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GHANA: Parliament Of Ghana To Start Virtual Sittings

PLEASE
TURN TO
PAGE 3



First Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Hon Joseph Osei-Owusu



Speaker of the Fifth Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone, Honorable Dr. Abass Chernor Bundu

Sierra Leone: House Speaker Beckons President, Chief Justice and Donors

Page 10



Right Honourable Speaker, Professor Aaron Michael Oquaye (m) with Hon. Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu (r) and Hon. Haruna Iddrisu

Private Member Bills: Parliament of Ghana Poised to Overcome Bottlenecks for Implementation

Page 4

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Education

SIERRA LEONE: MP Dilates On Parliament's Role On The Reopening Of Schools Cum COVID-19

By Melvin Tejan Mansaray

Ever since Sierra Leone recorded its index case of Coronavirus or COVID-19 disease on the 31st March, 2020, the Government of Sierra Leone has instituted several health safety measures to protect the lives of its citizens.

The closure of all schools, universities and colleges was a byproduct of the precautionary measures.

Three months on, the Government again has deemed it necessary to reopen schools for pupils taking the National Primary School Exam (NPSE), Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and the West Africa Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) despite the country still recording new confirmed positive cases and deaths.

Public reaction and observations to the decision of the reopening of schools on Wednesday 1st July, 2020 has been mixed with some parents and guardians welcoming the news while others skeptical that this might put students and teachers on the coronavirus arms way.

President Julius Maada Bio during



Honorable Dominic J. Lavalie-Tshombe, Chairman for Parliamentary Oversight Committee on Basic and Senior Secondary School Education

Scientific research are showing that COVID-19 will not end soon, so in that situation we have prepared ourselves to keep our working and learning environment safe amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. More so, education is time bound and we are faced with a situation of students having to be promoted to other classes, school girls getting physically matured. If people are going to work, we can ensure that we put these same modalities in place to ensure that the classrooms are also safe by maintaining the rules and regulations put in place by the health sector.

his fourth State House Press Conference on COVID-19 held on June 23rd, 2020 told citizens that "The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary School, in consultation with stakeholders, has developed comprehensive health and safety guidelines for teachers, pupils, and their communities for the sole purpose of providing a safe environment for our students who are taking public examinations at all levels. Those guidelines are consistent with best practices around the sub-region and the world. We will monitor the data and determine and scale up further actions as necessary."

What has been the involvement of Parliament in all of these stakeholder consultations and decision-making, Honorable Dominic J. Lavalie-Tshombe Chairman for Parliamentary Oversight Com-

mittee on Basic and Senior Secondary School Education enumerates.

The Government Member of Parliament (MP) representing Constituency 098, Moyamba District Southern Sierra Leone and Chairman Parliamentary Oversight Committee on Basic and Senior Secondary School Education Hon. Dominic in a telephone interview said as a responsible Government, they have thought it feasible for students writing public exams (classes six, form three and six) to resume school sessions while adhering to COVID-19 rules of use of face mask, social distancing (spacing in class attendance of not more than twenty five per class) and hand washing.

He noted that the decision of the Government to reopen schools

for public exams was not taken under pressure from West African Exams Council but scientific advice.

"When we look at the Covid-19 situation in the country, we are observing a decrease in new confirmed cases coupled with high number of recoveries. Scientific research are showing that COVID-19 will not end soon, so in that situation we have prepared ourselves to keep our working and learning environment safe amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. More so, education is time bound and we are faced with a situation of students having to be promoted to other classes, school girls getting physically matured. If people are going to work, we can ensure that we put these same modalities in place to ensure that the classrooms are also safe by maintaining the rules and regulations put in place by the health sector. I think it is prudent that we reopen schools taking into consideration the regulations that are guiding the pandemic."

He acknowledged that no matter what, some people are going to see the decision as risk taking but same is also the case for regular workers adding that the fear of risk cannot continue endlessly because some countries have resumed schooling and other aspects of living moving on in line with the health guidelines.

Hon. Dominic said to ensure safety in schools; the Parliamentary Oversight Committee on Basic and Senior Secondary Education is out and about in the sixteen political districts of the country to monitor the psychosocial training of teachers among other things.

"Today Wednesday 1st July, 2020, we started visiting schools to see that the health regulations and guidelines are maintained," Hon. Dominic said, adding that they visited the Harford, St. Joseph Convent, RCS and Juneultrance schools in the Moyamba District where they observed high attendance rate above fifty percent and maintained the classroom management guidelines of not more than twenty five students per

Continued on Pages 3&6

Parliamentary Practice & Procedures

GHANA: Parliament Of Ghana To Start Virtual Sittings

By: Gilbert Borketey Boyefio

Plans are far advanced for Ghana's Parliament to start virtual parliamentary sittings to allow Members of Parliament to perform their parliamentary duties when they are outside the Chamber or in their constituencies.

This has become very necessary as Parliament implement social distancing protocols as part of its measures to curb the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. This initiative also comes as a welcome news at a time when Ghana goes into Presidential and Parliamentary elections in December and Members of Parliament will be torn between political campaigns and performing their parliamentary responsibilities.

This was disclosed during a webinar organized by the Parliamentary Network Africa (PNAfrica), in partnership with the Public Affairs Department of the Parliament of Ghana, in commemoration of the International Day of Parliamentarism (World Parliament Day) on June 30.

The webinar was on the theme,



First Deputy Speaker of Parliament,
Hon Joseph Osei-Owusu

"The Role of Parliament in an Era of Pandemic" to highlight the significant contributions of Ghana's Parliament in the COVID-19 battle.

Parliaments have a critical role to play as the world addresses the health and socioeconomic challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The webinar addressed by the First Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Hon Joseph Osei-Owusu, took a closer look at how Ghana's Parliaments is adapting their practices in accordance with physical distancing guidelines presented by government.

The webinar discussed and explored the possibilities and challenges of hosting virtual parliamentary sittings or committee meetings, the difficulties Parliaments are facing in this COVID-19 crisis and how they are adapting to the new context while continuing to strengthen parliamentary openness. It further discussed the importance of ensuring that parliament continue to promote transparency and access to information, accountability, participation and high ethical standards as it adapts.

The webinar is the first of PNAfrica's Parliamentary Dialogue Series, a thought-leadership speaker series aimed at giving citizens an insight into the legislative agenda before parliament; the work of the various committees of Parliament, and how they will affect the livelihood and socioeconomic development of the people going forward. It will give participants the opportunity to interrogate and engage with the leadership of Parliament, including the various committee leadership on the legislative agenda, in order to propose innovative and collaborative ways to complete a good volume of the work of Parliament before their tenure ends.

The next webinar schedule for next

week will feature the Majority Leader, Hon Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu, and the Minority Leader, Hon Haruna Iddrisu.

About World Parliament Day

The International Day of Parliamentarism is celebrated every year on 30 June, the date in 1889 on which the IPU was founded. The Day was established in 2018 through a United Nations General Assembly Resolution.

This Day celebrates parliaments and the ways in which parliamentary systems of government improve the day-to-day lives of people in the world over. It is also an opportunity for parliaments to take stock, identify challenges, and ways to address them effectively.

Instituting an international day for parliaments is particularly important at this critical time for parliamentary democracy, when people are losing trust in political institutions and democracy itself is facing challenges from populist and nationalist movements. If democracy is to thrive, then parliaments, as the cornerstone of functioning democracies, need to be strong, transparent, accountable and representative.

SIERRA LEONE: MP Dilates On Parliament's Role On The Reopening Of Schools Cum COVID-19

Continued from Page 2

class.

Over ninety percent of the kids wore face mask although they were expecting the supply of face masks on the day of the reopening, he said, noting that for the few kids without face masks, the Committee advised that they go to the back of the classroom while they were admonished to get a face mask in the coming days.

He said the schools visited had hand washing prevalence with veronica buckets and thermometers.

Hon. Dominic said: "The environment is conducive; we just need to uphold the regulations. We are working with templates and with chiefs to do the assessment."

On the involvement of the Parliamentary Oversight Committee on Basic

and Senior Secondary Education in the consultation and decision making process to reopening schools, Hon. Dominic said, the Education Ministry organized a psychosocial training of trainers for teachers, "and MPs were to witness this event to see the content of the materials, see the turn out, see whether the session is maintaining the rules of the pandemic and to see how well planned the Ministry is and the Head of Schools are for the reopening of schools. The Committee went through the sessions. We are now out in the field to have firsthand report, not only to wait on the Education Ministry's report but to jointly visit the field to get firsthand information from schools."

Hon. Dominic noted that the Parliamentary oversight Committee on Education cannot cover all schools across the country but using a pilot approach adding that hopefully they are expecting to table a report in parliament

with regards to their findings from the field visits.

Hon. Dominic stressed that a relevance of the Parliamentary Oversight Committee in all of this is to monitor, stating that they need more support to partner or go independently to do continuous monitoring of the schooling sessions and even up to the exams period which will have an entirely unique setting this time around with no more than twenty five pupils expected in a classroom.

"The examination bodies must begin to put in place or have more supervisors for the examinations classes. If we have support as a Committee, we will be out to ensure that what we have started continues. We need logistical support as a Committee; the nation is wide, if we can just be provided with fuel through the support of the Parliamentary Service Commission or like in the case of support we had from

UNICEF, or can have support from any education supporting institution to just enable us to go out of Freetown, it will greatly assist our parliamentary work," Hon. Dominic said.

Critics say the long stay at home by the students will have an impact not only on learning outcomes but possibly on the public exams results but Hon. Dominic disagrees.

He said all schools were closed on March 31st, 2020 and the WASSCE exams was supposed to have commenced in April, while the NPSE taken in May and schools were to have been closed for a two weeks Easter break, while the BECE is normally taken in July.

The MP said, "we are expecting that over ninety five percent of the syllabus was supposed to have been completed as against March 31, 2020, so if the

Continued on Page 6

Transparency and Parliamentary Openness

Private Member Bills: Parliament of Ghana Poised to Overcome Bottlenecks for Implementation

By Clement Akoloh,
GHANA

The Parliament of Ghana has started work on some three Private Members Bills aimed at filling in the gaps in the country's laws identified by Members of Parliament on behalf of the public to complement Bill proposals advanced to the House by the Executive Arm of Government.

"During the meeting, three Private Members Bills were worked on. The Bills are: Road Traffic Amendment Number Two Bill; Public Health Amendment Bill; and the Children's Amendment Bill," Speaker Professor Aaron Michael Oquaye revealed in his closing remarks to end the First Meeting of the Fourth Session of the Seventh Parliament.

However, this may not materialize until Parliament has been able to come out with some clearly defined position on this issue, given the fact that there has been some inconsistencies in the approach of previous Speakers on Private Members Bills.

A Private Members Bill, an importation from a parliamentary system of government, is a bill introduced into a legislature by a legislator who is not acting on behalf of the Executive branch of government. The designation "Private Members Bill" is used in most Westminster System jurisdictions, in which a "private member" is any Member of Parliament (MP) who is not a member of the Cabinet (Executive).

Speaking to the Parliamentary News Africa in an interview, the Majority Leader and Leader of

A Private Members Bill, an importation from a parliamentary system of government, is a bill introduced into a legislature by a legislator who is not acting on behalf of the Executive branch of government

Government Business in Parliament, Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu, indicated that the mere show of intent by the current Speaker is not enough to guarantee the operationalization of the PMB. According to him, some technical hurdles would have to be dealt with first.

"You see technically, the Speaker is not a Member of Parliament so if any direction or any ruling should be given, it should be predicated on an issue that has been raised in the House. Outside the House, the Speaker may express his opinion. But if we want to have a clear position on that as a House, the issues must be generated from within and then the Speaker would be required to make a position that this is the position," he explained.

In order to scale this hurdle, the Majority Leader Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu indicated that he was collaborating with the Minority Leader, Haruna Iddrisu to try and engineer a situation which would then occasion the Speaker coming out with a clearly defined position and ruling on the matter. This would then liberate Parliament to do what is appropriate.

The Speaker's closing remarks reported that the House's use of Private Members Bill was being explored by some Honorable Members to fill in the gaps of the

existing laws.

However, the three Bills mentioned fell short of the number of Bills the Speaker had earlier announced at a stakeholder conference on the promotion of Private Member Bills (PMB) which Parliament was considering, including: the Public Order (Amendment) Bill; Electoral Offences and Related Malpractices Bill; Budget Bill; and Reproductive Assisted Technologies Bill.

If successful, this will be the first time the Private Members Bill would have been operationalized by any Parliament in Ghana under the Fourth Republican constitution. Except for one Private Member Motion on "Measures to Remove Algae in Marine Waters" introduced by Mr. Lee Ocran, then MP for Jomoro for the National Democratic Congress Party in the third Parliament. However, the motion died prematurely due to lack of support just like many Private Member Motions.

It will also dispel the self-imposed notion by previous Parliaments that Private Members are prohibited by the constitution to initiate Bills in any form on behalf of the people. A former Speaker of the third Parliament of Ghana, Rt. Hon. Peter Alan Adjetei is on record to have given a ruling which favored an interpretation of the constitution which barred MPs from initiating Bills.

This is also bound to open the flood gates for lobbyists, various interest groups and Civil Society Organizations to push for legislations through Private Members because the status quo currently is not easy to maneuver by these interest groups since legislation is only routed through the Executive of the Government of the day and perceived through its philosophical or ideological lenses. Rt. Speaker Aaron Michael Oquaye made it part of his agenda right from the beginning of his tenure as Speaker in 2017 to champion the implementation of the Private Members Bill in spite of the divergent views on the subject as he sought to break the jinx that surrounded its operationalization in the country as the result of what he considers as a misconception borne out of a misinterpretation of the constitutional provisions on the subject.

The widely held view of some governance experts which has stalled the operationalization of the Private Members Bill up until now is that, there is a limitation placed on the Private Member by the constitution from taking a legislative initiative based on their understanding of Article 108 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana. It states, "Parliament shall not, unless the bill is introduced or the motion is introduced by, or on behalf of, the President..."

The constitutional provision further continues by imposing the limitations on the introduction of bills concerning the imposition of taxes and the settlement of financial affairs including an amendment to a bill, which, in the opinion of the person presiding, is not authorized by the President.

However, Speaker Aaron Michael Oquaye, a renowned Professor and a former Political Science lecturer of many years' experience, who himself has been a two time Member of Parliament in the Fourth and Fifth Parliaments, a Second Deputy Speaker in the Fifth Parliament, has insisted that the current rendition on the Constitution does not stop Members of Parliament and for that matter Parliament from initiating legislation in the public interest.

The Speaker's position is firmly supported by a constitutional expert, Nana Dr S.K.B Asante who urged Members of Parliament not to live under the erroneous impression that the constitution actually prohibits the introduction of bills by private Members of Parliament.

He said Article 108 of the 1992 Constitution did not impose an omnibus prohibition on the initiation of all legislation by a private member, since any MP was perfectly entitled to introduce any legislation which did not have the specific financial implications spelt out in the article.

Many other countries including Australia, Canada, India, Norway, UK, South Africa, Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa and Uganda all have a Private Member's Bill as a good alternative to fill in the lapses in their national laws. Legislative watchers are waiting with bated breath, the day which this constitutional bottleneck to the operationalization of the Private Members Bill would be pushed to the back burner.



Right Honourable Speaker, Professor Aaron Michael Oquaye (m) with Hon. Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu (r) and Hon. Haruna Iddrisu

Parliamentary Affairs

GHANA: Speaker Gives 2 Weeks Ultimatum To EC To Update Parliament After Registration Exercise In August

By: Emmanuella Dadugblor,
GHANA

The Speaker of Parliament Rt. Hon. Prof Aaron Mike Oquaye has summoned officials of the Electoral Commission (EC) to be in the house, two weeks after the voter registration exercise is over, to update the House on its preparations towards the conduct of the 2020 general elections. The summon follows concerns raised



Jean Mensa is the Chairperson of the Electoral Commission

Osei Kyei Mensah Bonsu made an announcement that The Electoral Commission (EC) would in the coming days brief Parliament on measures it is taking to conduct the 2020 general elections. The exact day was however not given as the commission was still in talks with the minister.

The Majority Leader made the announcement on the floor of the House in response to concerns raised by the MP for Adaklu, Mr. Govers Kwame Agbodza, and the Minority Leader and MP for Tamale South, Mr. Haruna Id-risu, about the need for the house to be updated on the EC's plans for a free and fair election. Mr. Agbodza said general elections are important issues which the house need to be updated on as has been done by the former Electoral Commissioner, Charlotte Osei in the past at a closed door meeting. With barely five months for the nation to go to the polls, Mr. Agbodza said, "it is important the Chairperson is brought to update the House," and anything short of this is an act of preventing Members of Parliament, the people's representatives to interact with the EC so that we can report back to our constituents to prepare adequately for this year's elections."

Backing his colleague's calls for the EC to update the House, the Minority Leader said while the Majority Leader had assured him of steps he had initiated to get the EC to come to the House, the appearance of the EC Chairperson would enable the House to interrogate the EC's procurement and budget concerns as well as post Covid-19 measures. "The Majority Leader has assured me. So I want definite assurance when the EC is coming. Are they coming before the Special Budget Committee or they are coming before the Committee of the Whole because we all need to know what it is that we need to do.

The EC on Tuesday, 30th June, 2020, began the registration of eligible voters in a 38 day exercise targeted at some 16 million Ghanaians. The exercise has since received backlash from individuals and Organizations including the Ghana Medical Association who have raised concerns about the commission's inability to ensure strict adherence to the COVID-19 safety protocols.

about the manner in which the exercise is being conducted, especially about the Commission's inability to ensure the adherence to Covid-19 safety protocols. "And I wish to direct so that this matter will not become a matter of any discussion whatsoever again that two weeks after the registration exercise has come to an end, the electoral commission must send relevant representative or representatives to this honourable house and give the house a briefing as honourable members have demanded and which honourable members deserve to have and which is something that has got concrete preceding in the electoral history of this country" Speaker Oquaye said on Friday July 3, 2020.

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Delivering the Business Statement for the Eighth Week ending Friday,

10th July 2020, Majority Chief Whip, Mr Kwasi Ameyaw Chere-meh, on behalf of Majority Leader and Leader of Government Business, Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu, announced that the "Office of the Majority Leader is liaising with the Chairperson of the Electoral Commission to attend upon the House for a briefing on their work programme. Mr Speaker, mindful of the busy schedule of the Commission, in view of the ongoing registration exercise, a favourable date, as may be agreed upon, would be communicated to Honourable Members." He announced.

Mr Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu also announced that "in order to meet the constitutional requirements relating to the coming into force of subsidiary legislations presented to the House, the Business Committee proposes that the House sits on Mondays, 13th July 2020, to Monday, 3rd August 2020." This, Mr Ameyaw- Chere-meh, explained related specifically to CI 94, which is related to the Transfer of Votes, and sitting on Mondays which would enable them fill the 21 sittings days constitutional requirement for the instrument to mature.

In May this year, Majority Leader,

Education

SIERRA LEONE: MP Dilates On Parliament's Role On The Reopening Of Schools Cum COVID-19

Continued from Page 3

kids have been at home for more than two months and are now coming for one month for the NPSE exams, two months for the BECE, I think it is a reasonable period to do a catch up. More so, as a responsible Government, we have been embarking on radio teaching programme, but really the schools are supposed to have exhausted the syllabus as against March 31st, 2020 when the schools were closed."

Hon. Dominic explained that the success of the students in public exams is the penultimate goal of the Government but also keeping a right balance with the protection of lives, adding that the action to reopening schools is well planned and calculated thus, a better result is expected as the outcome unlike in the case of the Ebola outbreak when the country registered mass failures in public exams.

Asked what if the action to reopen schools backfire, Hon. Dominic said that is not their hope that is why they will ensure effective monitoring so that they will be on top of the situation by the grace of God for an ultimate success.

The Parliamentary Basic and Senior Secondary Education Committee Chairman however said, like parents, almost every teacher was happy for the reopening of schools, which he said was depicted by the over ninety percent of teachers and over sixty five percent of pupils turnout on the first day.

"I assure you that the students are prepared to learn and that the sensitization got far and wide.



He said most of their colleagues engaged the media with District Directors and Teaching Service Commission officials to reemphasize and encourage parents and pupils to ensure that pupils be in school on the first day of reopening July 1st, 2020, an objective that was actually achieved at the end of the day," Hon. Dominic J. Lavelie-Tschombe said.

Agnes M. Jalloh Head Teacher Dr. S.M Broderick School said they prepared (cleaning) ahead for the reopening observing that the attendance was encouraging, and six classes were used for one hundred and forty eight pupils.

"We have twenty five pupils per classroom to maintain social distancing. We have ensured that there is one child to a seat, we made sure we space them because we have enough classrooms. Most of the children have their face masks, we also have buckets for hand washing," she said, adding, "our major challenge is, we do not have hand sanitizers. We only have to improve. I bought some soap so that they can wash their hands before going into the classrooms."

Risk allowance, payment of subsidies, were topical issues ahead of the reopening of schools, Jalloh said they are expecting help from the Government "because, our subsidy is so small and the class six pupils are paid for only ten thousand Leones per child. They will have to take their mock test all of which involves money. I pray that the Government will help us. To parents, just provide food for your kids because we are not allowing sellers to come into the premises and we do not allow the children to go out for launch or even stand in an assembly."

Marvelous Gilpin Cole Vice Principal Fatah Rahman Secondary School said the attendance of students was great and more pupils are expected in the coming days.

"For the first day of reopening, we have about sixty five percent, I think the reason behind this high turnout is because of the children and parents, and the message was well circulated and received," Gilpin said.

He however pointed out that the use of face mask is challenging and asked who is to be blamed if not the parents and Government who they expected to have sent in their supply of face masks, veronica bucket and sanitizers before the reopening of schools. We

"I am happy to be in school today to be prepared for the BECE exam after three months. I don't think the long stay home will affect my performance because everything is in place - I was tested, I washed my hands before coming to class.

have not received that as I speak and perhaps they will be brought in this week, the Teacher said.

Fatah Rahman School is almost adjacent to the Education Ministry and if supplies are made, its authorities say they know that they would be among the first.

Gilpin said, "The supply is coming a bit late because the students have already commenced schooling - many of them do not have face masks. The absence of these items is threatening should there be any infection among the student population."

While monitoring the first day of the partial reopening of schools, a student showed signs of illness; his particulars were taken along with the phone numbers of his parents.

The Vice Principal said this sick child could not be tested because they do not have thermometers.

"My message is that the Government and partners must plan the school re-

opening well although it is not easy, we look forward to receiving these things so that the risk posed to teachers and pupils does not become a reality. I hope that they will do something before the end of this first week," Teacher Gilpin said.

Lamin Bhendu a class six pupil at Dr. SM Broderick Municipal Primary school said it feels exciting to be back in school to prepare for the NPSE although he used his time at home to attend extra classes, while Fatmata Foday another class six pupil said she is happy too to be in school noting that studying hard is now her target one month ahead of her exams.

Mariama Quee a form three pupil Fatah Rahman Municipal Junior Secondary school said everything is in place, they have facemasks and everything is going on well.

"I am happy to be in school today to be prepared for the BECE exam after three months. I don't think the long stay home will affect my performance because everything is in place - I was tested, I washed my hands before coming to class. I call on colleagues not to have any fear because we have been divided into the various classes so that we can have enough space. A similar sentiment was expressed by Monina Mohamed a pupil of the same form who said it is great that the President released them back to school.

"Not every one of us were studying at home but we are here to be prepared for the exams. We were tested upon entering our classes; the social distancing is very good because we are few in number per class. We have more than six veronica buckets for hand washing. I call on colleagues and parents not to be afraid to come to school because everything is in place," Mohamed said.

However some form six students were seen clustering together at the St. Josephs' Convent, Freetown Secondary School for Girls and St. Anthony Schools at the Syke Street intersection, while the use of face mask was not widespread.

Many parents expressed mixed feelings - some welcoming the reopening of schools while others registered fear for the life and safety of their kids, citing concerns about a lack in certain things that ought to be in place not readily available on the first day of school reopening.

Parliamentary Affairs

GHANA: Parliament To Saction Absentee MPs Who Sign In As Present

By Emmanuella Dadugblor

The Speaker of Parliament, Rt. Hon Prof Aaron Mike Oquaye has threatened to sanction Members of Parliament who are marked present contrary to their absence from the sittings of the house. This comes after Majority MPs William Quaitoo and Dr. Mark Assibey-Yeboah questioned the basis for marking minority MPs for Cape Coast South Ricket Hagan and Asunafo South Collins Dauda present when both were absent on Wednesday July 1, 2020.

Giving his ruling on the matter, the speaker said it is important that members act according to

best practices of the house and any member who flouts these orders will be punished in future if the problem persists "If there are any persons signing in for people who are not present, please this is your last warning because in the near future, you may be subject to very serious disciplinary action" the speaker warned.

The Speaker has also directed the Clerk-to-Parliament, Mr. Cyril Kwabena Oteng Nsiah together with the Parliamentary Service administration to see to the deployment of clock-in devices to address the problem "We've had difficulties with this issues of attendance. We all know that we've placed orders for machines for that purpose. Mr. Clerk and the administration, I charge that you must facilitate the arrival of

these machines for our purposes" he directed.

Meanwhile the first Deputy Speaker of Parliament Joseph Osei-Owusu is demanding investigations into the phenomenon of legislators marking their absentee colleagues present in the chamber. He said the move is necessary to fish out the persons behind the act so the issue can be dealt with properly. "The real issue here is who has been marking those absent present. Is it the table office because every member has to sign in to indicate that he or she is a present? Is somebody signing in on their behalf? In that case, those persons are the ones we must be looking out for. The table office goes round and those who don't go in behind, they bring the register for you to sign. So if in-

deed those people were not present, then who marked them present? I think we must investigate who has been marking those absent present," Mr. Osei Owusu said.



Speaker of Parliament, Rt. Hon Prof Aaron Mike Oquaye

GHANA: Parliament Bemoans Low Public Confidence In Its Activities

By Emmanuella Dadugblor

The Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of parliament, Hon Frank Annoh-Dompreh has bemoaned the low level of confidence from members of the public in the work of parliamentarians. He said the situation is due to the competitive nature of politics and the unkept promises of parliamentarians to their constituents. Delivering a statement to the house to mark the World Parliament Day on June 30, 2020, Mr. Annoh-Dompreh said it is important to identify the contributory role of parliament in achieving a robust democracy so as to address the shortfalls which does not augur well for the progress of parliamentary work.

"Public confidence in authority of parliament is low and falling. The reasons are multiple which includes the competitive nature of politics, which means that there are almost always winner and losers, promises that cannot be kept and problems that cannot easily

be solved. A toxic combination of adversarial politics, broken promises and a perceived inability to bring about positive change undermines public confidence in political processes" he said.

The lawmaker also attributed the seeming low performance of parliamentarians to the limited understanding of the public about parliamentary activities "Public understanding of the role of parliament is generally limited. Even the most highly educated may struggle to distinguish what is the purpose of executive and that of the legislative branch of government. This contributes to unrealistic expectations of what parliaments and individual parliamentarians can achieve"

He has therefore urged the house to make a concerted effort towards the education of young people on civic and parliamentary matters as he believes this will bridge the gap between parliament and the public.

For his part, ranking member on the Foreign Affairs Committee, Hon. Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa also noted that the high attrition rates in parlia-

ment have become a treat to the Ghanaian parliament as it robs the house of experienced lawmakers who can contribute meaningfully to parliamentary work. He said research has shown a rise in the number of first term MPs each years which undermines the smooth continuity of parliamentary work " I have been doing some work from the library of Parliament of Ghana and Mr. Speaker, when you compare to other parliaments across the world, we are among the highest. And on a day like this we must reflect on how to combat this because the high attrition rate robs parliament of experience, it robs parliament of institutional expertise which eventually undermines the output of the house". He noted.

Hon. Ablakwa also called for a constitutional amendment which will enable the independence of parliament from the executive, as this is a major cause of the high attrition rate.

"To address this, Mr. Speaker, and I know that you have published on this particular recommendation, the amendment of the 1992 constitution so that parliament will be independent

so that majority of ministers appointed by the president will not be selected from parliament. That is really one thing leading to the high attrition where so many people in the executive, chief executives and all others really want to come to parliament. And people come to parliament in Ghana not really to specialize in law making and carry out parliamentary oversight but to catch the eye of the president"

He also called on political parties to introduce protective mechanisms for incumbent first term members of parliaments who are interested in a second term so that they can get another chance to come back to the house and bring their experience and expertise to bear on the works of parliament.

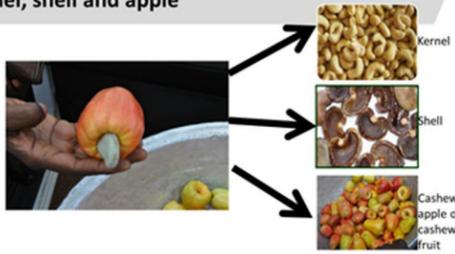
The International Day of Parliamentarism (IDP) or World Parliament Day (WPD) has Since June 30, 2018 been celebrated worldwide, countries the world following a United Nations General Assembly Resolution.

WPD commemoration also predates to 1889, when the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) was founded.

Special Report

The Economic Potential Of The Cashew Apple Fruit

Cashews are made up of 3 main parts: the kernel, shell and apple



Potential of cashew apples

Africa produces an impressive quantity of 15 million tons of a not well known fruit: the cashew apple annually. This fruit comes together with the cashew nut and can be obtained by removing nut from the fruit. It is much larger than the nut and can weigh eight to ten times more than the raw cashew nut (RCN). Although it is a wholesome and nutritious fruit, it is hardly harvested and consumed in Africa. The fruit is usually discarded when the nut is harvested. Reasons for this may be that the fruits of which the nuts are removed are fully ripened and perishable and sometimes difficult to collect. Besides, the apple has a fibrous structure and an astringent flavor which makes it generally necessary to process the apples for consumption. The conversion of the cashew apple into food products in Africa would be very worthwhile. Given the high nutritional value and the large volume of the apples, cashew apple products may contribute substantially to a healthy diet of the consumers. Besides, it may increase the income of the cashew growers and hence improve the profitability and competitiveness of the cashew value chain. Moreover, it will create new agricultural and industrial employment opportunities.

1. Currently the apple fruit is underutilized in Ghana, what can be done to change this narrative?

A lot of education and sensitization activities can be used to project cashew apples in the country highlighting their nutritive content especially their high Vitamin C and antioxidants content which has the potential of boosting the immune system. These could encourage the patronage of the fruits and their derivatives.

Secondly, the cashew apple needs to be processed into consumable goods such as jams, jellies, fruit juices, as vegan food (has high vitamin and mineral content).

Moreover, demystification of the myth associated with the eating of the fruit could allay the fears of people, hence increasing their consumption.

2. How viable is it to invest into apple fruit processing or products?

Apart from the nutritional and health benefits of processing and commercializing the cashew apple crop in Africa, there are also considerable economic advantages. Based on a first exploratory investigation (Paul J. Mathot, 2011; unpublished), it is estimated that the income of the cashew growers would increase with approximately 50% if they harvest and sell half of their cashew apple production for processing⁴.

This will improve the living conditions of the cashew producers and agricultural workers. It will also be a boost for the profitability and competitiveness of the cashew value chain, as it will reduce the production costs of the cashew nuts and it will increase the investment capacity of the cashew growers.

Processing of cashew apples will create substantial additional employment for the people in rural areas, mainly women, who will be involved in the harvest, collection and transport of the apples.

Processing of cashew apples would also create sizeable direct and indirect industrial employment opportunities. It is estimated that by and large 50 - 70 direct and indirect industrial jobs are created by each 5000 tons of cashew apples which are processed per year.

If 50% of the African cashew apple production is manufactured into juices and drinks, this would add approximately 3 billion US Dollar to the GDP of Africa's main cashew producing countries⁵ (Paul J. Mathot, 2011; unpublished).

Cashew apple processing is known to be a viable business. GIZ/ComCashew is in a contracting process now to revisit the calculations on viability. The results would be ready by the end of the

year.

3. What is the trend in Africa, with special focus on Ghana?

Africa produces more than 15 million MT of cashew apples annually. Specially in Ghana, RCN production of 110,000MT in 2018 (Source: Ministry of Food and Agriculture of Ghana) translates into cashew apple production of 800,000 - 1 million MT.

The fruit comes together with the cashew nut and is called cashew "apple". The nut is removed from the apple when the fruit is ripe. This is most often done in the field. Then the apples are left in the field and the nuts are processed.

Cashew is grown in many countries in Africa. The main producing countries are in order of volume: Côte d'Ivoire, United Republic of Tanzania, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria, Mozambique, Benin, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Madagascar, Senegal and Mali.

Table 1 shows volume of cashew apples produced by different countries in 2017 (Source: ComCashew, 2018):

Country	RCN Production 2017 MT	Apple produced MT
Cote d'Ivoire	671000	5368000
Tanzania	230000	1840000
Guinea-Bissau	205000	1640000
Nigeria	170000	1360000
Mozambique	136000	1088000
Benin	110000	880000
Ghana	110000 (2018)	990000
Burkina Faso	70000	560000
Senegal	35000	280000
Kenya	10000	90.000
Gambia	8000	72.000

All over the continent, cashew apples are not well utilized. Only an estimated 1% of the apples are used on the continent. The key reasons are lack of information about its nutritional content as well as the nature of the cashew apple itself. They contain crude fibers and astringent tannins which are

usually not appreciated by the consumer. Moreover, at the time the nuts are harvested, the fruit is quite ripe and perishable. Use of cold chain in cashew apple preservation is non-existent. Therefore, the cashew apple is discarded and hardly used as fresh fruit in Africa. That being said, countries such as Burkina Faso and Cameroon promoted the consumption of cashew apples in the fresh state. During the cashew season, fresh cashew apple fruits as well as dried ones can be found in the local market in countries such as Burkina Faso and Cameroon.

Most countries in Africa process part of the cashew apples into food products for local consumption. GIZ and other partners in Benin promote the production of "cajuina" (Brazilian cashew apple juice), jams and jellies by small scale processors which are found in the local supermarket. In Cote d'Ivoire, a few small businesses make cashew apple based products such as cashew apple juice, jam; vinegar, and alcohol. Ghana boosts also of a few small scale cashew apple processors that make mainly cashew apple juices, alcohol. Some of these processing companies include:

- Natu Company Ltd, Wenchi
- Ceecash - Asiri,
- BB Wineries, Sunyani
- Bansam Ltd; Kpando
- CRIG, Bole and
- Monastery, Tuobodom
- Pinora,

Many opportunities exist in Ghana to increase the processing of cashew

apple based products. In order to process all the cashew apples produced in Ghana, large to medium processors are needed to support the smaller processors as shown by large scale juice processor, Ivorio in Cote d'Ivoire.

4. What are the challenges and opportunities available?

Opportunities
a. High nutritional content of the apples resulting in healthy individuals in Ghana
b. Additional income for farmers and entrepreneurs.
c. New agricultural and industrial employment

opportunities, especially for women in rural communities.

d. Investment into the processing of cashew apple products - medium to large scale as the cashew apples are available in abundance. Products such as ice-cream, production of cajuina and mixed fruit juices

Special Report

e. Cashew apples are suitable for vegetarians and vegans, for example, cashew apple kebabs (similar to tofu)
 f. Restaurants can benefit by introducing cashew apple based products
 g. Low cost of the apples.

Since majority is left on the field to rot, processor either get the apples for free or buy them at a very low price as compared to the cashew kernel which is of high value.

h. Accessibility of the apples. The apples are easily accessible during the harvest season since there are no international buyers for competition compared to that of the RCN.

i. Several derivatives
 The apples can be used for both food and non-food products. Food derivatives include apple juice, nectar, cajuina which is a Brazilian specialty, sweets, candies, toffees, jams, syrups, dried apples, wine, aperitif, vinegar, brandy, among others. Non-food products include animal feed, compost/manure and industrial alcohol and energy production. It is also used in the cosmetic industry due to the presence of antioxidants for body care products.

j. Start up for a small-scale company is not as capital intensive as compared to that of RCN processing.

With some basic kitchen equipment some cashew apple products can be made. Small farmer groups can easily venture into this business.

Challenges

a. Post-harvest Challenges
 Cashew apple is a non-climacteric fruit, which must be harvested ripe if it is to be consumed as a fresh fruit or processed into various products. This fact poses some limitation with respect to the post-harvest life and quality of the fruit. The apples are highly susceptible to injury and microbial deterioration during harvest, transportation and storage. Microbial spoilage can be minimized by adopting good harvesting and post-harvesting practices. This challenge can be mitigated by investors through direct farmer linkage programs. Farmers can then be organized and trained to collect the right apples at the right time

b. Short season.
 Cashew apples are normally available from latter part of December to April in Ghana making it inaccessible for the rest of the months. However, an investor can store the cashew apples during the season or process high volumes for use throughout the year. Depending on the product targeted, dried apples or frozen could be stored for use throughout the year.

c. Cold storage facility
 In order to process the year round, it is essential for apples to be stored the year round by freezing which comes with an extra electricity cost.

d. Myths verse facts
 This article provides the opportunity to demystify the cashew apple. Some people may be allergic to cashew just as people are allergic to groundnut, beans and other products. This fact needs to be separated to encourage the consumption of cashew apples.

5. Nutritional benefits and product development; how can it be integrated into local cuisine

Cashew apples are highly nutritious. Research has shown that the cashew apple contains 5x the vitamin C content of oranges and 12x the Vitamin C content of pineapple. Cashew apples are an excellent source of Vitamin A, B and C. They are high in antioxidants and minerals. A summary is shown in Table 2 below: Cashew apples can be easily integrated into the local food in Ghana.

Chemicals	Rates
Moisture	87.8%
Protein	0.2%
Fat	0.1%
Carbohydrate	11.6%
Crude fiber	0.9%
Calcium	10.0mg/100g
Phosphorous	10.0mg/100g
Iron	0.mg/100g
Vitamin. C	261.0mg/100g
Thiamin	0.02mg/100g
Riboflavin	0.5mg/100mg
Nicotinic acid	0.4mg/100g
Vitamin A	39.0IU
Sugar	6.7-10.5%
Pectin	1.17%

Source : Sobhana A and Jose Matthew (2013); Strategies for Cashew Apple Utilisation on commercial scales; Cashew

Fruits (100g)	Vitamine C (mg)	Polyphénols (mg d'acide gallique)	Références
Pineapple	15 (1)	94 (1)	(Fu et al. 2011),
Pear	7,9 (0,4)	22 (1)	(Fu et al. 2011)
Banana	4,5 à 12,7	57 (4)	(Fu et al. 2011)
Mango	34 à 44	37 (2)	(Fu et al. 2011)
Papaya	45 à 56	47 (2)	(Fu et al. 2011)
Orange	45 à 56	77 (1)	(Fu et al. 2011),
Cashew Apple	150 to 300	200 to 300	(Soro D. 2012)

First of all, communities growing cashew would have to adopt the consumption of fresh cashew apple fruits. Children are seen eating cashew fruits during the cashew season and adults can equally do so.

Besides, people should patronize the consumption of juices produced in our local communities. As cashew apples are highly nutritious, caterers are encouraged

to be innovative and come out with cashew apple cuisines that suite Ghanaians. Extensive sensitization programmes about the fruits could also help with their integration into local cuisine. In this regard, GIZ/ComCashew is working on new products that would be outdoored by close of the year 2020.

6. The case of Brazil and what Ghana can learn from them.

Brazil is the origin of the cashew tree. Portuguese traders brought the nut to India and Africa from the 16th century. In 2012, Brazil produced between 300-330,000MT of raw cashew nuts (equivalent to about 2.7 million MT cashew apples) per year. This has reduced to about 120,000MT today. About 15-20% of Brazilian cashew apples are processed, including juice extraction (8 per cent). Other usages include fresh and dried fruit, jams, wines, candies and animal feed made out of waste products, cosmetics etc.

Moreover a lot of researches have been undertaken by EMBRAPA, the Brazilian Agricultural Promotion Agency in that regards. For Instance, they have developed a cashew tree variety that produces apples that can remain on the ground for one day without being damaged or beginning to ferment. Under the Trilateral Cooperation between Ghana, Brazil and Germany, Ghanaian researchers are exploring the propagation and multiplication of such cashew-apple varieties for the domestic market. In Brazil, the fruits meant for human consumption are plucked in its entirety (i.e. including the nut) from the trees, and either packaged as fresh fruit for the market or processed for food.

In 2007, 12 juice factories in Brazil processed more than 200,000MT of cashew apples into the following products:

Juice	125,000 MT
Cajuina	2000 MT
Candy	6500 MT
Fresh Fruit	20,000 MT
Animal Feed	45000 MT

The domestic market is the prime destination for all of these products.

Cashew apple fibers (after juice extraction) are used for making bread, snack bars and meat-like products/

There are a lot of lessons here for Ghana, first to learn to eat the cashew apple as a fresh fruit and process the rest into healthy products. Additionally, business options of exploring the export of cashew-based products to Brazil exists. The Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana is working closely with EMBRAPA to equally bleed

Processing of cashew apples would also create sizeable direct and indirect industrial employment opportunities. It is estimated that by and large 50 - 70 direct and indirect industrial jobs are created by each 5000 tons of cashew apples which are processed per year

cashews that would provide more, bigger, less astringent cashew apples. This should surely help diversify the Ghanaian food with cashew apples with the subsequent nutritional benefits of eating cashew apples

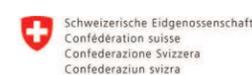
References:

4. Based on:
 - ex-farm cashew nut (RCN) price of US dollar 0,70 per kg,
 - an economically viable juice processing (gross profit 20-30% of revenue)
 - an ex-factory price of cashew juice of US dollar 1,25 (which is about 20% less than the price of other more common juices).
 This would allow for a farm price of cashew apples of at least US dollar 0,10 per kg.

Paul J. Mathot (2011), Cashew Apples in Africa, an enormous crop waiting to be harvested.

5 Based on ex-factory price of US Dollar 1,25 per kg packed cashew juice.
 The potential increase of the GDP differs considerably per country.
 For instance Burkina Faso, US dollar 60 million and Côte d'Ivoire, US dollar 600 million.

This Special Report is part of a visibility and advocacy project for agricultural value-chains implemented by Parliamentary Network Africa (PNAfrica) with funding from



Swiss Confederation

Federal Department of Economic Affairs FDEA
 State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO

Parliamentary Affairs

SIERRA LEONE: House Speaker Beckons President, Chief Justice and Donors

By: Melvin Tejan Mansaray,
SIERRA LEONE

The Speaker of the Fifth Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone, Honorable Dr. Abass Chernor Bundu has called on President Julius Maada Bio, Chief Justice Hon. Babatunde Edwards and international donor partners to do more in curbing the menace of rape, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) that is permeating the country at the moment.

Speaker Bundu made this statement during the third plenary sitting of the Fifth Parliament (Third Session) held on Thursday 25th June, 2020 at the Chamber of the Sierra Leone Parliament, Tower Hill Freetown.

Addressing Members of Parliament (MPs) and Representatives of Gender Right Groups in a well-attended sitting of Parliament, Hon. Bundu said the country is faced with another difficult and challenging moment in the struggle to protect and defend the rights of women and children. "We are witnessing a spate of violence and sexual assault against women who constitute fifty one percent of the

population of Sierra Leone", the Speaker said.

The last few days and weeks have attracted an outpouring of condemnation and call for action by right groups and campaigners following the revelation that a five year old (Khadija Saccoh) was allegedly sexually penetrated and murdered.

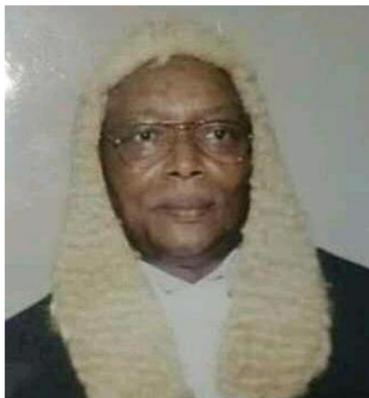
The Police Spokesman Superintendent Brima Kamara said four people are being investigated including the girl's brother, teacher, aunty and caregiver.

Records from the Rainbow Initiative Center, a medical organization that offers care for rape and victims of sexual violence shows that 2020 has so far recorded close to one thousand cases of rape and other sexual offences against women and girls.

Late last year, President Julius Maada Bio declared a State of Emergency on rape in Sierra Leone but it elapsed after a period of ninety days.

The Sierra Leone Parliament has also not been effortless in the fight against rape and SGBV. Late last year, Parliament strengthened penalties contained in the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, 2019 but ironically, rape and sexual penetration continues unabated the Speaker expressed.

On Tuesday 22nd June, 2020, activists and citizens took to the streets, staged a peaceful protest in the Central Business District of Freetown, in front of the Law Court Building, Attorney General's Office and attempted to process to the precinct of Parliament Building with placards calling for justice



Speaker of the Fifth Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone, Honorable Dr. Abass Chernor Bundu

for Kadija and tougher actions on the issue of rape and other sexual abuses of women and girls.

In response to these calls and protests by right groups such as Kids Advocacy Network, Black Tuesday Movement, and others seeking justice for Kadija, Mr. Speaker bowed to public pressure and said those words of condemnation and appeal for action, Laurence, a resident of Freetown said.

"Parliament as the supreme law making authority of the State is deeply disturbed by the act of cruelty perpetuated against an innocent child whose future has been brought to an abrupt and tragic end," Hon. Dr. Bundu said. He on behalf of Parliament, unreservedly and absolutely condemned what he said was a 'heinous and abhorrent act against a poor soul, promising Parliament's collaboration with other arms of the realms of governance to put an end to rape and sexual penetration of girls.

Hon. Dr. Bundu however called on President Julius Maada Bio "to speedily establish the Task Force on Rape and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) as a fulfilment of his commitment to the eradication of rape and other forms of gender violence in Sierra Leone."

This Task Force, some Right Activists say will fast track collaboration and focus on the issue having state and non-state actors working together to end rape.

Sierra Leone has a special division on Sexual Offences, but Hon. Justice Fatmata Bintu Alhadi recently told Parliament during an Appointment Committee vetting that a special court for the exclusive dealing of matters of alleged rape cases for a one year period will inform further actions.

Hon. Justice Alhadi's suggestion was profoundly reechoed by Hon. Dr. Bundu who said "We further urged the Chief Justice and other judicial actors to expedite the setting up of the Fast Track Court to speedily try and conclude cases of rape and gender violence."

The Sierra Leone Judiciary is still struggling to clear piles of backlog cases compounded with other challenges despite new reform measures being introduced by the Hon.

Chief Justice.

The country is yet to have a forensic medical laboratory that can be used for semen and other biological tests to prove a case of sexual penetration.

A government official said a forensic lab is in the tune of millions of dollars which the government cannot afford for now due to the coronavirus.

Meanwhile the Social Welfare Minister said they received promise from the UNWOMEN to get the lab constructed and furnished but that is yet to materialize.

To this effect, Hon. Dr. Bundu appealed to donor partners for support to establish a forensic lab to assist the prosecution of rape and other related offences.

The Speaker of Parliament however registered condolences to Khadija and relatives of victims of abuses and thanked campaigners for their continued fight to defend humanity.

The Speaker of Parliament nonetheless promised that, "we have heard you, and we will act." Hannah Grace Muna Gillen, Co-ordinator Skyy Women's World Network, a women's advocacy organization said Parliament had it wrong when it amended the law on unlawful canal knowledge to sexual penetration.

She said the statement of the Speaker is a mere lip service if the laws are not enforced by the relevant institutions. She also noted that even if a forensic lab is established, people will not be willing to testify and prosecute rape and sexual violence matters in court if the Judiciary cannot provide witness protection.

She cited the case of a killed witness in a similar case of rape and death of a certain late Hanah Bockarie, whose remains was found at the Aberdeen Beach. "There is no need for the setting up of a new Task Force, we only need resources to capacitate the existing structures at the Social Welfare and other departments to avert the repetition of what happened to the late Khadija and so many other girls and women suffering in silence." Hannah Gillen said.

Hon. Dr. Bundu however called on President Julius Maada Bio "to speedily establish the Task Force on Rape and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) as a fulfilment of his commitment to the eradication of rape and other forms of gender violence in Sierra Leone."

Feature

The Diminishing Role of The Traditional Media in the Age of Virtual Parliament: The Sierra Leone Experience

By: ML Deen Rogers,
Senior Legislative Officer,
Parliament of Sierra Leone

One of the benefits of the burdens of the Corona Virus is the emergence of hybrid virtual Parliaments all over the globe. Parliaments have to do what it should under the current circum-

For all it takes in this pandemic, the Parliament of Sierra Leone has joined the other members of the virtual club to reduce the bias in the reporting of its proceedings and to right-size the influence of the press gallery or the traditional media in reporting its proceedings to the public.

stance to ensure that the management of the state is executed in the manner prescribed by law in the fight against this invisible enemy. In the upheavals of Covid-19, there is a clarion call on Legislative Assemblies to ensure accountable, transparent, and inclusive-related policies or legislation are implemented for the public good. In the shadows of the COVID-19 pandemic, Parli-

ment is not optional in a democracy.

In this mix of things, the role of the traditional media as an appendage or inseparable partner of Parliament in a democracy is diminishing in the new normal. The traditional influence or space by the mainstream media in reporting on the proceedings of Parliament is asking for a new approach. The Parliament of Sierra Leone is taking the fullest of the opportunities a hybrid virtual parliament would offer in the age of this pandemic. The traditional media has to recognize the current trend and face the new reality together with Parliament or decide to shape their destiny.

In this new arrangement, the Parliament of Sierra Leone is going to take ownership of reporting its proceedings. The traditional role of the media especially the physical presence of the press gallery as a potent tool for disseminating information and promoting parliamentary transparency is going to diminish in the face of the hybrid virtual Parliament. Besides, the new normal is going to broaden the space to report on parliamentary proceedings through the web-based virtual software.

The Parliament of Sierra Leone ventured in the new world of virtual software on the 28 of May 2020 when the Parliament conducted its first hybrid virtual State Opening of Parliament which marked the beginning of the Third Session in the Fifth Parliament. The 3cx virtual with a current connection of 800 users was inaugurated on the first hybrid virtual State Opening of Parliament. The user access was rolled out countrywide putting on board 3TV stations, over dozens of Radio Stations and more than 700 people globally were connected using a designated link. With dedicated fiber-optic connectivity powered by 1GBPS upload/download streaming plugs, the Parliament of Sierra Leone is even more ready or incentivize to disseminate credible and real-time reporting on its



Parliament of Sierra Leone

proceedings in committees as well as in the plenary.

For all it takes in this pandemic, the Parliament of Sierra Leone has joined the other members of the virtual club to reduce the bias in the reporting of its proceedings and to right-size the influence of the press gallery or the traditional media in reporting its proceedings to the public. Moving forward, each of the sittings of Parliament and the activities of its Committee is adequately reported on a dedicated space on the parliamentary website, and these proceedings are streamed online. In like fashion, the Ghana Parliament realizes that some Media Houses have their agenda. So, it has used live streaming of its sittings on Facebook to disseminate true and unbiased outcomes of its proceedings. By this transformative action, the electorate can see for themselves and relate to any media spin on its proceedings.

With the opportunities in the virtual Parliament, the Parliament of Sierra Leone may create a zoom platform or broadcast its proceedings on radio, television, stream online and do web-based promotions by creating the space for the public to participate in the legislative process.

Hybrid Virtual Parliament is going to create a default impact on public engagements, thereby enhancing parliamentary trans-

parency with or without the traditional media. This will encourage MPs to reach out and interact with their constituents. It will also enhance the participation on the part of the broad masses of the people. To achieve information sharing and parliamentary transparency by the emerging new normal, the virtual world created by Parliaments worldwide will rebuild confidence between the principal (the people) and the agent (parliament) thereby minimizing the role of a Third Party.

The traditional media should now start to review or rethink the kind of system or infrastructure to feed into the new normal. The reality is that the media and Parliament will never be the same after COVID-19.

Once the Parliament of Sierra Leone is fully digitized, the role of the traditional media will shrink with time and the whole idea of accreditation with requirements or accreditation without requirements will be a thing of the past.

Can the traditional media or the parliamentary press gallery go virtual?

Hybrid Virtual Parliament is a SMART investment in the age of the new normal and it is going to be one of the enduring legacies of COVID-19 in our democratization process.

Parliamentary Affairs

SIERRA LEONE: Limited Publicity on International Parliament Day 2020

**By: Melvin Tejan Mansaray,
SIERRA LEONE**

Since June 30, 2018, countries the world over have been observing the International Day of Parliamentarism (IDP) or World Parliament Day (WPD) following a United Nations General Assembly Resolution.

WPD commemoration also predates to 1889, when the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) was founded.

"The IDP is a time to review the progress that parliaments have made in achieving some key goals to be more representative and move with the times, including carrying out of self-assessments, working to include more women and young MPs, and adapting to new technologies," the IPU said on its website.

The year 2020 commemoration of the IDP like in many other facets of society, has been affected by the coronavirus disease pandemic in the world with Sierra Leone not being an exception.

This year's WPD publicity and activities in Sierra Leone have been less energetic.

A long serving administrator in the Sierra Leone Parliament, Momodu Lamin Deen-Rogers said there is more to be done in popularizing the WPD commemoration in the country. "This day is less celebrated here. Members of Parliament do not have much idea about it, as do Officers of the House. The day came in to being

in 2018. It is a new day set aside for celebrating Parliament," Deen-Rogers said.

Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) has been a strong development partner of the Sierra Leone Parliament. It has been building the capacities of both MPs and staff of Parliament over the years. In an IDP e-mail brief dated 30th June, 2020, Alusine Diamond-Suma (Rev.) Country Representative WFD wrote about what the WPD is all about, why and when it is commemorated and highlighted the role of Parliament.

The WFD Country Representative however published a pager of what it described as, "FACTS AND FIGURES ABOUT PARLIAMENT OF SIERRA LEONE" outlining that "The Parliament Chamber was opened by His Royal Highness the Duke of Kent on 26th April 1961 (The Eve of Sierra Leone's Independence).

The Parliamentary system in Sierra Leone is unicameral (with one chamber).

The Parliament of Sierra Leone is the Fifth Parliament. It is referred to as 'a hung parliament'.

This current Parliament constitutes four political parties; SLPP with 58 seats, APC with 57 seats, C4C with 8 seats, NGC with 4 seats, 3 Independent MPs, 2 vacant seats and 14 Paramount Chief Members of Parliament; respectively representing 132 constituencies and 14 Provincial Districts in Sierra Leone."

We are not basically holding any formal event but we are doing a publication to be circulated on social

media, the WFD Country Representative said.

He continued that a semi meeting will also be held with some commissions but emphasized that no formal public event will be held due to the COVID-19 pandemic particularly.

The Fifth Parliament (third session) of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone has been tumultuous and marred with unending stalemates in a Presidential-Parliamentary hybrid political system, one in which the main opposition All Peoples Congress (APC) party initially had sixty eight (68) parliamentary seats and the governing Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) forty nine (49) seats.

The Coalition For Change (C4C) party has eight (8) seats, National Grand Coalition (NGC) four (4), Independent three (3) and fourteen (14) Paramount Chief MPs.

This unique configuration of the Fifth Parliament was unprecedentedly altered by two separate High Court's decision to remove ten APC MPs one year after subscribing to the oath of office and were on active duty as sitting Lawmakers.

The Courts' order essentially removed the ten APC MPs for different alleged electoral offences, which now gives the APC party fifty seven (57) seats and SLPP fifty nine (59) until a couple of weeks back when the SLPP Legislator, Hon. A.O Kamara sadly passed away leaving the SLPP with fifty eight (58) seats presently.

The composition of the current Parliament of Sierra Leone is youthful, elitist with over seventy percent of MPs holding first and other academic degrees but, with just sixteen (16) out of one hundred and forty six (146) MPs being women, gender disparity remains a huge imbalance, Hon. Dr. Bernadette Lahai former Minority Leader noted.

Media coverage of the 2020 WPD observance was less prominent or almost none existent with perhaps only one radio station, Skyy 106.5 FM dedicating attention to the day's importance during its media review programme (Day Break Salone) held on Tuesday 30th June, 2020.

It was observed also that none of

the very many newspaper publications of the day carried any story about the WPD, less to talk about the handful of television stations.

Marion George, a Parliamentary Journalist and Producer Day Break Salone show said they earmarked this day to highlight the plight of parliament and their constituents but unfortunately, she said, "None of our invited guests from the Sierra Leone Parliament could attend citing that they need permission from the Leadership of Parliament to deliberate on the issues."

This is unfortunate for a parliament that promised to be interfacing with the public during its first ever parliament open day event in 2019, Marion said.

"Both the Administration and MPs owe it a duty to be open, transparent and accountable to the people that elected them and whose taxes are used to pay administrators of Parliament too," Marion said.

She also noted that there are several accountability and other unfinished issues in parliament for which the public has no knowledge on, what has been the outcome.

Day Break Salone Show Host Kadija Jalloh said during the discussion on WPD, they were able to get the views of a Parliamentary Monitor who catalogued a long list of issues ranging from; administrative and political accountability of parliament, the weak and inconclusive nature of oversight on Ministries, Departments and Agencies, parliamentary openness, the media and Parliament, among other things.

"Our guest commented on the issues of the controversial election of the Speaker and feud that ensued that led to the police booting out of opposition APC MPs, the existing vacant seat at Constituency 110 for which a rerun election was cancelled due to violence and is yet to be conducted for over a year now, the APCs walkout of President Julius Maada Bio on the occasion of the State Opening of the Second Session of the Fifth Parliament, the brokering of cross party dialogue and corporation through the 2019 Bo Peace Declaration, the role of the President and an MP in a separation and fusion of power situation, and many other things," Khadija said.



Parliamentary Affairs

Ghana is Well Placed to Leverage on its e-Parliament Infrastructure amidst COVID-19 Pandemic

By: Clement Akoloh

Although the Parliament of Ghana doesn't have the full complement of its e-Parliament infrastructure yet, based on what is on paper and what we are privy to, the Legislative Arm of Government should be in a good position to take full advantage of what it has put in place so far to better serve its people despite the constraints the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to bear on public gatherings and Parliaments around the world.

The Majority Leader and Leader of Government Business in Parliament, Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu, confirmed this position in a recent interview with Parliamentary News Africa at the sidelines of a recent engagement with the media to deliberate on the agenda for the Third Meeting of the Fourth Session of Parliament.

"You know, even now we have some facilities. We don't have the full complement of it anyway, but we have some facilities to the extent that we want to do away with the issue of having

everything on hard paper. Unfortunately, not too many of us access it. I think I am also guilty. I don't access it, but was I born before computer? I am not too sure," he said in a jest.

Some Members of Parliament and some pressure groups among others have called for a total shut down of Parliament following the confirmation of positive cases of the Novel Corona virus within the precincts of Parliament.

When it was suggested that perhaps this was a good opportunity for the country to put its e-Parliament infrastructure into good use by going virtual to avoid physical contact in order to prevent a further spread of the disease in Parliament, the Suame Member of Parliament concurred.

"If we were accessing it, then of course, the virtual Parliament would be something that would become an in thing. Recently, we had some training for the Members of Parliament. Unfortunately, not all of us accessed the programme. So I think increasingly, we must be working towards that. But it is good if we were proficient in that area, perhaps given the current environment, it would be most helpful to Parliamentarians and indeed to Parliament in the conduct of business," he said.

The revised definition of the term e-Parliament by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) to better capture how technology is fast changing Parliaments and the difference it has brought to the Parliament and public interaction over the years, even makes it better and highlights Ghana's Parliament as one of the most equipped Parliaments for such a time as this.

Apart from Ghana's robust Information Communication Technology and Integrated e-Parliament System infrastructure which is capable of hosting virtual meetings of the Parliament of Ghana and its committees, but for a few challenges, it has also invested into and leveraged on the power of new media and

new technologies to bring the Parliament closer to the people. Thereby increasing the level of interaction with its audiences.

With the help of a World Bank Facility in support of all the e-Governance projects in the country, the Parliament of Ghana can boast of a dedicated fiber optic network overlay for the exclusive use of Parliament as part of the operationalization of the Integrated e-Parliament Project.

The project which should have been completed and handed over to Parliament by the end of February 2020, is supposed to make it possible for MPs to participate in activities in Parliament when they are away from the House including filing questions and other similar procedures online and receive instant feedback; access Parliament's digitized library resources including Parliament's Order Papers, Votes and Proceedings and the entire agenda for a whole Session among others; as well as enable electronic voting.

Though our last publication on this subject some few weeks ago indicated that Software incompatibility, inadequate IT staff and the unwillingness of MPs to adapt to change was delaying the roll-out of the (e-Parliament) project which was behind schedule, it is still not clear when the project would be finally completed and handed over to the institution of Parliament.

The last activity we witnessed in connection with this project before the outbreak of the Coronavirus in the country, was the training programme Members of Parliament were taken through in order to familiarize them with the e-Parliament platform created for both internal and external Parliamentary work and to give them guidance for the use of the special tablet which will connect MPs to Parliament when they are away from the House through a Private Virtual Network (VPN).

Aside this, the Parliament of Ghana has made gains with the adoption of the newest technolo-



Majority Leader and Leader of Government Business in Parliament, Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu

gies and new media to increase its interaction with the people it serves as well as its visibility on the traditional media, social media and online.

The very interactive social media accounts of the Parliament of Ghana which live streams every sitting of Parliament on a daily bases and the resourcefulness of its website, which makes almost every Parliamentary information available to the public, is worthy of note.

All these make the Parliament of Ghana come close to fitting the redefined term of e-Parliament by the apex Parliamentary body, IPU which reads: "An e-Parliament places technologies, knowledge and standards at the heart of its business processes and embodies the values of collaboration, inclusiveness, participation and openness to the people."

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union's World e-Parliament Report 2018, the term e-Parliament has evolved over the past ten years and still counting since the first World e-Parliament Report was issued to include the transformational changes the technologies adopted by Parliaments within this period have brought to bear on the performance of the traditional roles of Parliament.

It paints a picture of how digital tools, in their broadest sense, are changing and transforming parliaments, how they are managed and how new media and open data are helping parliaments connect with new audiences.

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Parliamentary Affairs

GHANA: 2020 Elections May Be Run With A Provisional Register -Minority Leader

By:Emmanuella Dadugblor

Ghana may go to the 2020 Presidential and Parliamentary polls with a provisional Voters Register rather than a certified Register, the

"My reading and understanding of the new instrument give me much to be concerned with and to state authoritatively that the 2020 presidential and parliamentary elections of Ghana are likely to be run on a provisional voters' register and not a certified final register. Because in the definition column of the newly introduced regulation, the Public Elections Regulations, which replaces C.I. 94, a registered voter means a person whose name appears on the provisional voters' register,"

Minority leader Haruna Iddrisu has said. This follows the laying of a Constitutional Instrument (C.I) for the 2020 general elections by the Electoral Commission, through government on Thursday, July 2, 2020 to replace CI 94 which was used for the 2012 and the 2016 polls.

According to the Tamale South legislator who spoke to the media in parliament, the new instrument, Public Elections Regulations 2020, defines "a registered voter as a person whose name appears on the provisional voters' register." This provision however is at variance with what the constitution and the CI 94 describes as a recognized certified voters register "By virtue of Article 11 of the 1992 Constitution, Parliament can only watch on. It is not an instrument which we can add, subtract or delete. It is inferior legislation to the parent Act under Article 11 of the Constitution," he told the media.

According to Article 11 Clause

(1), "the laws of Ghana shall comprise the Constitution, enactments made by or under the authority of the Parliament established by the Constitution, any Orders, Rules and Regulations made by any person or authority under a power conferred by the Constitution, the existing law and the common law". Clause (7) of the same article states that "Any Order, Rule or Regulation made by a person or authority under a power conferred by this Constitution or any other law shall come into force at the expiration of twenty-one sitting days after being so laid unless Parliament, before the expiration of the twenty-one days, annuls the Order, Rule or Regulation by the votes of not less than two thirds of all the members of Parliament"

The Minority Leader intimated that though the law is silent on the event of a register not certified, the situation could have been avoided if the earlier concerns raised by the minority that a new register was not needed for the 2020 polls

had been heeded to. "My reading and understanding of the new instrument give me much to be concerned with and to state authoritatively that the 2020 presidential and parliamentary elections of Ghana are likely to be run on a provisional voters' register and not a certified final register. Because in the definition column of the newly introduced regulation, the Public Elections Regulations, which replaces C.I. 94, a registered voter means a person whose name appears on the provisional voters' register," he explained.

He added that these deficiencies in the new CI underlines the position of the minority that the EC is not fully prepared to compile a new voter register. "Not as it was in C.I. 94 on a certified final register.

It means that the EC is running behind time and is running for time and is gusting for time. What are the implications, and the ramifications will be on the 2020 presidential and parliamentary elections; your guess is as good as mine. It also means that nominations for both presidential and parliamentary candidates will be on a provisional voters' register and not certified final register. So if you were recommended by a voter and the person's name is subsequently expunged or deleted you may suffer consequences; that I am unable to explain," he noted and concluded that all he was seeking was for the presidential and parliamentary elections to be conducted on a certified register. Mr. Iddrisu added.

The CI would be referred to the Subsidiary Legislation Committee of parliament before the house takes a final decision on it to come into force before December 7, 2020.



Minority Leader Hon. Haruna Iddrisu

Parliamentary Practice & Procedures

Last Week in Ghana's Parliament

By: Benjamin Opoku Aryeh

It is more characteristic of a teacher to mark the attendance register to detect which student was absent. Similar exercise came to live in Parliament when some Members of Parliament (MPs) were found to be absent yet had their names registered in the MPs attendance register, a long standing problem that is yet to receive any targeted solution in the life of Ghana's parliamentary democracy. This prompted a new debate about how such names are smuggled into the books, and how to effectively ensure that the right thing is done in the House. The Speaker of Parliament admonished persons engaged in such act to desist from recording names of MPs who have not attended sittings.

Bills

Development Finance Institutions Bill, 2020 was presented and read for the first time and referred to the Finance committee consideration and report. The Act is expected to provide for the li-

censing and supervision of development finance institutions in the country to promote growth and development in key sectors of the economy and for related matters

The Land Bill, 2019 was taken through consideration

Papers Presented

A report of the Finance Committee on the Revenue Administration (Amendment) Bill, 2020 was laid by the Chairman of the Committee on the floor of the house. The Majority Leader and Leader of Government Business laid the Public Elections Regulations, 2020 which was referred to the Subsidiary Legislation committee for consideration and report.

Another report of the Committee on Mines and Energy on the 2020 work programme of the Ghana National Petroleum Commission was laid by the Chairman of the Committee.

Among the agreements approved in the House included a facility agreement between the Government of Ghana and Duetch Bank AG and IMF Global Services- UK Limited for an amount of €56, 153,500.00 to construct trauma hospitals in Obuasi and Anyinam accident and emergency center at Enyiresi Hospital.

The following waivers: a request for Waiver of Import Duty, Import NHIL, Import GETFund Levy Import VAT, EXIM Levy amounting to the Ghana Cedi equivalent of \$28, 251,258 on equipment and raw materials to be procured by the Kasapreko Company Limited under the 1D1F programme; request for waiver of Import duty, Import NHIL, Import GETFund Levy Import VAT, EXIM Levy amounting to the Ghana Cedi equivalent of \$814, 874.00 on machinery, equipment and raw materials to be procured by Vester Oil Mills Limited under 1D1F programme; and another request for Waiver of Import Duty, Import NHIL, Import GETFund levy Import VAT, EXIM levy amounting to the Ghana



Ghana Parliament House

cedi equivalent of \$1, 208, 404.00 on machinery and equipment to be procured by Acum Energy Ghana Limited under the 1D1F programme were laid on the floor of Parliament.

Statement

Hon. Frank Annor-Dompreh who is the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs made a statement to commemorate International Day of Parliamentarism in which he encouraged that women are fairly represented in parliament as women play vital role in the development of a country. The Hon Okudzeto Ablakwah added to the statement stressing on the need for legislators to work effectively to play their role as lawmaking, representation and law making. He however lamented about the attrition rate in parliament.

Questions

Korley klottey MP, Hon. Zanetor Agyeman-Rawlings asked what steps the Ministry of Works and Housing has taken to prevent the annual occurrence of flooding especially in the low lying areas like Odawna, Adabraka Official town in the Korley Klottey constituency to prevent a repetition of the disaster that occurred on 3rd June. In his answer, the Minister for Works and Housing stated that the drainage construction work is about hundred per cent complete, while other

projects around the Osu Castle, Stadium and Parliament House are still under construction.

Another question in the name of the Hon. Frank Annor-Dompreh sought to inquire why the Ministry of Works and Housing abandoned the CONTI project and what alternative solutions, if any does the ministry propose. The Minister answered that the cost for the project was discovered to be exorbitant. And so a more cost effective way to complete the project is underway and the project is expected to commence in August 2020.

The MP for Ho Central, Hon. Benjamin Kpodo, asked when the designated health workers would be paid the COVID-19 special allowance of their basic salaries as promised by government and approved by parliament. He indicated that the ministry is in the process of compiling the data for those health workers who are classified as frontline workers and are qualified to receive the allowance stipulated.

The Week Ahead

MPs are hoping to sit on Mondays as against their normal sitting days which commenced on Tuesday and ends on Friday in order to enable them complete House business before the House recesses on 7 August 2020 as expected.

Korley klottey MP, Hon. Zanetor Agyeman-Rawlings asked what steps the Ministry of Works and Housing has taken to prevent the annual occurrence of flooding especially in the low lying areas like Odawna, Adabraka Official town in the Korley Klottey constituency to prevent a repetition of the disaster that occurred on 3rd June.



2020
INTERNATIONAL YEAR
OF THE NURSE AND
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MORE INVESTMENT
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