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Bicycles Help Win 3 Seats for Women in Ghanaian District Assembly

July 11, 2011 by Paula Stromberg

Ghanaian women celebrated three victories in the 2010 District Assembly election in the [Upper West Region](#) of Ghana, with the help of bicycles provided by [YWCA Canada](#) and [Canadian Crossroads International](#) through local Ghana partner [ABANTU for Development](#). More than 40 women ran in the Upper West Region including three in [Wa Municipality](#), while the last election in 2006 saw just one female candidate. The ten female candidates were given bicycles to help them campaign in remote towns around the regional capital of Wa, in Ghana. Bicycles enabled them to distribute campaign flyers in rural areas and discuss problems with local people in a bid for votes in the District Assembly elections.

The Bicycles for Ballots project was part of practical election support that ABANTU for Development implemented for female candidates in the Upper West Region. Helen Koranten, Executive Director of the Centre for Rural Women Empowerment and Development, identified female candidates for the District Assembly elections, facilitated training workshops for women across the political spectrum and arranged the collaboration to supply ten bicycles for candidates' election campaigns. "Women used their new bicycles to reach voters in distant places. Roads in our area are just

footpaths through the hinterlands, quite inaccessible to cars,” she explained. “Without bicycles, they would have struggled getting from village to village.”

One of the successful District Assembly candidates, Stella Porekuu, a kindergarten teacher, topped the polls with 199 votes, while her two male competitors received only 144 and 80 votes. It was a tough fight, especially due to her lack of funds, as she remarks, “One of my male opponents is rich. This is a newly-created district and people are very poor. If you campaign for election and don’t give them something, at least some water to drink, they imagine you are powerless to achieve anything. They won’t bother voting for you.”

Porekuu thinks help from YWCA Canada, ABANTU for Development and dozens of other NGOs have helped women understand the importance of voting. “Women are getting educated and developing our minds. The number of female voters is increasing.”

Landslide victories could be driving home the message for women. With 462 votes, compared to her male opponent’s 103, Virginia Saaliboh had a decisive triumph. “During my campaign, women’s groups assured me of victory. Many women came out to vote,” said Saaliboh from the Baseable electoral area in the Lawra District, about 54 kilometres from Wa.

Fabiana Kavaarpuo, a first-time candidate, says that her community’s major problem is poverty. “For the first time in my area, people were ready to give a woman their votes. Women voters saw another woman trying to help them. Girl children drop out of school here so I hope to be a role model for them.”

Fundraising for an election campaign or any kind of development is always a challenge, especially for women and their families. More women need to get into decision-making structures from grassroots to the national level. Poverty cannot be eliminated without gender equality principles. “With help from partner collaborations, we increase rural women’s visibility in politics,” concludes Helen Koranteng.

This is a guest blog by Paula Stromberg, whose story writing, newspapers, photography and art designs have won more than 50 national and international awards. A professional writer, newspaper editor, business and labour journalist, she has also published essays, poetry and short stories. For more information, visit her [website](#) & blog.

[« Return](#)

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