

## Women, Citizenship and Governance

The 1990s heralded aspirations for governance in several African countries, some of which have made a dramatic historical U-turn. This shift was characterized by an autocratic and neo-patrimonial tendency to liberalise and democratise. However, there is still some reservation regarding the results of such changes, as there has also been a regression in some countries.

Which role have women played in making democracy a basic criterion for development in Africa? In this case, we can refer to the most recent example of the rebellion in Côte d'Ivoire.

The low impact of global governance on the national policies of some states highlights the gap in institutional capacities and the continued presence of harmful social and cultural practices. There is a set of key elements central to a change in women's roles and participation in anchoring democracy, as citizens:

- A governance system that is more egalitarian in its content and form;
- Greater involvement of women in political processes thanks to the implementation of a conceptual framework;
- Building women's capacity, in order to allow them to be more active in political and democratic life, for increased empowerment;
- Greater awareness of the ideals of democracy and good governance, through training and competence of female leaders.

However, the problematic of incorporating gender in governance must be analysed in the specific context of African countries. From the early independence period, some countries, such as Senegal, devised a policy, which some call 'state feminism', in order to encourage women's participation in the development process and to improve the living conditions of populations. As written in the Beijing plus documents, 'women's promotion, and equality between men and women are a component of human rights; it is a prerequisite for social justice. It is an objective that should not be considered as exclusively women-driven. It is the only way of building a sustainable, fair and developed society. Widening women's scope of action and ensuring equality

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between sexes are major prerequisites to political, social, economic, cultural and ecological security for all the people'.

Such issues bring us back to other ones pertaining to governance, such as the problematic of the African state, the system of governing the citizenry and the answers brought to their needs in a developmental context; which roles should be envisaged in a gender perspective? There is indeed an African general context to the problematic of leadership and governance.

A retrospect on demonstrations of power in African societies shows that there are two kinds of power: traditional and modern. In some matriarchal cultures, the way power is managed and transmitted shows the prominent role given to women in African societies. Indeed, there is enlightening evidence that is available, regarding women's relationship with power, in colonial and pre-colonial Africa. We can draw useful lessons from the leadership of the 'Mafo', Bamileke princess, Mamy Yoko, from Sierra Leone or the 'Sarawnia' from Niger, Queen Pokou of Côte d'Ivoire, the princesses and queens of Waalo, Senegal and many others, who had to manage the power given to them.

However, what African women really lack is their presence in a theoretical and conceptual debate, as well as expertise in some fields. We shall try to talk briefly on these two points, which are a major hindrance to women's enjoyment of full citizenship.

### **Women and good governance: Theoretical dimensions of the debate**

Two dimensions can be considered by women: i) the global evolution of the continent and the role of the African state, and ii) good governance.

#### **1. The global evolution of the continent and the role of the African state**

It is about asking ourselves how to build a wealthy Africa from the continent's hu-

man resources. It would be difficult to take up this challenge without the input of women, whose courage, resourcefulness and imagination are a tremendous hope for the continent. In so doing, two points seem particularly important: a national or even Pan-Africanist awareness and promotion of social justice through a redistribution of national wealth, based on equality of chances. Women are the first to demand increased efficiency of public services, solutions to health, educational, training, justice and security problems.

Even if women's claims are clearly perceived, however, a right perception of political stakes and what it takes to the crystallisation of an egalitarian sense of citizenship and national awareness are absent. Most African states have difficulties in infusing such national awareness in their citizens. The number of competent women, who are able to participate in the management of power on an egalitarian basis, is still low. Various strategies must be deployed to address the lack of competent women at the various levels and in various sectors. Besides, incorporating gender in governance and creating a leadership that could bring about economic changes demands actors to conduct such changes, as well as a clear understanding of the stakes and the right choices to make.

This is why the road to women's leadership must be put in a historical, economic and political context and also why all attempts of reproducing the modern nation state have so far failed. The challenges that need to be taken up are the building of a national market, increasing of the living standard, and this cannot be done by merely relying on international aid, in a context of impoverishment of people. It is such a context, dominated by the informal sector and structural adjustment policies, that we need to anchor in a democratic system, where women would be able to play a political role.

#### **2. Good governance**

In the face of such a situation, one can ask, as Godfrey Lardner, an economist at the UN Economic Commission (ECA), whether African women really need to go to a lot of trouble to try to catch the

distressed boat of development in Africa. Does the famous oft-misused concept of good governance have the same meaning for all actors? Whenever one talks of good governance, the first thing that comes to mind is the fight against corruption. Furthermore, according to a survey we have carried out on behalf of the United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the content of this concept changes according to whether the person concerned is from the institutional world, from the civil society or a political party. Very few studies make a relationship between 'good governance and gender', since researchers do not usually consider such a dimension.

CODESRIA has been organising Governance and Gender Institutes for a couple of years now. For the time being, both themes are not interconnected, and the gender dimension is hardly dealt with in the abundant literature. The question raised by Ayesha Imam, Amina Mama and Fatou Sow (1997) about engendering social sciences is illustrated by the theories on governance, which revolve around some elements, such as the nature of the state- the gender of which is considered as male by the African feminists, and which, to some authors such as Achille Mbembe, Jean-François Médard and Patrick Chabal (see references), is associated with political clientelism or neo-patrimonialism. However, there is still room for hope, because, as Mbembe (1992) says, a certain number of quasi-autonomous spaces of expression have been created, and several non formal organisations have been set up. 'A real social power is being created, in unprecedented forms, while the civil society is taking shape, sometimes at the margin of the state or outside the control of postcolonial bureaucracies, according to very heterogeneous modes'. It is in such a context that the dynamism of the civil society, informal sector, is taking place in most African countries.

The destruction or implosion of the formal market thus constitutes two parameters that give to the African experiences of collapse or restoration of authoritarianism a peculiar local characteristic. However, both may have a desired or accidental effect, namely a reinforcement of the material bases of social forces least disposed to being 'democratised'. It is this complex economic situation that women must be aware of. Political underdevelopment is linked to two backward models:

the clientelist and neo-patrimonial models; the latter is larger than the former and also includes clientelism, nepotism, 'tribalism' and corruption which are all part and parcel of the underdeveloped state in Black Africa.

### Women and citizenship

First of all, what meaning can they give to good governance, in order to fully enjoy their citizenship? To answer this question, one must think about the ideas inspired from the reflection of a key theoretician of governance, Goran Hyden, for whom the state is seldom the sole source of political power. Furthermore, it is often the public sphere rather than the state only that is weak. Individuals do not see the wrong in tapping into public resources for private or community purposes. This is a common attitude in various institutions that go well beyond what is commonly called 'the state'. Considering that the notion of the public sphere includes both the state and the society, to what extent is there a civic public sphere, and how do the political actors, some of whom belong to the state, and others to the civil society, manage and sustain it? Are civic institutions, such as ministries, political parties or the media, which are within the public sphere, respected and is such legitimacy acknowledged? This brings in the significance of respect for the rules protecting the public sphere.

In Africa, the trend for good governance appeared in the 1990s, in a context of political and economic liberalisation. This highlights the capacity of the state for responsiveness and responsibility, as well as the impact of these factors on political stability and economic development. Within this interaction (state, society), the study of governance contributes to identifying adjustment models for the relationship between the state and the society that could strengthen political legitimacy. The following can be noted:

- Poor crystallization of national awareness to the detriment of ethnic awareness for a large number of people, as explained above;
- Poor level of political awareness, which can be accounted for by the very nature of political parties, whose major agenda consists of mimicking regional and ethnic leaders;
- The subjective management of the state on the basis of political acquaintances rather than on scientific and technical competences;

- The weakness of female expertise by sector and field of specialisation;
- The lack of sustained feminist movements that could protect women's interests, namely their promotion in the field of governance and leadership, rather than a national movement within which women would agree on a common agenda, while respecting the partisan ideologies of each woman or group of women. For example, how do women perceive the stakes around integration projects such as the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) or the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS) etc?

Instead, women have contributed to reinforcing the social hierarchies of this power. We shall analyse the incorporation of gender in the governance of an independent country that has been enjoying international sovereignty for almost forty years. This will lead us to a retrospect of the modes of management of the postcolonial state, and development policies on the continent. We shall be reviewing the various strategies adopted.

However, Africans have been making efforts for around thirty years towards consolidating their economies, namely through the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA). Actually, the LPA did not include the issue of women's leadership in governance as such, but it remains the first development strategy document for Africa with a whole chapter on women, as soon as it was created. This was not the case for the other strategic or general policy documents that followed. It is only afterwards, with the support of the African women, that NEPAD has included a gender dimension to its concerns.

During the last decade, governments at the national level have raised awareness about the importance of women's contribution to the decision-making process, in order to put an end to women's underrepresentation in the decision-making. Several countries have taken measures for affirmative action by setting up, for example, women's commissions, and allotting seats for women at parliament, appointing women to public positions, for example as ministers, ambassadors, or even prime ministers, as in the case of Senegal. At the regional level, as a follow up to the LPA, NEPAD and the African Union have made gender balance one of the fundamental elements of the development process in Africa. This was reinforced by the

declaration of the Head of State on gender balance, in Maputo, in July 2004. At the global level, the last decade was characterized by the adoption by the international community of the Beijing Declaration and Agenda on women, as a follow-up to the Nairobi strategies (1985) and the Millennium Development objectives, which consider gender balance as a priority.

## References

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# Women and the Making of Electoral Substance

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When the governments of the world met in Beijing, China, in 1995 to review the progress they had individually and collectively made or not made towards enhancing the status of women, most countries in Africa had just commenced on the road to re-instituting plural politics. More than three decades before, these same African countries had emerged out of colonialism with a pledge to uphold governance based on the popular mandate and therefore responsive to the aspirations of the African citizenry. That pledge had been reneged on by an overwhelming majority of the governments soon after they had been ushered into power.

The return to multiparty contestation for government power and the constitutional reforms that gave it structure were practically imposed by the conditionalities attached to the IMF/World Bank loans and structural adjustment programmes following popular uprisings and demand for change by Africa's suffering millions. The Beijing pledges in 1995 were thus among many of the other pledges of reform and democratisation that African governments made once more to the citizenry. The question that is often asked is whether and to what extent African governments have lived and can live up to their promise to deliver accountable governance and economic development.

Accountable governance is, however, not just a reflection of what governments do or aspire to do, but is also informed by the actions of the people under those governments. What do they do under repressive governments? To what extent do they hold governments accountable to their pledges when there is room for that kind of engagement? More pertinently, since the return to formal accountability through plural politics, what demands

have African citizens been making on the state to build sustainable democratic institutions and culture and thereby guard against regression to the kind of authoritarianism that characterised much of the

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first two and a half decades of independence?

This paper will draw from the experience of southern Africa to review progress made towards the democratisation of political space and governance practice by examining the status of women and the contribution of their struggles for greater inclusiveness, particularly in governance institutions.

## Women, political parties and electoral processes before the 1990s

There are certain similarities between the manner in which the new institutions of governance in post-colonial Africa emerged to herald independence and their re-emergence in the 1990s. For instance, political parties, electoral processes and the constitutions that gave them structure and content were, in most countries in Africa, instruments largely negotiated between external powers and certain dominant national groups. At the end of colonial rule they were, in one sense, part of the conditional terms on which colonial governments were prepared to hand over power to their colonial subjects. But in another sense they were also the available means by which colonised subjects could legally channel their long-standing, legitimate anti-colonial struggles into co-

herent political programmes in the fight for independence.

With the demise of authoritarian rule in the post-colony, they were once again the instruments used by external powers to negotiate political reforms conditional on governments maintaining neo-liberal economic policies represented by structural adjustment packages. At the same time their reforms represented the aspirations of the millions of African citizens who had borne the brunt of authoritarian rule that had characterised most African states after independence. The nature and character of the development of these political instruments reflect the contradicting impulses in which they were born as products of both hegemonic external power and agents of liberation for the oppressed or those excluded from power.

Across the continent, the contradictions of constitutional reforms in African societies became manifest soon after independence when, having been used to mobilise popular support for the legitimate transfer of power from the departing colonialists, political parties and the constitutional arrangements that gave them form almost immediately began to be perceived by post-independence governments as obstructive to nation-building and state development. In reaction to this perceived threat, most post-colonial governments simply legislated against multiparty competition for government power and replaced it with single party systems.<sup>1</sup> The same impulse by the governing elite to see multiparty competition as a threat are reflected in the resistance to more substantive reform and the persisting repressive tendencies in many states.

With regards to women, virtually all political institutions in Africa have historically shared the common characteristic of relegating women's political participation