic is around four miles away from her community but the bridge to that community collapsed, “it was difficult to access in emergencies and one woman died on the way to the hospital in childbirth. We engaged with our Assembly member and asked for help. They came and re-built the bridge, which was good for a while but recently the rains washed the bridge away again. We have engaged again with our DA member and have also been to the DCE.”

Some of the women in Atwima Mponua who were representing church groups talked about having greater confidence to approach church leaders, but this was more in relation to being able speak to the congregation on different issues. Churches were said to sometimes support individuals with their problems if they were sick or needed support with school fees, but not to take actions to address community problems. The women were clear that the DA has the mandate to respond to problems faced by communities.
7.5.2) Issues for which women approach the Chiefs for assistance

Women in both Districts said they go to the Chief with land issues, marriage issues (usually concerning problems with their marriages) and if they want to make a gathering in the community then they would go to him first, “mainly he helps with family issues.” Other examples of issues women raised with Chiefs in Atwima Mponua included ensuring the laws around illegal mining are enforced and responding to domestic violence, as well as bringing the Chief and Assembly members together to initiate communal labour to build latrines, teachers' quarters etc. For example one woman who is an NPP party organiser said that through meetings in the communities they are able to get the Chiefs and Assembly member together and notify them about issues.

One of the teachers in Atwima Mponua explained that in her community she mobilised others to engage with the Chiefs and asked them to go to the DA to raise the issue of a lack of clinics in the communities putting pregnant women at risk because they have to travel far for antenatal care and to deliver their babies in clinics. The women recognise that the DA will listen to the Chiefs, so engaging the Chiefs is considered important in this context. Another woman in Atwima Mponua talked about a kindergarten in a school which was not adequate to cater for the number of children attending. They had a meeting in the community with the Chiefs and Assembly person and agreed on contributions from all members of the community to build a kindergarten; they have already begun to build the foundations.

In Atwima Mponua, the women talked more about the role of the Chiefs in decision-making and attributed power to the Chiefs. The Chief of Chireyaso community in this District explained that he has a family mediation role, noting that women come to him alone and in groups to raise concerns. He summarised his current priorities for tackling community problems – he has started organising for a latrine and he also wants a clinic in the community so that pregnant women don’t have to travel to the maternity Ward at the hospital. He noted that they lack a lot of facilities in the school e.g. a computer and a library. They called the entire community to inform them of the projects they want to take forward. The DCE came to the meeting and he is looking at the DA and NGOs to support them and can also draw on the community levy and the Chiefs’ fund (collected from the donations brought by visitors to the Chief and used for donating to funerals amongst other things). He said that the Elders also meet regularly with the DA member (from the NPP) who is always present in the quarterly meetings. They don’t have enough money to do everything, so for now they are focusing on the toilet and the clinic, they have the architect's plans for the clinic and the community has dug a large rectangular hole for the toilet.

Teenage pregnancy is a big problem in the community according to the Chief. He explained that people in the community are mainly cocoa farmers but the income from this work is seasonal so at the end of the season women don’t have enough money to take care of their children and that girls are lured by men with money in exchange for sex. The men he is referring to are not from the community but are the timber loggers who are based temporarily in the community, “they have money as it is a lucrative business. Once their job is done they depart and leave the girls behind”. The Chief and Elders have taken an initiative to address this problem, they created a byelaw that says any man who impregnates a teenager will be taken to court, however this byelaw is yet to take effect.
“Teenage pregnancy is a big problem in the community according to the Chief.”

In Ada East, women felt that the Chiefs do not have much power except in relation to land, although some women in Ada East said that they go to the Queen Mothers and Chiefs around issues like “youth loitering”, needing money for school fees, support for old people. In this District, the MWA leaders from Ada Foah market reported that they had gone to the Chief to tell him of the problems with the market flooding because he owns the land where the market is situated. As a result, he has agreed to assist them to prevent the flooding. The Chief explained how women approach him, “the Market Associations will call me if they have any concerns since I own the market (Ada Foah) land. For example they were concerned about the security in the market so I am responsible for this and am now going to speak to the department for security to address this issue.” He added that women will also speak to him about land disputes and family problems. “The main problem is that men can be irresponsible and not care for their children.” In these cases he will bring the man and woman together to discuss and reach a solution. His role is focused on mediation and counselling. Every Wednesday he talks on the radio to raise awareness of relevant issues such as family, inheritance, land and litigation.

Queen Mothers were mentioned less in Atwima Mponua than in Ada East and in some communities women said they had only recently had a Queen mother. The SHEP Coordinator (GES) in Atwima Mponua explained why in her view Queen Mothers, even where they exist, do not have much power in decision-making:

“Chiefs try and make byelaws in communities such as banning children from attending funerals/wakes and giving sanctions to those who don’t participate in communal labour e.g. 20 cedi fines. People discuss with the Chief and Elders (there are around 15 Elders who are related to the royals – only the Queen Mother is female, all other Elders are men – this is because women are seen as unclean because of menstruation; they don’t want the link to royalty to be unclean and for women to sit on the important seats.”

(SHEP Coordinator, Atwima Mponua)

7.5.3) Women taking action themselves

In both Districts some women mentioned the need to take action and not rely on others for help. In Ada East, women considered being members of an Association as an important part of helping themselves. In Atwima Mponua, the women spoke more about seeing it as their responsibility to resolve issues in their communities, especially given the lack of Government resources, although some of the actions they mentioned were taken after approaching a Chief and DA members and finding out that they do not have funds available to provide support. For example one of the women in Ada East explained that in relation to the flooding in the Ada Foah market and people coming in to steal their wares because the site is not secure, the women went to the Chief and he said he would take up the issues but he hadn’t done it. She added, “we shouldn’t expect others to take decisions on our behalf but can form associations and do things ourselves.”
A woman representative of the Pentecostal Church Council in Atwima Mponua said she has learned that they have to take the initiative. For example there is no latrine in her community; she approached the District Water and Sanitation Team and was told the latrine project is now over, so they built it themselves with the Chief’s support. They have a community fund and the leaders in the community meet every quarter to account for this. The leaders include the Unit Committee Chair, UC members, Chiefs and Elders and she participates in that meeting which is made up of about 20 women and 40 men. They keep accounts so they can decide what to spend the money on and they consult others in the community to understand the needs. (The Treasurer of the fund is a woman).

Other issues of concern include teenage pregnancy, school drop out especially of girls, polygamy, and domestic violence. A number of women in both Districts said they attend PTA meetings to discuss school dropout and teenage pregnancy. The GES staff in both Districts have explained their work in schools on sexual and reproductive health to the women in the quarterly meetings, which has helped them understand the issues and to share their learning with others.
In Atwima Mponua various women gave examples of taking action to address teenage pregnancy themselves, such as through advising individuals in their community they noted were at risk, organising young women in the church to be role models or calling a meeting with young people to discuss the issue and talk about the importance of contraceptives. Some women thought that teenage pregnancy was increasing but not everyone agreed on this; for some the disappearance of traditional practices was considered an important factor but not others. It was noted that in some communities Queen Mothers are trying to address this issue through the introduction of byelaws giving the Queen Mother power to delay marriages. One or two women said they advise others on where to report violence. People tend to go to the Chief in relation to violence issues although some mentioned there is more awareness of Government agencies like CHRAJ and DOVVSU.

It is clear that women are able to use their confidence, skills and groups and associations to engage with a range of decision makers to bring about change. Their interests are wide and they lobby for many different things from services, to rights, to issues for their children, land etc. Through the platform provided by the project for political participation, they are addressing many of the barriers facing women across the board.

“We shouldn’t expect others to take decisions on our behalf but can form associations and do things ourselves.”
8) How decision makers respond to women’s concerns

In both Districts most women said that decision makers didn’t listen three years ago but that they do now. Some of the women consulted talked of meetings in their communities attended by District Government officials which had been organised as a result of issues being raised in the quarterly meetings. The DCE and District officials consulted said that they usually hold meetings in communities to feed into the District Development Plan and that community consultation is a key commitment of the Government. In addition, to be approved for the District Development Fund (DDF), the District Government has to provide evidence of having consulted with communities. However it was also noted by some officials, that there is a lack of funding which limits Government capacity to carry out community meetings and undertake travel to different communities. It is important to understand the ways the District Government consults with men and women in communities to be able to assess how the quarterly meetings differ from these existing forms of consultation.

8.1) How District decision makers communicate and consult with women outside of the quarterly meetings

The DCE in Ada East explained the various ways in which he communicates with women, in particular how he reaches poor women. He emphasised that radio is used to discuss issues with the community and women will call in to “phone-ins” with their problems. He mentioned the NCCE van, which goes in to communities and gets feedback. He said that Town Hall meetings are held quarterly and anyone can attend, they discuss District plans, expenditure and development. Normally the meetings are organised by zone, per area council and around 100-200 people attend. “They want to listen so they go. Men women and youth attend but fewer women speak. The DCE presents the plans, then the floor is open for them to speak. Men speak more than women but sometimes present the views of their women.” Also the NDC women’s group (political group from his party) come to him with issues. “For example, women are vulnerable in relation to water. If we discuss with men where to put a water point it is not helpful for women who are the ones who collect water so it is important to discuss this with women.” He added that the quarterly meetings are hence an important space as it enables decision makers to hear the concerns of women and link to different women’s associations, which has not been possible through their traditional forms of consultation.

Similarly, in Atwima Mponua, the DCD reported that when they hold community meetings, the difficulty they have is women not coming forward so even if they plan a meeting, only a few women come and men dominate meetings. The few that come find it difficult to express their concerns and men do the talking. They try and suppress women, “this is a cultural issue, men are talking, women feel they shouldn’t talk for fear of being shouted down.” To overcome this, he said they sometimes hold a meeting only for women and encourage them to be bold. When they go for meetings in the communities they send invites and beat the gong at the Chief’s palace and the people assemble. He explained they have a visit plan developed by the DCE so that they visit the main communities. He also noted that people come to his office before they go to see the DCE or when the DCE is away. He said he is unable to address concerns immediately because this depends on funding, so people have to be patient.
The Budget Officer in this District said that they hold a stakeholder meeting with community members in August to discuss issues from the previous year to find out if they are still relevant or need revising and based on this meeting and feedback from assembly members, they develop an annual plan. Both women and men attend the meetings. His view about who attends these meetings differed from other officials, he noted, “most are women as the men are on the farms. The good thing is that women have already been informed in the Gender Centre meeting, so women are ready to attend.” This is important to note as this suggests that the reason women are attending the meetings he is talking about is because they are women who are involved in the quarterly meetings.

The Budget Officer in Ada East District reported that as part of his work in generating revenue for the assembly he meets with Women’s Associations e.g. Dressmakers’, Hairdressers’, many of whom he has come into contact with in the quarterly meetings. These groups have to pay tax so part of his role is to educate them why they have to pay taxes and explain what is done with the funds raised. He explains that they have to have registration certificates for their businesses, adding that almost all now have a certificate. He lets them know that being registered means that they will be the first to benefit from any assistance because they are recognised businesses.

Women themselves said that sometimes the DCE comes to their communities. A women’s NDC member in Atwima Mponua explained:

“Before the DCE goes to the community he sends a letter to the Chief and the Assembly member who announce there will be a meeting. The Chief and Assembly member collate the issues raised by people in the community and when the DCE comes one person presents the issues nominated from the community e.g. the Chief. So the Church Council member who attends the quarterly meeting added the women’s issues to this list and then she represented the community and spoke about all the issues on the community list including the need for a CHPS (Community-based health and planning service) compound and now construction has started.”

(Women’s NDC member, Atwima Mponua)

These forms of consultation with women are fairly hierarchical and formal and it is not surprising that many of the women have said they were scared to speak out in such meetings in the past.

Most women consulted reported that decision makers are now taking more action in response to issues of concern to women than in the past, however a minority disagreed. Those that thought things had changed since the FLOW project started three years before, gave examples of issues they themselves had raised with decision makers where they had seen an action taken or a commitment to act. One of the Assembly members in Ada East felt some issues are tackled but others are not and she explained that most issues do not go through decision makers.

A few women felt that their Assembly members have become more confident to respond to issues in both Districts. One of the trainees who is an Assembly member in Ada East explained what she does in her community:
“Women come to me, I meet women in my community, I beat the gong and ask people what needs they have. I meet with the community twice per year. Many people come unless it is raining. Men and women come but mainly it is women because I am a female Assembly member and women have time to attend, so it’s mostly women.”

(DA member, Ada East)

The Budget Officer in Atwima Mponua said that he sees the contributions of the women Assembly members and he knows that the issues they raise are coming from the community. The women Assembly members stress sanitation, education of children, security, teenage pregnancy, children staying out of home for long periods and overnight dancing. He recalled the example of one female Assembly member who wanted to cancel the revenue collection from record dances in the community (a room with a disc jockey where young people pay to enter and dance all night and there is no control). The suggestion from the Assembly member was that the Government should stop giving them operating permits and this was agreed in the Assembly meeting.

8.2) How decision makers are held to account

There was less information forthcoming around how decision makers are held to account beyond women following up with officials and Assembly members in relation to specific commitments made and although the District Government consults on District plans, it was not very clear how final decisions are made in developing the District budget, nor how information on budget expenditure is shared.

In relation to commitments by decision makers in the quarterly meetings, in Ada East, women reported there have been some commitments to women made in the quarterly meetings, related to changes to the market. These are recorded by Gender Centre staff in writing and followed up through further meetings between the Gender Centre and the DCE and also the decision makers provide updates on their actions in the subsequent quarterly meeting. A member of the MWA in Ada East highlighted:

“Formerly there were no lights in the market and no security gates. There were armed robbers in the market but this has calmed down a bit since gates were installed. Today the DCE come to the communal labour session in the morning and has promised to give us gravel in return for our labour. The DA has constructed 48 sheds in the market.”

(Member of the Market Women’s Association, Ada East)

In Atwima Mponua, there was less mention of actual commitments made in the quarterly meetings. The DCD in Atwima Mponua said he sometimes attends the quarterly meetings and at times, he and other officials follow up with women in their communities, as a result of issues they have heard about in the meetings.

One of the NDC organisers (also an appointed Assembly member and project trainee) gave an example of raising the issue of the need for teachers’ quarters in her community and said the Budget Officer promised they would do it and then she followed up with him in the next meeting.
As noted above, in both Districts, the project has recently formed a five-member committee made up of women who attend the quarterly meetings and one of the roles of this group is to follow up on actions agreed in the quarterly meeting. In Atwima Mponua, two of the trainee aspirants consulted are members of this group. They reported that that they held a follow up meeting with the DCE. Another member of the committee added, “we went to inspect the public toilets. The toilet roof was leaking so we reported it to the DCE. He will report back to us at the quarterly meeting regarding what he has done.”

In terms of feeding back to communities on Government actions and decisions, most of the women consulted said that the DA does not have meetings to communicate Government decisions; the meetings are mainly to hear community needs. Some said that sometimes DA decisions are communicated through the radio. Some women in Ada East noted that DA decisions related to the market are communicated to the Market Women’s Association. One woman in Ada East explained that the market women organised a demonstration and stopped the construction of the sheds because they wanted them to be bigger, “the DCE was furious. The women then collected an amount of money per shed in order to persuade the DA to construct bigger sheds.” However it was understood that in the end, this was not possible because of the directive from Central Government relating to the size of the sheds. It was also highlighted that the DCE has applied for nine out of the 48 sheds for members of his family but that the women are planning to challenge this as they think it is too many.

An Assembly member in Atwima Mponua explained that in her community, in relation to sanitary facilities, there have been follow ups by the Assembly but it seems they don’t have enough funds to complete the work, so community members have now given the rest of the money required to construct two new latrines. One of the MWA members in Atwima Mponua explained that in her community prior to coming to the quarterly meetings, she didn’t know that you had to approach the Assembly to account for how the Government money is used. For example she referred to a project to build toilets where they kept seeing delays and misappropriation of funds. Through learning gained in the quarterly meetings, she was able to mobilise the young people in her community to approach the Unit Committee to account for its expenditure and she involved the Chief and the Elders. This example was the only time a woman mentioned that the Assembly should account to the public for how its money is used.

The NCCE representative in Atwima Mponua noted that if the DA were following the plan then they should speak to their community members more often, but they don’t do it. He added that people don’t know this, so they don’t hold them to account, “people don’t come together so that they can ask questions of their Assembly members. We have to empower communities to ask for feedback. If their Assembly member isn’t doing something they should call him/her and ask why.”

The Budget Officer for Ada East reported that the District budget is available on the Ministry of Finance website, however neither the Gender Centre nor the researchers were able to find it, which suggests that it is not easily available. The Community Development Manager in this District has not even seen the detailed budget for her District and was not clear what proportion of this budget is allocated to community development or gender-related activities.
9) Conclusions

The research found that there have been many positive achievements by women to address their priorities as a result of their involvement in the quarterly meetings space and the knowledge and confidence gained through that involvement. It also found that the District Government staff consulted appreciated the opportunity to meet with women and hear their views and generally recognised the importance of women voicing their concerns. In addition to this, the decentralised Government system and a political environment which promotes consultation offers an enabling environment for women’s participation in a range of decision-making structures at the District Level. Nevertheless, there are several barriers that affect women’s participation in different ways, especially the limitations of decision makers to respond to women’s needs and cultural attitudes, which continue to subscribe women to the domestic sphere, so that women are not taken seriously as potential leaders.

This section analyses what the women consulted have been able to do for whom and identifies some of the enablers and barriers.

9.1) Achievements of the women

The quarterly meetings are women-only spaces – It is important to understand the significance of this when reflecting on the benefits of participating in the space which the women reported. The confidence, ability to speak out, understanding of women’s rights issues are changes that have happened for women over time through participating in a safe space with other women. However interestingly, when women in Ada East suggested that men should also be invited to the meetings, only a few women recognised that this could change the dynamics of the meetings, in spite of many noting that they used to be afraid to speak out in the presence of men. The fact that several women in Ada East are keen to involve men in the meetings indicates to some extent how empowered the women now feel. However, the rationale to involve men in the meetings was twofold: so that they would see how empowered the women are in the meeting and so that they would learn about the topics the women have learned about from someone external, because they felt that men are less likely to believe things if they hear it from the women. This suggests that although women are strengthened through their participation in the meetings and feel informed, nevertheless being able to influence their husbands and other men in the community remains a challenge for many. This issue is reflected in comments from the Gender Desk Officer in Atwima Mponua, who said that despite the fact that women’s voice and leadership skills have increased, they are still not able to speak freely in their communities and change the opinions of men about certain issues such as family planning, which she felt they needed to hear from the Gender Centre because, “women’s voices are not heard in the community.”

Increased confidence, knowledge and agency – The women are clear that they have gained confidence, knowledge and inspiration through being involved in the meetings, connecting with other women and being able to take action. Others also spoke about their learning influencing their relationships with their children and their husbands; some talked about being able to help and advise others.
Knowledge has earned them respect in their families and communities; which in turn has led to them feeling valued and appreciated.

The women did not identify other ways in which they have gained confidence and agency, though some referred to gaining knowledge through listening to the radio.

**Women value becoming informed on issues relevant to their lives** – As described in section 7, many of the women who attended, both young and old, spoke of the value of learning about the different issues such as marriage, wills, their rights, being financially independent from their husband and how to raise their male and female children. They are keen to share this knowledge with others and gave many examples of having done so in their groups, churches and community meetings. This knowledge has earned them respect in their families and communities; which in turn has led to them feeling valued and appreciated. Many of the women do not consider themselves educated and learning is important to them. **Being able to use their learning to help others after each meeting is an important aspect of building women’s agency and continued empowerment.**

“The key lesson is that women were ignorant and when armed with information they can do a lot, now the women can do mighty things.”
(Programme Manager, the Gender Centre)

“One somebody has been trained and has acquired new knowledge and community members recognise these new skills, the community continues to consult them on various issues.”
(Executive Director, the Gender Centre)

**Assuming and contesting leadership roles** – The confidence and new knowledge has enabled some to take on leadership roles. Some of the women were clear that they want to continue to take up leadership roles, for example two of the aspiring UC members in Atwima Mponua see this as a route to becoming DA members. Some of the women in Atwima Mponua who are organisers in the NDC women’s wing and who had learned that women can be leaders and had gained the confidence to contest for UC elections felt they had particularly benefited from their involvement in the quarterly meetings. They spoke of realising that you don’t have to be educated to be a member of the UC or the DA, whereas in the past, this belief had held them back.

**Strengthening their associations and being more effective leaders of associations** – The market women in Ada East certainly felt that they had benefited through coming together in the meetings, raising their concerns in that forum and establishing links with the DCE. Likewise, women from the Fishmongers’ Associations and hairdressers saw this as an important step in strengthening and formalising their associations and being able to access other kinds of support via the District officials or NGOs. Many of the women in associations saw the meetings as having re-invigorated their associations through their connection with the CDM who has provided further support to them. Also some associations have become centralised at Government level such as the fishmongers, hence women understood that they may have the opportunity to move up through the ranks of these associations.
The involvement of the CDM in Ada East as a key actor in the quarterly meetings is certainly important in terms of her follow up support to the various associations and taking their concerns to other District Government Departments.

**Developing a collective voice** – In Ada East, it was clear that women had developed a strong collective voice around demands related to the two markets in the District. Many of the women see this as a priority and the fact that they have been able to bring about some changes has strengthened their resolve and confidence to address other problems in the markets. Women have also realised that they have power and influence. Six of the women have become toll collectors in the Kasseh market and they have seen the revenue from the tolls increase since they took on this role. They are aware that this gives them leverage with the DA to have their demands heard. In Atwima Mponua, although the market flooding was also a concern to women, there did not appear to be any one particular unifying issue in the District. Women here spoke of many problems which are common in their communities and have become confident to raise these, both in the quarterly meetings and in other decision-making spaces.

**Addressing problems in their communities and raising concerns with decision makers** – There are many examples above of actions women have taken. In Atwima Mponua in particular, women were rising to the challenge of resolving problems in their communities. The actions which women have taken or have mobilised others to address, concern problems that are often seen as women’s issues such as schools, water, toilets, healthcare, so there is some expectation from decision makers that they should speak on those issues. Women gave examples of approaching their local Assembly member, their Chief and other people relevant to a specific issue such as building contractors. Often getting these issues addressed involves mobilising community members to undertake communal labour such as digging the area for a toilet, or building the foundations of a school or contributing small donations.

The market women in Ada East have been able to influence the District Government to take a number of actions and the fact that the DA relies on toll revenue from the market means that it is in the Government’s interest to respond to the demands of these women.

Other issues important to women such as addressing school dropout, teenage pregnancy and domestic violence, access to credit, amongst others, were raised in both Districts but women have not come together to take collective action or demand a particular Government response on these issues. Nevertheless, there was some indication that Government officials see the importance of discussing social issues with women and in fact, the Planning Officer in Atwima Mponua described social issues as “women’s issues.”

Many of the women talked about parental neglect being a big problem and young people “being wayward” but again this was not something that they had particularly taken measures to address, although some women said they had learned it is not only the man’s responsibility to take care of children financially. Some of the market women consulted in Atwima Mponua preferred to send their daughters to boarding schools so that they would have less opportunity, “to roam about after school and become involved in risky behaviour.”
9.2) Enabling Factors

**Decentralised Government system** – In relation to women’s participation, the decentralised Government system offers a broadly enabling environment as local structures exist in some places and there are commitments to women’s involvement in all these structures. However the implementation is weak and there are still very few women members in the DA – only four female Assembly members (one elected) out of 37 in Ada East and five out of 54 in Atwima Mponua, so women’s voice in the Assemblies is weak. However, the fact that there are some women in the Assembly demonstrates to other women that it is possible to participate in the Assembly and the involvement of these women in the quarterly meetings serves to inspire the women who participate. In the quarterly meetings the women Assembly members are informed of the issues important to the wider group of women and they are able to articulate these in the Assembly meetings.

**Existing women leaders acting as role models** – Both women and decision makers consulted talked about the importance of women assuming leadership roles and challenging attitudes and beliefs that women’s place is in the kitchen. The NCCE representative in Atwima Mponua said that things are changing, “Women’s voice at community level is changing. This is because of education. Because of the Gender Centre now there are women running for District Assembly positions and there is euphoria about the elections. Before women had potential but no one to empower them, but now women are coming up, education has created awareness. Those in their slumbers are now waking up.” However the Planning Officer in this District, said that in his opinion, in the political arena, “women still have to come up; they think that the market is their place,” adding some perspective that there are only eight women that he knows of running for the DA in the next elections out of 58 positions. His view is that the effort to inspire women’s leadership needs to be doubled:

“I don’t like that women still think that the market is their place. Even after they go away for schooling in Accra, they come back and work in the market.”

*(Planning Officer, Atwima Mponua)*

However this is not necessarily a reflection on women not being inspired to become leaders but could also be linked to the fact that formal employment opportunities at District Level are very limited.

**Government requirement to consult communities** – The District Government is supposed to show evidence of consultation with communities and all sectors of communities in order to secure the District Development Fund (DDF) budget, however there is a lack of Government funding to be able to put this into practice. For example the Community Development Departments in both Districts did not have a vehicle or much of a budget, so their capacity to visit communities and consult them was limited. This issue is a widespread problem in the country. Hence the project’s focus on bringing Government officials together with local women is helping the Government to carry out the role it should be performing. Furthermore, the quarterly meetings take place in the District Assembly rooms which is where many of the District Government Departments are located, so it is easy for them to attend the meetings and for women to meet with the DCE following the quarterly meetings.
“Women’s voice at community level is changing. This is because of education. Before women had potential but no one to empower them, now those in their slumbers are waking up.”

Thus the decision makers are broadly supportive and commit to participating in the quarterly meetings whilst they are organised by the Gender Centre and they take actions to respond to some of the women’s concerns. In Atwima Mponua, there was interest from the DCD and Budget Officer that the meetings should continue beyond the project and should be included in the District budget. However in Ada East, the DCE did not see this as a responsibility the District Government would assume and was comfortable for the Gender Centre to continue taking this responsibility, even though he noted that it is more challenging to hear the concerns of women through community meetings.

**Local Government priorities** – The issues most likely to be addressed by decision makers are those mandated to Local Government, for example building school classrooms, community based health and planning service (CHPS) compounds and toilets. Furthermore, these are actions which can be initiated through communal labour in communities. The Local Government focus is on infrastructure rather than longer term development, which reflects the role of Local Government but also the funding constraints – if the budget is insufficient or budget instalments are delayed then it is difficult to embark on a three-year programme. Hence women in Atwima Mponua asking for toilets, CHPS compounds, and improvements to schools in their communities, fits with the Government’s priorities although they are not able to reach as many communities as there are demands from.

**The role of the Gender Centre is crucial in facilitating the meetings and thereby enabling the Government to fulfil its role** – The Gender Centre staff are from outside the District and are careful to project a neutral position in relation to party politics. The staff bring knowledge of women’s rights and experience in training and supporting women leaders and are able to influence the decision makers to participate. The Gender Centre through working with a local resource person in each District, is able to ensure the meetings are organised and well attended. The Gender Centre draw up the agenda for the meetings and are able to ensure that all the women have the chance to speak and that decision makers are prompted to respond. They also invite other speakers in Ada East to talk on specific issues or conduct sessions themselves in the meetings on various issues including women’s rights, leadership, wills, marriages etc. They have many years of experience of tailoring education on women’s rights to different audiences and are respected by Local Government staff. Government officials are committed to participate in the space and listen to the women because they should be doing this anyway as part of good governance; hence the women are coming in to a positive space where decision makers are open to listen to them.

An interesting element of this approach in Ada East was the Community Development Manager also acting as the Gender Centre resource person. She is able to build on the quarterly meetings through her community development work, following up with women and their associations, linking women to different NGO and Government initiatives and encouraging women to organise and raise issues. She is thus able to fulfil her District role in an environment where she has scarce resources because of her involvement in the FLOW project.
Having a District official as a local resource person gives the Gender Centre direct access to the District Government, which is useful for being able to meet District officials and create buy-in for the project. However, a possible disadvantage is that District officials may get transferred and there could be a risk that other District officials may not take ownership of the participation spaces if they think it is the responsibility of one person in the District. In Atwima Mponua, the resource person is not part of the District Government, yet here there was more interest from the DCD and Budget Officer that the Assembly should support the continuation of the quarterly meetings.

Men’s support of women's participation – Women in Atwima Mponua said their husbands were generally supportive of them being involved in the quarterly meetings and other decision-making spaces. It was less clear if Chiefs or male religious leaders are promoting women’s engagement, as it was not possible to interview any religious leaders during the research. Women in Atwima Mponua said that the church leaders are supportive inasmuch as they are invited to speak to the wider congregation on the topics they have learned about.

In Ada East, women said that they have support of their husbands “at times.” The majority said that they have to ask permission from their husbands and one added that she needs to let her husband know one week in advance. The majority said that if their husbands say “no” then they can’t attend. One of the women said that she didn’t have to ask permission, she just informs her husband that she is going. In Atwima Mponua, most of the women feel that their husbands are supportive. They ask permission from their husbands to attend the meetings and then they say yes. One woman explained, “they don’t say no because they are seeing the changes in our lives.” They do not feel threatened because they are still humble and respect their husbands. Some said that the men are very supportive:

“I get the letter and then I can just go. My husband will always remind me the day before that it is my meeting.”
(School teacher and Church Council Leader)

“When I get the letter I show it to my husband and he says “hey you are moving forward”.”
(Market Queen)

9.3) Key Barriers

A number of challenges to women’s political participation that were identified in the Pathways to Empowerment research, were referred to in Section 4. Some of these also emerged in this research but others appeared less relevant. For example, most of the women considered their husbands to be supportive of their participation in meetings and groups and although the women recognised that a lack of education would limit them from becoming MPs, they did not see this as a barrier to participating in the Unit Committee or District Assembly. In Atwima Mponua, the elected Assembly member said that the meetings are in the local language which means that she can attend. If they were in English she wouldn’t be able to go, however, this means that she will not be able to move up through the political ranks. The Gender Centre noted that women’s education level could also limit their involvement in some of the District sub-committees such as the Finance and Administration Committee.
They added that the voice of women in the Assembly meetings is often less powerful than men’s voices, both due to the low numbers of women members compared to men, but also because they often have less understanding of their role in the District Assembly, so they need support and mentoring to be able to perform this role well. Hence the Gender Centre’s support to the trainee aspirants which include women Assembly members, aims to address this barrier, through providing information on the District Government, the functioning of the Assembly and the roles of Assembly members.

**Leadership roles being seen as masculine** – Even though the women consulted appear strong it was highlighted by the Gender Centre and by some of the women themselves, that women still do not have a lot of voice in communities in decision-making processes in traditional structures and churches etc. The Chief and most of the Elders are men and the church leaders are usually men and women rarely speak in meetings of the Chief and Elders. In church groups they are often part of a women’s council and in the political party in the women’s wing, so they are not necessarily in spaces where they are debating issues with men. Women who are in church groups, which are mixed, tend to be in the Secretary role. Most respondents also said that in community spaces, consultation meetings held by Government are usually attended by more men than women, although one or two said it was the other way round. Feedback from many women was that if women are present in public meetings, they are unlikely to speak, although as noted above, several of the women consulted in the research said they are now confident to speak in front of men.

**Oppressive cultural and religious views of women’s roles in society. Also a woman’s own beliefs in herself and her role can influence her participation in politics** – Many of the women consulted talked about never having considered that they could take up leadership roles or speak out on issues which concern them in public spaces. Several of the male decision makers and workers in Government agencies also referred to the traditional role of women and women having been relegated to the background in the past but that this needs to change. However although recognising that this needs to change it was not clear how the District Governments were trying to change attitudes and practices which continue to keep women in the background. For the women this is why the issue of wills and the Intestate Succession Law was so important, because they see they can now challenge centuries old practices.

As noted in the wider literature, it is important to recognise that this perception by women themselves and by others will not change overnight but the more women who assume leadership positions and become respected in those positions, the more public perception will change. One or two of the District officials consulted said they were clear that women could do the same job as men and perhaps even better than men. Some of the women trainee aspirants had been encouraged to take up leadership roles through their involvement in the project that they would not have considered previously, this was also true for some of the women participants in the quarterly meetings. This will not be the case for all, but if over three years, women’s self-belief has changed and some women have assumed leadership positions then others could be inspired to follow. Having the courage to stand for elections is important, however whether women get elected is also subject to political manoeuvrings – there were examples of men pushing people to vote for male candidates who are standing from a particular party which can result in women not getting elected.
Having the courage to stand for elections is important, however whether women get elected is also subject to political manoeuvrings.

**Women’s multiple responsibilities** – This is an often cited challenge in the wider literature in relation to women’s participation in terms of the lack of time for them to participate in decision-making spaces. The women consulted in this research did not see this as a challenge in their context. Many of the spaces in which women say they have increased their participation are spaces they already attend such as PTA meetings in schools and church groups. The churches are close to their home and their trading associations meet in their workplace i.e. in the market place. Assembly members and Chiefs are based in the community so they too are accessible in terms of distance. Neither do the majority of women see their participation in the quarterly meetings as an extra burden because for some, they have learned to care better for their children and divide responsibilities with their husbands which they didn’t do previously, “I sat down with my husband and apportioned out the time” (teacher and trainee aspirant, Atwima Mponua). Some women bring their babies with them to the meetings.

**Women’s participation being limited though their lack of economic means** – This issue was mentioned by the various women who were aspiring to be elected to the Assembly or Unit Committee. Through the project they had been supported with some campaign materials such as t-shirts, posters and leaflets, in preparation for the elections in March 2015. However since the elections were postponed at the last minute, the women were concerned about how they would be able to campaign again later in the year without a budget for campaign materials. District officials and the Gender Centre staff also noted this challenge. The women standing for election do not have a regular income but work in the informal sector, two of the women candidates interviewed in the research were single and the third was separated from her husband and did not have financial support from him except towards her children’s education.

**Other challenges that limit women’s participation:**

**Women can make demands and influence Government decisions but do not have the means to hold Government to account** – Some of the women pointed out that decision makers are unable to respond to everything and are also subject to Central Government control. An Assembly member in Ada East explained, “the decision makers have a big load on them. Many groups raise their problems and these need prioritising. We practice local governance and are supposed to listen to the grassroots but have the issue of Central Government dictating to us. There are as many priorities as there are grains of sand on the seashore.” She also noted that there is shortage of revenue in the District, which hinders what the Government can do. There were certainly examples of women raising issues and sometimes repeatedly raising issues when the District Government has not taken any action but the women have little means to hold decision makers to account beyond reminding them that they committed to specific actions. Women do not have access to District budgets and cannot challenge final decisions, especially when the feedback is often that the Government does not have the resources.
The issue of funding constraints was referred to by women in both Districts as well as by District officials – The DCE in Ada East emphasised that he has explained to women in the quarterly meetings how his decisions are made and that he is not autonomous, he is also managing directives coming from the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. For example, the size of market sheds in Kasseh market was dictated by the Ministry, as mentioned in section 8.2.

One of the Community Development Officers in Atwima Mponua summarised the main challenges faced by Local Government, common in both Districts, in relation to consulting with communities and working with them to implement development activities:

“There are 42 communities in the District. We go to 14 communities in a year (every year we go to different communities). There are nine Community Development Officers. I go to four communities but it is very difficult to do the work because the department does not have a vehicle. We have to hire a car to go to the communities. Our budget is mainly spent on car hire and refreshments for meetings in communities. We don’t receive any budget, we have no computer or printer and have to go out of the office to do our work to print reports and also contribute from our own pockets.”

(Community Development Officer, Atwima Mponua)

The Community Development Manager in Ada East highlighted:

“The Government pays salaries but I have no budget for carrying out development activities, only some transport money from the Assembly. So the Gender Centre’s support to me as the focal person for the FLOW project enables me to do some of the work in my plan. For the last three months we have been told to register all people with disabilities but we can’t do it as we have no money, the Assembly will only give us fuel and transport costs.”

(Community Development Manager, Ada East)

Hence even when District decision makers want to respond to issues raised by the women, they are severely constrained by budget availability and competing priorities which may result in prioritising the needs of other constituents and groups with powerful voices in the District. These are critical barriers because in practice it results in there being limited opportunities for women to have their views heard by decision makers who may not visit their communities and even if their concerns are raised, there are no funds to be able to carry out development activities. “An Assembly that is perpetually broke is not something we should be counting on.” (Staff of the Gender Centre). In Atwima Mponua, the Budget Officer explained that they have still not received the DDF budget allocation for 2013 and 2014 but in spite of this they are assessed and have to have implemented the activities for those years in order to qualify for the DDF for the following year. This means they have to borrow money which incurs interest, so when the money does arrive it disappears in loan repayments.
In this District, the Budget Officer explained that 2% of the budget in the District should be spent on gender according to the budget guideline, 0.5% on HIV and 5% on disability, “if you don’t follow the guideline, the budget is not approved.” The DDF assessment includes having a gender-balanced budget and it is important to get full marks. In Ada East, there was a lack of clarity amongst the DCE, BO and CDM about the percentage of the budget allocated to gender work.

Another issue is that the decentralised structures are not functioning everywhere so for example in Ada East none of the women could identify a Unit Committee as having existed in their communities. At the time of the research in June 2015, both District Assemblies had been dissolved in time for elections which were supposed to take place in March but these were then postponed to later in the year (possibly September) so there was no functioning Assembly in either District.

9.4) Lessons for future work

Overall it is clear that the approach adopted by the Gender Centre has been effective in bringing women together with decision makers in the selected Districts. The meetings only take place four times a year but include a large number of women from a range of groups with different interests and concerns. The fact that women are already members of different groups and associations which is a key feature of the Ghanaian decentralised Government system is highly significant as women were clear that they have more influence through being in groups.
Those consulted were satisfied that they had opportunity to speak and be heard in the quarterly meetings and saw the meetings as bringing them far more benefits than just engaging with decision makers. Many women appreciated the safe space and solidarity they experienced through coming together with other women and sharing their concerns.

Many women demonstrated confidence, agency and energy to tackle problems in their communities and there were several examples of women succeeding in changing things either themselves or through influencing decision makers to take action and ultimately benefiting other women and men in their communities. Women were also able and confident to take up leadership positions within their communities and Districts themselves.

These findings are similar to learning from recent research by Trócaire (longitudinal research carried out over 3 years in 3 countries), on what enabled women to participate in informal community decision-making spaces. The Trócaire research highlights that participation in groups, especially women-only groups, can support women to build confidence and skills helping them to influence decisions within their households and the wider community. This research also found that participation and empowerment are in a mutually reinforcing relationship: women’s participation within different decision-making spaces can support women to gain power but also feeling empowered can lead to women participating in new ways or spaces. The findings in Ghana also demonstrate this – a small number of the women consulted reported that they had become empowered to contest leadership positions in Unit Committees or the District Assembly, whilst others highlighted that through taking action in their communities and assuming leadership roles in informal spaces, this empowered them and gave them confidence to do more and take on greater leadership responsibilities.

More work is needed to embed spaces for women to participate in Government consultation and accountability processes. The Government should be facilitating such spaces but are limited by significant resource restraints and are also reportedly influenced by political interests and the vested interests of more powerful groups, so may not prioritise women’s concerns when it comes to deciding where to spend limited resources.

Educating women about their rights is important to the women but it was also noted that men need to learn about women’s rights. Male Government officials were readily able to highlight that women’s voices have been suppressed traditionally and that this needs to change, but perhaps would benefit from support to take a stronger lead in challenging discriminatory cultural norms and prioritising issues raised by women such as teenage pregnancy, polygamy and child labour, amongst others.

For women’s rights organisations such as the Gender Centre working in this field, it is important to build alliances with other organisations and Government agencies working on gender inequality, women’s participation and governance issues to build sustainable strategies to link women to different opportunities and spaces for influencing decision makers and taking up leadership roles.

22. Newbury, E and Tina Wallace (2015), Pushing the Boundaries: Understanding Women’s Participation and Empowerment, Trócaire
Annex 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ada East District</th>
<th>Atwima Mponua District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17 Women who attend the quarterly meetings representing different groups and</td>
<td>21 Women who attend the quarterly meetings representing different groups and associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>associations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 trainee aspiring women leaders</td>
<td>11 trainee aspiring women leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Queen Mothers</td>
<td>6 members of the Market women’s association, all from the District capital, Nyinahinin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 members of 3 fishmongers’ associations from the following communities: Anyakpor, Lolonyakope, Otrokper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 members of the Dressmakers’ Association (8 apprentices, 2 Madams)</td>
<td>4 Church Association members</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interviews (9):**

Chief (of Ada Foah Wem (m))
CHRAJ Director (f)
NCCE Director (m)
Budget Officer (m)
DCE (m)
School Health Coordinator – GES (f), Public Relations Officer – GES (f) [interviewed together]
Community Development Manager/ Gender Centre focal person (f)
Leader of Fishmongers’ Association, Anyakpor
Leader of community women’s group in Foah Wem community and aspiring Assembly member

**Interviews (11):**

Chief of Chiriyasos Community + elders
NCCE Programme Officer (m)
Gender Desk Officer (f)
Planning Officer (m)
DCD (m)
Community Development Officer (m)
District Social Welfare Officer (m)
Budget Officer (m)
Gender Centre focal person (f)
NDC organiser and aspiring UC member, Agogoso
NDC organiser and aspiring UC member, Agogoso

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Table 1 – Stakeholders consulted in the research
Table 2 – Leadership roles assumed by trainee aspirants during the project

The existing role is included on the left, followed by the leadership role assumed during the project, in italics.

Atwima Mponua (11 trainee aspiring leaders)

- Teacher – Church Secretary
- Radio Operator – Church Secretary, Ladies Farm club Secretary and also Welfare Coordinator for District
- Caterer – Women’s Council President – Catholic Church
- Teacher – Secretary in Church for last 2 years
- Employed by the DA – School Porter
- Market Queen and trader – Coordinator on gender and family issues in church for the past 2 years
- Public Servant, DA Registry – Teacher in the church – bible studies for the past 3 months with the youth – “Before women wouldn’t stand for leadership positions in Church bodies. Now they know that they can.”
- Caterer, Assembly Member (appointed), NDC Women’s Organiser – President of the Catholic women’s council for the parish for past 2 years
- Public Servant – DA Registry – Executive Member of the Pentecostal Church Counselling group – they counsel youth before marriage

Ada East (8 trainee aspiring leaders)

- Teacher – “Now I know women can be leaders I’ve taken up a leadership role in an Association (GNAT- Ghana National Association of Teachers). I attend meetings on behalf of the school. Before people wanted me to go but I was sceptical. Before when I worked with men I felt a bit lower than them.”
- Nurse midwife – “I founded an NGO that promotes reproductive health rights and health of women and children. Before I thought I had to wait for a man to do it and for us to follow.”
- Hairdresser – Involved in the leadership in her church
- District CDO – Church Management Committee Leader, also Chair of House Numbering Committee. “In the past I couldn’t do it. Now I have the confidence.”
- Teacher – Tomato traders association Leader
- District Community Development Manager – won an award – best worker in the District
- CHRAJ Registrar – became an Executive within the workers’ union of CHRAJ

Leadership positions the trainees are planning to contest

- Trader – will contest in the Unit Committee elections
- Teacher – Aspiring Assembly Member
- DA elected member – will re-stand again
Now we can speak out: Women’s experiences of political participation in Ghana

Annex 2 – Research timeline in Ghana

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Activity and purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mon 1 June</td>
<td>Arrive in Ghana – travel to hotel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues 2 June</td>
<td>Meeting/workshop in the GC office:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Introductions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mapping of stakeholders involved in the project – to understand who the GC works with and how and the linkages between the different stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Footsteps exercise in relation to quarterly meeting spaces – to understand the detailed approach of supporting women to access and participate in the selected decision making space and how staff understanding shapes the approach to the work with the selected space and the women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mapping of different decision-making spaces accessed by community women, aspiring leaders, DA officials and decision makers – to understand the decision making context and opportunities and challenges for participating in decision making and how the quarterly meeting space relates to other spaces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 3 June</td>
<td>• Review of M&amp;E data/meeting with M&amp;E Officer – to draw out learning in the work so far, identify any gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Review of research methodology with relevant staff:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Research questions – which are critical, which need changing, are there questions missing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Which exercises would be most appropriate for which groups, are there other participatory tools the GC has experience of?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o What we want to ask in interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Who are we consulting – literacy/status/how many from the same community etc?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Context/background info. on the two research sites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Meeting with relevant staff on itinerary:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Finalizing the itinerary, clarifying length of time to be spent with the different stakeholders, clarifying partner staff accompanying the researchers, organizing materials needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Meeting with Dorcas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Thurs 4 June**  
**Morning**  
Travel to Ada.  
Meeting with focal person and orientation with interpreter.  
First half day group work with 20 community women who participate in the quarterly decision-making space:  
* • to explore what they perceive to be the purpose of the space, which women attend and which don’t, their motivation for being involved, how they have determined their priorities and what actions they have taken, what they have achieved as a result of being part of the space, what has changed for them as individuals and for other women in the community.

**Afternoon**  
Individual interviews with traditional leader/s and religious leader/s, including Queen mothers:  
* • to explore the role of leaders in promoting women’s participation and engagement and what they consider as the benefits and negative consequences of women’s participation.

**Fri 5 June**  
**Morning**  
Workshop with trainee aspiring women leaders (15) who participate in quarterly decision-making space:  
* • to explore many of the questions outlined in the updated diagram below – what they perceive to be the purpose of the space, which women attend and which don’t, their motivation for being involved, how they have determined their priorities and what actions they have taken, what they have achieved as a result of being part of the space, what has changed for them as individuals and for other women in the community

**Afternoon**  
• Individual interviews with two individuals who attend the quarterly meeting space regularly from the District Assembly who have a decision making role:  
* o to explore the views of decision makers who engage with the women both on the purpose and effectiveness of the space, their views of the women and their legitimacy, the influence of the women and how their own views and actions have been shaped by the women and how they are held to account.

• Individual interviews – with two individuals who attend the quarterly meeting space regularly from the following –CHRAJ, electoral commission, education office:  
* o to understand their perception of the purpose of the quarterly meetings, the effectiveness of these meetings as channel for women to raise issues collectively and influence decision makers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sat 6 June</td>
<td>In Ada:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morning</td>
<td>2nd half day of group work with the same 20 women who participate in the quarterly decision making space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual interviews (with two-three women from the group of 20 women):</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• to understand how the space is structured and organised and to gain a deeper understanding of barriers and enablers to participation and changes for women in their lives as a result of their participation and whether they have been able to access other political decision-making spaces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun 7 June</td>
<td>Rest day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon 8 June</td>
<td>Meeting with members of a Women’s association who do not participate in the quarterly meetings but members of their group do:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morning</td>
<td>• to explore what influence the women who participate in the quarterly meetings have had in these groups and what has changed in these groups; to understand what their awareness is/perceptions are of what has been achieved through some of their members’ involvement in the selected decision making space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td>Meeting with members of a different Women’s association who do not participate in the quarterly meetings but members of their group do:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• As above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Travel to Accra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues 9 June</td>
<td>Debrief with relevant staff in the GC/ preparation for Kumasi work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weds 10 June</td>
<td>Travel to Kumasi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting with focal person and orientation with Interpreter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thurs 11 June</td>
<td>Full day group work with 20 community women who participate in the quarterly decision making space.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Fri 12 June

**Morning**
- Individual interviews with individuals who attend the quarterly meeting space regularly from the District Assembly who have a decision making role and NCCE
- Meeting with members of a women’s association who do not participate in the quarterly meetings but members of their group do
- Meeting with members of a different women’s association who do not participate in the quarterly meetings but members of their group do
- Individual interviews (with two-three women from the group of 20 women consulted on Thursday).

**Afternoon**

### Sat 13 June

- Workshop with trainee aspiring women leaders (15) who participate in quarterly decision making space
- Individual interviews with traditional leader/s & religious leader/s.

### Sun 14 June

Travel to Accra.

### Mon 15 June

Feedback to the GC on key issues.
Now We Can Speak Out

This country report from Ghana is part of a larger research programme undertaken by Womankind Worldwide funded by the FLOW (Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women) programme, funded by the Dutch Government. The research aims to try and understand better the kinds of spaces created for women in different contexts to promote their participation and to learn what enables women – especially those with limited exposure or experience in decision-making and public life – to build their confidence, find their voice and engage in political activity at the local level. It aims to address the question: how do these spaces work and what are the barriers and enablers for change? There is a dearth of information exploring what enables women to change and grow and how they fare in complex and difficult decision-making arenas and this research aims to address this gap by focusing on the experiences of women.