

ing Strategies for the Advancement of Women, Paragraph 2).

The problem of the working woman in Japan is not far from being the problem of the working woman in Africa, as they share the common situation of male-domination and the relegation of women to the background. Africa's only consolation so far is, alas and ironically, its low level of development and therefore fewer opportunities for women to be absorbed into the labour market, unlike in Japan. Believing that African countries will one day attain the same level of economic development, the working woman in Africa may as yet face more hardship and discrimination if we do not intensify and sustain the struggle now.

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Plenty Done, Plenty More to Do: Women's Involvement in Politics and Decision-making in Uganda

This paper examines Uganda's record on women in politics and decision making vis-à-vis the commitments made at the World Conference on Women in Nairobi, through the Beijing Conference, and now ten years after Beijing. The main conclusion of the paper is that while plenty has been done in Uganda in involving women in politics, plenty more needs to be done.

The road thus far

Uganda is often cited as a success story with regard to the issue of women in leadership – specifically political leadership. Indeed, the 1995 Constitution contains various articles that address women's (political) leadership. The National Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy enshrined in the Constitution stipulate that the state shall ensure gender balance and fair representation of marginalised groups on all constitutional and other bodies. Article 32 addresses the need for affirmative action; Article 33 spells out rights specific to women. Article 78 states that every district shall have one woman representative in parliament, and article 180(b) ensures that one-third of members of each local council shall be women.

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One of the first demands that the Women's Movement made of the new National Resistance Movement (NRM) regime¹ was in the area of women's political rights. At independence in 1962 there was a 2: 88 female to male ratio in parliament (Tripp 2000: 70). Emasu (2001) aptly captures the situation over three decades: In 1967 no women served in parliament; in 1980 there was only one out of the 143 members. In the 1989 National Resistance Council elections, the NRM government brought about significant improvement in women's political participation. Thirty-four seats were reserved for women; two women won their seats in open contests against male candidates, three women were nominated by the president, and two were 'historical' members, appointed because of their participation in the guerrilla war led by the National Resistance Army. By 1996, 52 women held parliamentary seats, 39 of them reserved, and they constituted 19 per cent of the members of parliament. By 1995, women constituted

17 per cent of all ministers, 21 per cent of all Permanent Secretaries, 35 per cent of all Under Secretaries, and 16 per cent of all District Administrators. Women were also represented on National Commissions such as the Constitutional Commission, the Electoral Commission and the Human Rights Commission, as well as on parastatal boards.

Through affirmative action, women made considerable headway in parliament. Women now make up 24 per cent of the parliamentarians in Uganda. Despite the ongoing discussion of the merits or demerits of such a policy, one of the positive results is that women have been given exposure, political experience, and increased confidence. When asked about the changes to women's status after the 1986 NRM takeover, women overwhelmingly responded that the biggest changes related to women's participation in politics, standing for office, becoming public and government leaders, and being able to express themselves publicly to a greater degree than in the past (Emasu 2001).

In 1997 the Local Government Bill raised issues relating to women's access to political leadership. Although parliament had passed the Local Government Bill in December 1996, President Museveni vetoed

it, rejecting a clause that set the minimum academic qualifications for Local Council (LC) chairpersons at LC3 and LC5 levels (Ordinary Secondary level for LC3 chairpersons and Advanced Secondary level for LC5 chairpersons).² Women's groups had opposed the Ordinary Secondary level education requirement on the grounds that it would disqualify many suitable women because of their lower educational levels (*The Monitor* 1 February 1997). Even though there had been strong opposition from the MPs to revising the qualifications, parliament yielded to the pressure from women's organisations and women MPs, and threw out the education requirement (*The Monitor* 26 February 1997; *The Crusader* 25 February 1997; *The Monitor* 25 February 1997). This represented yet another landmark in the women's rights movement with regard to political rights.

Despite these gains, it is still not very easy for women to make it into political office and prestigious leadership. The major players in politics and decision-making are still men, despite the presence of women. The issues on the political agenda of women do not feature nor are they deemed a priority. The fact that men predominate in the public and political sphere in Uganda means that its organisation and structures are heavily influenced by male values, attitudes and priorities. Very often women are expected to conform to and not transform the structures and norms of the public sphere. Whether the culture and atmosphere of politics is actively antagonistic to women, or simply organised in a way that does not suit them, it can be difficult for women as relative newcomers to pose a challenge. Those who attempt to transform the structures and norms face a quick and brutal backlash.

Furthermore, despite the high numbers of women in politics and in the public space, women are still regarded as intruders in this (male) space and are largely unwelcome in the political domain. For the most part they are endured as a necessary evil rather than an equal partner on the pathway to development⁴. As one person put it:

The biggest threat facing the stability of families today is the desire for women to join high-level politics. There are shortcomings to this, most important being the lack of 'quality time' and parental love to children...

Women should be limited to 10 per cent political representation and should be stopped from voting for presidents and MPs at least for some 200 years (Kwesiga).

Another person put it this way: 'sometimes when you give financial, economic and social power to women, in most cases it brings problems. Check which type of woman is given power' (Muhairwe, Ekimeza, 23 February 2002) (ibid).

The major tactic with regard to women and leadership has come down to their appointment in leadership positions without any attempt at simultaneously removing the practical and structural obstacles that stand in their way to effective involvement in this arena. In short it is not enough to increase women's participation in politics and leadership without democratising the public space where such politics are carried out (Tamale 2001: 221). This issue is closely related to tokenism, which is the practice of appointing a few women to positions of power and responsibility, without giving them the requisite support. The following quotation illustrates this point:

Women are not brought in as an equal partner but as a means of balancing the composition. This is reflected during parliamentary debates where in most circumstances the Speaker or the chairperson is giving women a chance to speak. He will often say 'let me first get gender balance'. When looked at analytically it seems as if the Speaker is giving an opportunity to substantive speakers, and then giving women a chance for the sake of balance (Emasu 2001).

Bringing women into the policy and decision-making space does not necessarily lead to power-sharing or redress imbalances at that level. Many women have in fact shared in the struggles in that space, struggles to assert the worth of a woman, struggles to be respected as competent legislators or decision-makers, etc. Take the example of Maria Mutagamba, who in 1996 was a member of the Democratic Party (DP). When she was still with the DP she was chairperson of the presidential elections campaign in 1996. When she asked Dr Kawanga Ssemwogerere what he expected of her, he said, 'All you have to do is present yourself at the conference centre, welcome me when I come in and introduce me to the gathering' (Byanyima and Mugisha 2003: 186). She also recounts the

following about her high position in the DP:

Slowly I was coming face to face with the realities of politics. I had to get my campaign team to accept me first. They had not agreed on me becoming their chairperson. I think that Dr Ssemwogerere had sat somewhere and thought of a woman for several reasons. One, he thought I had money, which would help his campaign. Secondly I think he wanted to appear gender sensitive and appointing a woman head of his team would portray a gender-balanced campaign and thirdly, as I came to realize later, he thought I was a quiet innocent person who could be pushed around easily... At first men close to him did not accept me easily because they had lined up some other people to head the campaign and they did not want a woman to head it... (Byanyima and Mugisha 2003: 187).

While the public sphere is opening up to women, the private sphere remains intact. By private sphere we mean the family. Difficulties arise because the entry of women into leadership positions is discussed in isolation from these structures. Consequently, while the power centres are shifting, the other institutions in society are not changing. This is particularly so in the case of family structures and household dynamics. People are often quick to remind women where they belong, as the following quotation illustrates:

However high you have gone politically, socially or economically, your husband is your husband. Even if you become the President of Uganda and your husband is a primary school teacher, he is still entitled to his respect in that capacity. Drop the pride! It smacks of arrogance, conceit and egoism. Its capacity to destroy marriages is unquestionable (*The New Vision* 25 February 1997).

The barriers that women face in entering public and political life do not exist in a vacuum. They are closely linked with the overall economic, social and cultural status of women. For many political leaders the fact that the issue of women's underrepresentation in political life is part of a wider problem becomes a convenient excuse not to address the barriers within

the structures, cultures and practices within politics itself. The caution therefore is that strategies that simply focus on encouraging women to be involved in politics and improving the capacity of those who do come forward may fail to address the structural and cultural resistance to women from within these powerful groups.

Women in a multiparty dispensation

From 1986 to 2005, multiparty politics was effectively banned in Uganda. It was only in mid-2005, after a Constitutional Review Process and after a referendum on change in the political system, that Uganda adopted a multiparty form of governance. The recent general elections, February 2006, were the first multiparty elections in Uganda since 1980.

However, one resounding question about women has been whether the change in political system will change the fortunes of women on the question of politics and decision-making. Dr Sylvia Tamale, a leading feminist in Uganda, while analysing the 'new' political space, cautioned that:

...regardless of what political system is in control of the state, and regardless of the lofty rhetoric, when Ugandan women lift the veil off the face of the state, they see nothing but deeply entrenched norms of male privilege and power embedded therein. We see a patriarchal state whose number one agenda is to sustain and defend such power; an institution by men and for men. Ugandan women are more interested in taking the state to task to account for its soft-peddling on actualising women's democratic rights as enshrined in the constitution. We are more interested, for example, in quick explanations from the state as to why it is meddling with the land co-ownership clause; why it is sitting on the domestic relations bill; why it is deferring the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Commission. Ugandan women are acutely aware that the majority of men agitating for political power, whether clothed in the movement or in party colours, have traditional patriarchal mind-sets that readily justify women's subordination and exploitation. In rhetoric, they include issues of democracy and even gender equality in their political

manifestos, but in practice their actions contradict what they say. Indeed, most do not practise democracy in their own homes and families. They are not willing to address issues of sex discrimination, domestic violence, sexual violence, and gender equity, and often dismiss out of hand all that women say. We must note that the political space being opened up by the NRM administration is deeply masculinist, anti-women and militaristic. Whether the bolt on the ban on political parties is unscrewed tomorrow or whether the movement system consolidates its stranglehold, Ugandan women should keep a critical distance from the state and focus on the real issues that keep them in a subordinate position. Without a radical transformation in political and social structures and institutions, women will always have a raw deal in the public sphere. As things stand now, when the contests for political power are over, it will be business as usual for the male leaders that win the day. For women, therefore, movement or multiparty, the struggle continues! (Tamale 2003)

Not many of the political parties have focussed on questions important for women. The fact that Uganda is a patriarchal society is also reflected in the political parties and their lack of a clear agenda regarding women's issues. When the old political parties, the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) and the Democratic Party (DP) were active in the 1960s and 1980s, they did not take issues regarding women seriously. It is also worth mentioning that these political parties had the backup of strong patriarchal institutions. The UPC was backed by the Protestant Church, and the DP by the Roman Catholic Church. Even today, none of these parties have thus far signalled any alteration in their deeply entrenched patriarchal character or practices. The fact that few women have taken up the challenge to stand as candidates for other parties can also indicate that women still see their achievement as privileges handed to them by the Movement system and are therefore not certain whether to subscribe to other parties or remain paying allegiance to the Movement. Furthermore, there has been some outright intimidation of the opposition by the government, and women might feel insecure and afraid to express their political conscience (*The New Vision* 29 No-

vember 2005). As the opposition parties have shown little or no interest in taking issues important for women seriously, it seems unlikely that they will grant special support for women in a multiparty era. Furthermore, the opposition parties have lacked internal stability, and their activities have very much reduced them to disputes over whom to front for candidature.

Conclusion

Despite participating in the quest for a truly democratic dispensation for our country, women are aware (and sadly so) that when the contest for political power is over, it will be back to the old system. And so multiparty or not, our greater concern is that our society is transformed in order to end discrimination and subordination of women, the poor and the marginalised. Our struggle continues to ensure that democracy will have true meaning not only at state level, but also in the home. Our struggle too must consist of repeatedly showing the connection between women's marginalisation and economic and political stagnation.

As Uganda enters a new era of politics with the introduction of multiparty politics, it is also time to take stock of its achievements and challenges regarding women's involvement. If government is serious about this democracy project, then it cannot but address and increase women's involvement in politics and decision-making.

Notes

1. The NRM came to power in 1986 and has ruled Uganda since then. It also goes by the name of the Movement Government.
2. Uganda has a five-tier decentralised system of local government ranging from Local Council (LC) I at the village level, to Local Council V at the district level. Local Council levels III and V are considered the principal administrative units through which money and services from the central government are channelled for the benefit of the citizens.
3. Reverend Aaron Mwesigye Kafundizeki ably makes this point in a letter to the Editor in *The New Vision* of Tuesday 25 February. On page 9 he writes: '... very little has changed about the attitudes of both men and even women to women particularly in leadership roles. For instance, women leaders in the LC system operate in an environment which is dictated by values and norms unfavourable to their active involvement in this country...'

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The Education of Girls in Kenya: Looking Back and Still Looking Forward

Female education in particular, with its multiplier effects, has been shown to be crucial for the advancement of nations (Beijing Declaration September 1995). Education empowers women to bring about necessary changes such as smaller, healthier families (Wamahui 1996). In Kenya, except for pockets of resistance, the value of formal education as a tool for individual and societal development was recognised by Kenyan parents right from independence. This is manifested by the tremendous expansion in school enrolments, the availability of physical facilities and the number of teachers during the first two post-independence decades. The second post-independence decade coincided with the UN Decade for Women (1975–1985).

During this period, the proportion of children at primary school level rose from 50 per cent at independence to 95 per cent by the mid-eighties, ten years after the Nairobi Women's meeting. At the secondary level, there was a phenomenal growth of 2000 per cent. Gender parity was also achieved in the primary cycle while at secondary level, girls' enrolment jumped from 34 per cent in 1963 to 43 per cent by 1985. National literacy levels reached 70 per cent in 1989 with that of women increasing from 10 per cent in 1960 to 60 per cent in 1989, and that of men rising from 30 per cent to 79 per cent during the same period (ROK 1997). Government expenditure on total education has grown annually by approxi-

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mately 8.3 per cent since 1992. However, the educational trends in the 1990s were not promising. The available statistics indicate a reversal of the gains of the first two post-independence decades.

The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) identified the following factors that accounted for gender disparities in education:

- Customary attitudes;
- Early marriages;
- Early pregnancies;
- Inadequate and gender-biased teaching and learning materials and curricula;
- Sexual harassment;
- Inadequate physical facilities and other resources;
- Competing domestic responsibilities of girls and young women;
- Poverty.

According to Wamahiu (1997), a multiplicity of inter-related factors contributes to the under-participation (non-enrolment, lower persistence and poorer performance) of girls in formal and non-formal

education programmes in Kenya. A complex interplay of macro-level policy and micro-level practices, beliefs and attitudes determine whether households and communities feel it profitable to educate their daughters. A pervasive patriarchal ideology influences policy and practice at the national, community and school level, marginalising Kenyan girls in education. Arguably, this is manifested by:

- Deferred entry of girls into the school system;
- Frequent absenteeism from school;
- Poor performance;
- Lower aspirations; and consequently;
- High levels of wastage.

Some of the concerns raised at the Beijing Conference and framed within the Kenyan context still persist to a large extent.

- Poverty, the cost of schooling, competing domestic responsibilities and the labour market;
- Customary attitudes and negative traditions;
- Early pregnancy and schooling;
- The safety and security of girls;
- Gender biased teaching, learning materials, curricula and facilities;
- Lack of role models.

Providing educational opportunities to all Kenyan children is central to the Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Plan for Economic Recovery. The National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) Govern-