

## In Conversation

### The Ghanaian Women's Manifesto Movement

*On behalf of Feminist Africa, Amina Mama spoke to three of Ghana's leading feminist activists about the mobilisation that resulted in the Women's Manifesto. This pathbreaking platform document was launched at the Accra Conference Centre on 2 September 2004. Attended by women and men from across the social and political spectrum, the launch of the Women's Manifesto attracted extensive media coverage. It marked the culmination of an intensive mobilisation that involved women's organisations and movements, trade unions and professional associations, community-based organisations and elected representatives from all 110 Districts, and from across the cultural and political spectrums of this diverse nation. It was a carefully planned, intensive and participatory process, which provoked heated debates on the meaning of gender transformation in Ghanaian society.*

*The conversation excerpted here took place in Accra in January 2005, with Dzodzi Tsikata, the Convenor for the Network for Women's Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT), [1] Rose Mensah-Kutin, ABANTU for Development's Regional Programme Manager for West Africa, and Hamida Harrison, ABANTU for Development's Programme Officer. [2]*

**Amina Mama:** Let me begin by asking about the conditions that led you to embark on the mobilisation that gave rise to the Women's Manifesto. What was happening in Ghana at that time that led you to come up with this idea?

**Rose Mensah-Kutin:** Well, I think that in Ghana, like other countries in Africa, women had been active in development processes for a long time. So a number of things had happened prior to the Manifesto initiative. Most recently, the Domestic Violence Bill initiative saw groups coming together to form a coalition to work around getting the Bill drafted, popularising it by educating the public about feminist issues, and also pushing the government to pass the Bill.

Before that, there had been several attempts, particularly during the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) governments, by different women's groups to raise issues of concern to women, particularly the relationships between the state institutions working on women's issues and the political machinery. There was a concern that political organisations were stifling the capacity of the state institutions mandated to work for issues on women. For 20 years, while the PNDC/NDC ruled this country, there had been a particularly contentious relationship between the state and women's organisations, most particularly with the 31 December Women's Movement, led by Mrs Nana Rawlings, wife of the Head of State.

So a number of efforts were made during that time. You yourself are aware of the Third World Network National Machineries study that was carried out in eight countries in Africa. [3] This pointed to the need to continuously engage with the state in order to broaden the space for women's organisations to flourish, as well as to ensure that the state machinery working on issues for woman was in fact given the chance to perform in terms of meeting its mandate. As a continental networking organisation, ABANTU for Development created opportunities for us to interact with women's groups and women's activists from all over Africa, particularly Nigeria. I remember when I went to Nigeria in 1996 and got a copy of *The Nigerian Women's Political Agenda*. From that time, I began to feel that one day we could also embark on something like that. I remember talking to Nkoyo Toyo, and she said that theirs was a very simple process. They held a series of women's political summits that brought different groups together in a series of meetings. I thought it was an interesting idea.

When a new government came to power in 2001, they established a Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWAC). The new Ministry drew up a gender strategy document, and

NETRIGHT was one of the organisations invited to a consultation about the document. I remember feeling very outraged at that meeting because it was like everything had already been done, and they were finally bringing women together to sort of legitimise it. I remember telling a number of people, "Look, we have to do something more than this – something that we ourselves initiate!"

The idea for the Manifesto came up in 2003. We knew national elections were coming in 2004, and the people were talking about whether women were going to try to do something. Takyiwaa Manuh, the chair of our Board, was talking to me, trying to push me to think of something, and so I said maybe we should develop a Woman's Manifesto. We knew that Nigeria had done something like that, and so had Botswana and Tanzania. And so I just said it – that we should have a Ghanaian Women's Manifesto and she said it was a wonderful idea, and that is how it started.

**AM:** You mentioned that the transition to party politics had changed the political terrain. Would you like to say a bit more about that? What was it about party politics that formed this initiative?

**Hamida Harrison:** Ghanaians had lived under a military dictatorship for quite a long time, and here we were saying that now we had a democratic dispensation. But to have a democratic system, the question of participation, and women's participation in particular, is very important. We saw that the institutionalisation of democracy needed the participation of every citizen, and therefore women's access to policymaking was very, very important.

**Dzodzi Tsikata:** In addition, for over a decade, we had had the 31 December Women's Movement dominating the landscape. Depending on circumstances, it would present itself as a revolutionary organ, or as an NGO, or any number of things. But it had taken up all the space and stifled and constrained women's independent organising. It also controlled the national machinery for women, the National Council for Women and Development, so very few organisations were able to function at all. But towards the end of 1999, when we had elections coming, some important things happened. These shifted things within the state.

The first thing was the mysterious murders of scores of women in Accra. Women, especially gender equality activists, felt that this was something too big to be tackled separately. We had to come together so that something was done about these murders. The two main political parties were busy accusing each other. We suddenly realised that they were not actually interested in these problems. They were too busy campaigning for the elections, while we had this big problem facing women. So this catalysed women's groups, and they came together in this huge outburst. NETRIGHT and a new organisation called Sisters Keeper were very active in the protests.

**AM:** So what did you do?

**DT:** We launched demonstrations, pickets, and marched to the Osu Castle, the seat of government, to protest. I mean, we were desperate! There was a lot of support from the public and the media. Even when our numbers were small, the TV cameras shot favourably, to give the impression there were more of us. They all felt that the NDC government was not doing well. That really built up the confidence of the women's movement, because in the midst of all this, we had an election which nobody won outright. So we had to have a run-off. The opposition was leading, and this was virtually unprecedented in Africa – an incumbent government was about to be replaced! Before the run-off, we organised a massive manifestation, we marched to the Castle. The President did not come out to speak to us, and this outraged many. People were saying that women had overturned the government – that there was no way they were going to win the elections! So we came out of all that feeling

very energised, and indeed the government did lose the 2000 elections. I am not saying we were responsible, but it was a factor. Our actions and the government's lack of a proper response exposed it as not having the will to solve the murders. This did not go down well, because it was an issue of national concern. It fed into the general impression that the government was not concerned about the many problems facing Ghanaians. Secondly, it is not often that women in Ghana march on the Castle in an angry mood. Therefore it had an impact beyond the size of the demonstration.

This influenced the new government to show sensitivity to women's issues. The new President talked about women in his inaugural speech. This was also new – before, politicians were silent on gender issues, and now there was talk about empowering women, and which strategies to pursue. The President also announced the formation of a Ministry for Women. That was a mixed blessing to us. We thought that finally we had a government that understood that they had to pay attention to gender issues, but we did not think that the vehicle they were choosing was going to be very empowering. Straightaway we formed a delegation to go and tell the government that they were wrong. That showed the new confidence: suddenly people did not want to be marginalised, they wanted to be present in the political sphere. They went out and told the government, “You are wrong, we don't think that this is what you should be doing.” The delegation met the President and this was indicative that something was shifting at last, that there was more political space. The 31 December Women's Movement could no longer dominate the scene. Women's groups now felt a new level of confidence.

**RMK:** We knew we could never go back to the old days. By this time, we were out of the bottle already.

**AM:** Can you explain why you had such an apparently ungrateful response to the government declaration that a Women's Ministry was being formed? Why didn't you want this Ministry?

**DT:** What we were saying was that in countries such as Uganda, where Ministries of Women had been set up, gender issues had become ghettoised. We had all this information from the eight-country study we conducted. So we were very clear in our minds that there were lessons from elsewhere that we needed to learn. When that study was launched, one of the things that had been proposed for Ghana was the need for a constitutional guarantee, so that whatever institution was set up to co-ordinate the affairs of women would have a stronger mandate. There was a clear example for us to follow in the Ghana Commission of Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ). That organisation had shown itself capable of addressing many social justice issues and had a very good reputation. So we felt that if we had something like that Commission, it would be better than a Ministry.

The new energy that had come into the women's movement meant that it was like a new beginning for everybody after 30 years, even though we knew that the New Patriotic Party (NPP) perhaps might have not have been your ideal political party. But we were suddenly very hopeful that they might listen to us. So we articulated our position through the meeting with the President, a number of other meetings, and through press statements that brought these concerns into the public domain. We said we were happy that the government was taking an interest in women's issues – now here are our suggestions. But it was like an opportunistic thing on their part. It was important at that time for them to talk about being committed to women's issues, but as to the specific action that would concretise their interest – well, I don't think that they really wanted to listen to anybody.

As time went by, it became clearer to us that perhaps we had moved too quickly into dialogue. Some people were eager to work closely with the government and the Ministry of

Women's Affairs. But then the government began to show that it did not really want to dialogue with the women's organisations. We began to see that it was not just a matter of course for us to be accepted as the experts on these issues by the government.

**RMK:** What we wanted was a constitutional mandate. We also wanted a number of organisations at different institutional locations, because the business of gender equality is not a single package – it is a multi-faceted thing. So you need an independent statutory body, but you also need a policy-making agency within government that can also reach across various ministries. Usually when you set up a ministry, you don't have the mandate to reach across other ministries. You also need independent civil society formations and so on. We were worried about the institutional vehicle that had been chosen. Furthermore, we were worried about the agenda of the Minister herself, because she thinks micro-credit is the only way to go. And we had ample experience that the policy work was difficult, that it required education and a lot of effort. We had already seen that it could not be combined with practical and everyday issues like giving out credit to women, but the Minister preferred that, and throughout her four years, that was the sole focus of the Ministry's activities.

**HH:** We were vindicated, because within a very short time, the Ministry was saddled with the additional responsibility of children's matters, which made the Ministry huge and unwieldy. Soon after that, it also swallowed two independent commissions: the National Commission for Women and Development and the National Commission on Children. So all that made the work of the Ministry untenable, quite apart from the fact that it had very limited resources allocated to it.

**RMK:** Also, a number of people were shocked to learn that the state is not friendly to everybody, and is constituted of different interests. People tend to think that the state is a neutral body and some were actually traumatised to find out just how political things are.

**AM:** The myth of neutrality. What I hear you all saying is really pointing to the limits of bureaucratic government structures when it comes to the pursuit of activist agendas.

**RMK:** Yes, and that is a huge concern for democratisation more broadly.

**AM:** Beyond gender?

**DT:** Yes, I think it's a particular problem in Ghana, because people do not want to rock the boat. If you say something that is different to the government's agenda, then you are being subversive. For example, many people can't even deal with criticism of the World Bank and the IMF.

**HH:** It is also related to the ideology of the NGO setting. NGOs are supposed to be politically neutral, non-partisan and so on. And I think that many NGOs are afraid of the word "political", many of them actually say, "we are not political", while we in the women's movement are saying "this is politics". The minute you start talking about power and resources and so on, it is politics. This is something that makes people within the NGO setting very uncomfortable.

**AM:** Does that perhaps explain the commonly observed anxiety over feminism – that it is seen as overtly, if not aggressively political?

**DT:** In a sense, yes. In many countries in Africa, gender activists are accepted as long as they focus on programmes such as credit for women, income generation projects and girls' education, and couch their struggles in terms of welfare or national development. Once they broach questions of power relations or injustices, they are accused of being elitist and

influenced by foreign ideas that are alien to African culture.

**AM:** Thank you for that background. Now let's talk about the next steps. Having made the decision to pursue the Manifesto, with of all this accumulated experience – the previous mobilisations, and the new confidence – tell me about the process. It sounds like some scattered groups and organisations were able to coalesce around the violence issue because it was a sensational issue. Clearly, developing the Women's Manifesto was not all that sensational, even with the strategic opportunity presented by an impending election. It put different demands on how you mobilised. How did you develop your strategy and what was that strategy?

**RMK:** Well, I guess a number of people were quite clear that this was a political action. It was also about development and strengthening organisations, but we were clear that this was a political thing. You see, already we had NETRIGHT, and we could build on our previous experiences to create a vehicle for the Women's Manifesto.

**DT:** NETRIGHT is a coalition of organisations and individuals that was formed out of the National Machinery study. When we held the national workshop to discuss the findings of that study, we agreed that the absence of a common platform to struggle for gender justice was a problem. For example, if we wanted to strengthen the National Machinery, we needed a collective force to push for a feminist agenda.

**RMK:** Yes, that is where it came from. We set up this broad agenda, which was more like a platform that would determine what those issues would be. But very quickly we settled on a number of actions. NETRIGHT produced an alternative report for Beijing + 5. This formed a counterpoint to the government's report of its achievements. We also tackled some broad issues, the national machinery for women, women in politics, economic policy issues, and so on.

**DT:** Having a broad mandate meant that we had been involved in advocacy around a range of issues. NETRIGHT's very broad membership base was very valuable. For example, the trade unions and the Ladies' Club of the Ghana National Association of Teachers were involved. Once the Manifesto process was initiated, it was easy for ABANTU, itself an organisational member of NETRIGHT, to take the idea of the Women's Manifesto to these and other organisations such as the Ghana Registered Nurses Association. ABANTU also had its own networks and a very strong relationship with the media.

**RMK:** There were also many lessons from the Domestic Violence Coalition. ABANTU had engaged vigorously with the institutions involved in drawing up and passing the Bill, and had also had a serious media and public education campaign. However, we were not sure whether we understood the different power relationships that were involved in a process like this. It was also important for us to learn a little bit about what others had done. Dzodzi got hold of a document detailing what had been done in Botswana, and we had a number of informal discussions. Then we felt that we needed to hold a meeting to introduce the idea to women's organisations and other civil society organisations. We held that first open meeting on 23 June 2004, to discuss the idea with organisations and individuals and ascertain their interest in such a project. Everything took off from there. Hamida can say more about this.

**HH:** That first meeting we got in about 65 groups – mainly women's groups, NGOs, CBOs, policymakers and individual women activists from all across Ghana. They were very taken by the idea. We were able to convince them (or they were able to convince us!) that it was a very good idea, and that there was a need for us to continue with it. So this meeting gave the mandate to ABANTU to forge ahead.

**RMK:** If I might add, at that meeting and all subsequent consultations, we asked Dzodzi to make an opening presentation in which she detailed what it might look like to carry through the process of developing a Women's Manifesto. When we went into working group sessions, the information she provided was discussed further. In addition, we discussed the issues people might want to include in the document, and the processes that would be followed. At the end of that meeting, we had a recipe of things to do, with deadlines and all that. We were given that mandate and told, we hope you will carry it through. At that point, we hadn't anticipated where this would take us! But that was the challenge.

**AM:** Did you attract external support for this action?

**RMK:** At that first meeting, I remember the battle we had with the donors who had said that they were interested in supporting us, but they wanted something very quick and superficial. So when we were organising that meeting we refused their money, and we had the meeting anyway. It was after that that they realised: these people, they are serious!

**HH:** The next step was to take the idea to the grassroots and also to local policymakers. So with the help of Action Aid, we had a meeting of District Assembly women from all the 110 Districts of Ghana. This was the first time in the history of this country that these people met. They had never met in their local Districts, let alone in the regions, and now here they were meeting nationally in Accra. We had close to 180 District Assembly women from all over Ghana come to meet here for three days, to give us their ideas, their contributions and their input into a document that needed to be representative of all ideas, from across the country.

**AM:** That is impressive!

**HH:** We also tried to involve the Ministry in that meeting. We sent a special invitation to the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, as well as the Ministry of Local Government, because we thought these were Ministries that were key to the issues of women. Unfortunately, the Minister of Women's and Children's Affairs couldn't come, but she sent a representative. The Minister of Local Government couldn't come either, but he too sent a representative to the meeting. It was very unfortunate that the Minister of Women didn't turn up, because the women themselves, the District Assembly women, were very eager to meet her.

We found this meeting was very important, because through it, we were able to mobilise the ideas and contributions from all the regions, and we were able to form working groups of women from each region so that they could bring out their own concerns that were sometimes peculiar to certain regions.

**AM:** Give me an example?

**RMK:** For example, for women from the Upper West region, one of the key issues was the way women are treated within the marital relationship, and also the distribution of resources, access to land and violence against women. So they wanted those issues to be incorporated into the women's manifesto. In the Ashanti region, people were concerned about the issue of girl-child education, with more and more girls dropping out of school because they were interested in trading.

**DT:** Apart from fleshing out regional specificities, the meetings also detailed some of the demands for the Manifesto and sharpened the analysis of certain problems. For example, if you come to the section on how culture discriminates against women, we have a list of practices we are demanding should be abolished. The reason we were able to come up with such a comprehensive list was because of the consultations beforehand. It was also

because of the range of people in the drafting committee.

**RMK:** We could also analyse issues like the relation of culture and violence because people from the three Northern Regions were talking about things that could be attributed to cultural practices. Some of these communities are Muslim and some are Christian. So there was a demand that we be sensitive to the issue of polygamy, because many Muslim women might be in polygamous marriages, and some felt that the issue should be taken out of the Manifesto to avoid tension. But in the end it stayed because a number of people also said that this was their dream document, we were supposed to be talking about what we wanted for the future. This view of the Manifesto as a visionary document with practical time-bound demands took hold very well. It freed people to discuss their vision for gender equality and equity while making concrete demands for achieving such a vision.

**HH:** After the District meeting, we held a consultative meeting in October with all seven registered political parties in Ghana. This was because we felt political parties were very important in terms of women's place in political participation, and also because the Manifesto was directed at government agencies and political parties, because we were making demands on these institutions. Therefore it was imperative that we meet to learn about their structures, and how women really were facilitated in terms of taking part. With a few exceptions, the parties were represented by the leaders of their women's wings. The discussions gave us an insight into how political parties work, and how women participate, so their input also was very important.

**RMK:** Because of our past experience with the NDC and how they didn't listen, we were not very optimistic. This time round, the NDC delegates were thanking us profusely for organising the meeting and praising us for being forward-looking! They were also very open about the challenges women faced within the party leadership structures. On the other hand, the new ruling party, the NPP, said that there was no gender problem in their party. There were women in leadership positions in the party and there would have been more if women themselves had been more proactive. When we announced that we had invited the Minister, but she had not turned up, the women's organiser of the NPP phoned the Minister and put one of our colleagues onto the phone for the Minister to explain why she was not there! We felt that this was an attempt to intimidate us into not making any more comments about her absence.

**AM:** So after the meeting with the political parties, what then?

**DT:** The media.

**HH:** Rose went to a meeting organised by Women in Broadcasting and presented a paper about the process that we were following in trying to develop a Women's Manifesto for Ghana, and they were very interested because they wanted to see how that could be represented to the public through the media, electronic as well as the print media.

**AM:** So you developed a PR strategy right at the outset?

**HH:** Yes, we wanted to develop a close relationship with the media.

**RMK:** But it was not just a PR strategy, we wanted them to be part of it, because we knew that among them were women who were very active in the women's movement, so we knew that the issues were of interest to them. So we wanted them to be part of the coalition both as advocates and as persons who would publicise the coalition's work. They also contributed to writing the section of the Manifesto on the media and were active in promoting the document.

**AM:** After all these consultations, what was the next step?

**HH:** By December, we had all these ideas, contributions and an idea of what the document would contain. So the drafting and steering committees were set up. The convenor for the Steering Committee was Professor Ama Ata Aidoo and the convenor for the Drafting Committee was Dzodzi. I think Dzodzi would be more able to speak about these two committees.

**DT:** We launched these committees publicly, and the idea was to set out their terms of reference, establish the leadership and make sure that the drafting committee was organised – and the whole process went well.

**AM:** You said the membership went beyond the initial committee?

**DT:** The interesting thing is that the members of the steering committee all came to draft. (All laugh.) During the Christmas holidays, Rose and myself produced this very long document, really just to process all these ideas. We tried to structure it, but we were very clear that it was up to the drafting committee to produce this document, so this pre-draft was just to ease the process for them.

So we began the meetings of the drafting committee in the New Year. They were residential. It was a writing process, but also a very political process, because we set it up like a workshop. We would talk about the objectives of the process and then break up into small groups, each one with the responsibility of drafting a section. Then we would come back and discuss the draft and people would add and subtract. We had three drafting sessions. By the end of the first one, word had spread that this was a very interesting process. So the nurses came, and that was really important for us, because the registered nurses association is a very large organisation of women.

**RMK:** People with disabilities also were represented.

**DT:** The mainstream organisations such as the Trades Union Congress of Ghana (TUC) and one of its national unions, the General and Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU), were all very active. And then of course there were all the women's NGOs, which was very important, because it's not always the case that we all work together on the same thing. Then there were those who would call to complain that they had not been invited to participate in the drafting process.

**HH:** And we would say, "Just come!"

**AM:** Was this response due to media coverage?

**DT:** Partly. I also think people were feeling very positive about what was going on. At the beginning of the drafting process I had this apprehension that people might consider the demands too radical, but to our surprise it was the other way round, that our attempts to censor ourselves were thrown overboard! In one or two cases, we demanded 30% representation of women, and the drafters would demand "Why are we settling for less than 50%, less than half?" And we would carry on late into the night, people would just keep going at it with a lot of energy.

**RMK:** Obviously the process was much more complicated than we had foreseen. However, there was a lot of good humour. People were not personal about their drafts; if there were any quarrels, things were worked out.

**AM:** Sounds unbelievable! There must have been some fights?

**RMK:** Actually, we were amazed by the fact that people wanted to be in on it – we had thought that people would abandon the process along the way. But they wanted the thing to be collectively owned.

**DT:** And nobody walked out. The drafting process was very energising in fact, and the same people kept on coming back.

**AM:** I am interested in what you said about it being so inclusive – that in some way, this made the work harder?

**RMK:** In some ways it did, but we also came away with the sense that gender consciousness was very much higher in Ghana than we thought – we were a little surprised. We thought that we would be quarrelling about every single point, but that proved not to be the case. It was as if we had become the voices of moderation! This was very humbling because those who are against women's rights often accuse gender equality advocates of pushing agendas that are not realistic in the African context. But from the attitude of the women who participated in the Women's Manifesto initiative, lived experiences actually generate and dictate the kinds of changes needed to improve women's lives. This is an important learning point, because it draws attention to the need to trust in the process, to actually draw out women's experiences as the basis for making decisions and demanding changes to improve their well-being.

Another interesting thing: all of a sudden, people were beginning to ask questions and make demands on the government to provide certain things. People have become more conscious, perhaps through the process, about the responsibility of government, and the need for it to comply with its local mandate and all of those things.

**AM:** What did you do after the draft was complete?

**DT:** We organised regional consultations, two in each region, one for civil society organisations and another for government agencies. These affirmed the broad support for the Manifesto as a whole. The consultations also won the Manifesto many new friends and spread the message even wider, and generated the level of interest which culminated in that very successful launch.

**AM:** What happened at the launch, and what were its impacts?

**RMK:** The launch, at the Accra Conference Centre, was a spectacular event. Its success was beyond anything we had imagined. There was so much excitement! Over 1 000 women and men from all 110 Districts of the country at the time (now there are 130) were present. Representatives from the many different organisations, institutions and constituencies that had participated in the Manifesto process at different levels took part in the launch. Because the document represented the views and concerns of all these different groups, they felt that this was something they owned. Women felt that this was cause to celebrate, as they had reached consensus on matters that affected them. Many government departments and agencies were represented, with the exception of the Ministry for Women's and Children's Affairs, which saw the Manifesto as an attempt to encroach on its turf.

For those of us in the women's movement, the lesson was that women can work together on critical issues that affect them, and that with effective mobilisation, success is possible. What is required now is that we reorganise ourselves and advocate for the implementation of the

demands contained in the Manifesto. Once real improvements in women's lives have been achieved, then we can claim that the Manifesto experience has been worthwhile. But the coalition is a huge achievement, and it provides an organisational framework for the realisation of the demands in the Manifesto.

**AM:** What are your plans for the future?

**HH:** Disseminating the Manifesto even more widely and struggling for the implementation of its demands. We have already held two meetings of the coalition. The first was to agree on the structures and functions of the coalition and its agenda. The second was to agree on a plan of action. The coalition recently met with NETRIGHT and the coalition for the Domestic Violence Bill to determine what the priorities of the women's movement should be in the coming four years. This meeting was occasioned by the appointment of a new Minister for Women's Affairs to replace the previous incumbent, whose term in office had been a difficult one for women's organisations. These priorities included implementing the demands of the Women's Manifesto. A document setting out these priorities has been presented to the new Minister, who has been conciliatory and positive about the contributions of women's organisations. The coalition's first assignment is a campaign to get equal representation for women in the appointed membership of the District Assemblies.

**AM:** The lessons emerging from your account are relevant for other women activists in Africa. Can you share some of these lessons?

**DT:** Rose, Hamida and myself have discussed what we have learnt from our experiences. Three particular lessons come to mind. One of them is that a collective project of this nature strengthens unity, builds confidence and empowers not just those who initiate it, but all who become involved in it. This lesson was already apparent to us from reading about Women's Manifesto initiatives elsewhere. While our gains from the Manifesto process may not yet be tangible, they permeate the work of the women's movement in Ghana. Collective processes have become much easier, and trust and goodwill have been built. The process has also resulted in the emergence of new leaders in the women's movement in Ghana.

We also learned that the more thorough and broad-based a political process, the more it can withstand challenges from powerful quarters. As Rose said, we learned to trust the process to deliver what we wanted. For example, the unprecedented level of our mobilisation protected us from the then-Minister's hostility, and her attempts to derail our efforts by launching her gender policy the day before the Manifesto was launched. After a certain point had been reached, the Manifesto process could not be stopped, not even by us. We also experienced what we already knew in theory: that the state was not monolithic, because other state agencies, such as the Women and Juvenile Unit of the Ghana Police Service, made very positive contributions, particularly on questions of violence against women and the decriminalisation of prostitution. And the National Commission for Civic Education, a constitutional body, took up the regional launches of the Manifesto in several regions of Ghana.

Finally, the importance of partnerships, both within our ranks and with different constituencies – mass organisations, the media and other women's organisations – is a key lesson. There are not many of us working for gender equality and equity, and this applies to many African countries. Therefore, successful partnerships maximised our use of resources and created divisions of labour that enabled us to achieve our goals. The Manifesto initiative's relationship with the media was one of the most fruitful partnerships in our history of civil society activism. Every month, we briefed the media on one chapter of the draft Manifesto. Thus, by the time the draft was complete, its contents had been widely reported in detail. The fact that women working in the media were also involved in the drafting and

other processes of the Manifesto ensured publicity. In spite of our successes, however, media people are not yet spontaneously analysing the Manifesto. The ambition of the coalition is to take the media work to a new level so that journalists spontaneously use both the analysis and the demands in the Manifesto in their work. The participation of the unions and other mass organisations in the Manifesto initiative also gave the process legitimacy. Women's organisations have yet to tap the full potential of working with mass organisations on collective projects. The Ghanaian experience shows how fruitful such partnerships can be.

**AM:** Thank you all very much – yours is an extraordinary story that offers inspiration to us all!

### **Footnotes**

[1] NETRIGHT is a coalition of civil society organisations and individuals established to provide a platform for collective action and bring a women's rights perspective to activism on issues of national development. It is currently focused on economic policy issues, specifically, gender equity in the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (GPRSP) and land tenure reforms. NETRIGHT produces a biennial report on the status of women in Ghana.

[2] ABANTU for Development is an NGO with offices in Ghana, Nigeria and Nairobi (see Profile elsewhere in this issue of *Feminist Africa*).

[3] The Third World Network (TWN) carried out an independent research project to evaluate the National Machinery for Women in eight African countries. This was published as a monograph series in 2000.