

IN SEARCH OF GENDER JUSTICE: LESSONS
FROM THE PAST AND UNRAVELING THE 'NEW' IN
NEPAD

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Abstract

The paper posits that looked from the diverse perspectives of advocates of gender justice, NEPAD marks a significant regression from gains achieved since independence and particularly since the process of democratization that emerged in Africa in the late 1980s. Support from this conclusion can be gleaned from a glance at the section of NEPAD entitled 'Democracy and Political Governance Initiative that is a clear endorsement of the 'good governance' discourse promoted by the highly contested 'Washington Consensus' while it is silent on gender analysis as a diagnostic and assessment tool. The paper departs from both mainstream and gender biased debates on governance as well as from advocates of gender justice who limit their analysis and advocacy to concerns with the under-representation of women in the world of institutional politics. A good governance discourse that is premised on procedural conception of democracy that is conceived as separate and apart from socio-economic rights and structures as does NEPAD has extremely limited transformatory potential for a new and gender just Africa. Based on the lessons learnt by women from post independence Africa, the paper attempts to demonstrate the gender specific limits of choiceless democracies. By way of conclusion, it engages in an exercise of engendering the proposed process of 'targeted capacity-building initiatives' by NEPAD. Unlike the neoliberal agenda and its African version that is NEPAD, the effort deployed to engender these institutional reforms is motivated by a commitment to gender-equitable transformations and not by a preoccupation to create 'an enabling environment for private sector development.'

Beyond Platitudes

At a time when the hegemony of the Washington Consensus' is substantially eroded as a result of unrelenting critic from a multitude of social forces as well as the realities on the ground. And despite its claims to being Africa-led and owned initiative, the new partnership for Africa (NEPAD) is an unmitigated endorsement of the neoliberal agenda. In his opening statement at the Regional Conference on African Women and the New Partnership for Africa's Development in January 2002, President Obsanjo stated, "May your thoughts, reflections and insights be devoid of platitudinous civilities" (African Women's Forum, 2002). This paper takes up his request in terms of providing a gendered critic of the 'Democracy and Governance' component of NEPAD.

The paper also responds to the view of President Mbeki who a week prior to the aforementioned meeting in Nigeria, this time at a workshop to launch the work in progress Review of NEPAD in Johannesburg held on January 24, 2002 in Johannesburg stated that the interest of ordinary Africans in the initiative has also been awakened and this inculcates in everyone a consciousness that the NEPAD initiative exists ultimately to better the lives of the African people and thus must be accountable to them. Much more recently in an interview with Newsweek, President Abduolaye Wade noted that what distinguishes NEPAD from the preceding recovery plans is the fact that while previous plans were written by experts and never read by heads of state, NEPAD was worked out by 'Chiefs of State' themselves. He went on to add that "we have identified what we call the superpriorities, beginning with good governance" (Newsweek, 2002: 50). This short note is therefore a critic of NEPAD that draws on lessons of the past for ordinary Africans especially women with a focus on accountability and zeroes in on one of the superpriorities that is democratic governance.

The paper draws on critics of the good governance discourse by way of exploring the similarities and differences offered by NEPAD. More importantly, the paper will provide a synthesis of the debates on gender and governance that NEPAD has completely ignored. To be sure NEPAD makes sporadic mention of women in the document but the most detailed and telling view of the place assigned to women is to be found in Paragraph 49 where it is stated that Africa leaders will take joint responsibility for:

"Promoting the role of women in social and economic development by reinforcing their capacity in the domains of education and training; by the development

of revenue-generating activities through facilitating access to credit; and by assuring their participation in the political and economic life of African Countries.”

In addition under long Term Objectives, Paragraph 68 states;

“ To make progress towards gender equality and empowering women by eliminating gender disparities in the enrolment in primary and secondary education by 2005. ”

“ To reduce maternal mortality ratio by three-quarters between 1990 and 2015 ”

“ To provide access for all who need reproductive health services by 2015. ”

In addition to being highly limited in its vision of women’s empowerment and a regression in terms of stated goals in national plans, these goals are just a rehash of internationally set goals some of which are not even achievable in a large number of African countries.

Revisiting Good Governance

In the recent past NEPAD has been subjected to a growing number of insightful critics (Taylor, I. & Nel, P. 2002). Moreover, to the extent that is located within the neoliberal framework, earlier critics of ‘good governance’ are applicable to it. In the 1980’s, structural adjustment became the hegemonic development paradigm with its slogan of ‘getting prices right’ through curbing the power of interventionist state. When structural adjustment failed to bring about the anticipated growth rate after a decade of hard measures, the focus turned to getting ‘institutions right’ via the promotion of the ‘good governance’ agenda. In other words, the failure to bring about economic growth was now explained away by ‘poor governance’ as the major causal factor. In the words of the World Bank, “the root cause of weak economic performance in the past was ‘the failure of public institutions’ (World Bank, 1989: XII).

The economic policies of structural adjustment failed due to the ‘crisis of governance’ as evidenced by lack of accountability, transparency and predictability. The Bank further argued that ‘it was Africa’s uncertain and unpredictable political environments that were discouraging private investors from risking their money, due to fear that their property would be unprotected and their profits consumed by corruption. Despite a belated recognition of the state in the development process, the ideal ‘good governance state’ remained the minimal state defined in a narrow, technocratic functionalist terms whose goal was limited was limited to furthering the goals of an adjustment model (Mkandawire, T& Soludo, C. 1999; Abrahmsen,2000). More

concretely, according to the Bretton Woods institutions and now NEPAD, a good government is one that does not intervene in production, but limits itself to providing physical and social infrastructure, including legal framework favorable to private property (DAWN, 1995).

As for NEPAD, far from being a new departure from established practices, every single factor included under the rubric of democracy and governance initiative is a replica of the key principles and parameters identified by the World Bank Staff (See Mkandawire & Soludo, 1999:47). In fact, NEPAD has omitted democratic principles that were thrown in by the World Bank such as free flow of information and encouragement of a culture of public debate. On the other hand, NEPAD has retained the managerial and procedural aspects with a focus on institutional and bureaucratic efficiency and accountability.

Transforming Institutions

What in fact would have made NEPAD a new strategy is if it had taken up the challenge of elaborating on the fundamental requirements of transparency and accountability and on the type of institutions that could actually support the capacity for 'good governance'. As one observation noted, "if corruption, inefficiency and waste are really to be rooted out of the system, then it is essential to create institutions that will open the state actions to public scrutiny. For this there has been little enthusiasm on the part of the Bank or of governments. In its absence, the pressure for 'good governance' has led to no governance at all. State's capacity for any form of governance has been severely curtailed along with state resources for development projects" (DAWN, 1995: 39-40).

It is also important to note that another similarity between the neoliberal version of 'good governance' and NEPAD is the claim 'to speak on behalf of the ordinary people' and to emphasize that the primary aim of governance is to 'empower' them. In both the World Bank's good governance agenda and in NEPAD, the key effect is 'the constructing of structural adjustment and the institutions and countries (partners) that promote it as a force for democracy. The use of good governance blurs 'the distinction between democratization and the retreat of the state from the social and economic field, and thereby constructs a new legitimacy for economic liberalism in the form of structural adjustment programmes'. Likewise, the agenda's claim (both the Banks and NEPAD) to 'empower ordinary people' deprives the term of its radical political connotations and gives a highly instrumental meaning.

In the good governance parlance 'empowerment' merely implies the validation of cost recovery whose overall aim is to release the energies of ordinary people' and 'to 'empower ordinary people to take charge of their own lives, to make communities more responsible for their development and to make governments listen to their people'(World Bank, 1989: 54). In brief, the incorporation of works like 'empowerment' 'self-help and participation' into the Bank's otherwise monetarist vocabulary serves primarily to justify the curtailment of state responsibility (Abrahamsen, 2000:58). After ten years of deleterious outcomes, NEPAD has unashamedly embraced this instrumentalist notion of empowerment. It has become very clear that it is women who have suffered the worst from the curtailment of state responsibility and the abandonment of social development.

A considerable body of literature now exists on the gender implications and impacts of structural adjustment policies in Africa that reveal the ways in which poor African women's already unequal work burdens and limited access to resources have been made more difficult as a result of these policies. Shortfall in public services has meant that it is mostly women who make up for these shortfalls by increasing their working hours. Yet NEPAD fails to acknowledge and to change women's increased role in service provisions at great costs to their health and the curtailment of their daughter's educational opportunities.

Towards a Democratic Developmental State

Those genuinely engaged with searching sustainable solutions have recommended abandoning the 'technocratic twist' of the good governance agenda and initiating a process aimed at bringing about a democratic developmental state that is 'relatively efficient, capable and willing'. In their view, 'the constitution of democratic developmental state may be the single most important task on the policy agenda in Africa.' This being the case, 'the challenge should not be reduced to merely enhancing the technobureaucratic capacity of the state' but one that seeks 'to embed such a development state within democratic social institutions and governance structure.' Not only does such a challenge require imagination but also a sense of history (Mkandawire & Soludo: 133).

Such a vision resonates with advocates of gender justice who have been clamoring for a transformed democratic developmental state. They have learnt through their long struggle that it is only such a state that has the potential of becoming accountable to the needs and concerns of ordinary men and women instead of 'external partners' and the rich and powerful inside our countries. A related lesson that women have drawn from the engagement with states throughout

the long 20th Century is that gender accountability does not result automatically. In order to be beneficiaries of a more transparent, open, participatory and accountable state, advocates of gender justice have to intensify their struggle for the creation and strengthening of autonomous women's organizations, be able to build and sustain coalitions with other sectors of civil society and acquire the necessary technical skills for strategic and pro-active analysis and planning. A major challenge for women's organizations and civil society in general is advocating for the creation of and/or strengthening of institutions that will open state actions to public scrutiny.

As far as gender issues are concerned, the NEPAD document has been subjected to at least three well publicized critics, namely by the participants at the aforementioned Regional Conference on African Women and NEPAD held in January 2002 in Ota, Nigeria, by MATCH International, a Canadian NGO and by FEMENET.

A Glimpse of Women's View of NEPAD

The Nigerian conference hosted by the African Leadership Forum and organized by the African Women's Forum can be safely classified as an internal and friendly critic while the critic originating from Canada but an initiative that only used the space provided by MATCH International but reflects the view of women 'representing groups and networks in Africa' who met and reviewed the document is more critical and comprehensive. Thus the participants in Ota Nigeria saw the NEPAD initiative as a 'further affirmation of an emerging responsive leadership that is aware and cognizant of its responsibility to its people and the continent' but enjoined African political leaders to seek ways and means of ensuring that NEPAD 'becomes a people-based, people-focused and people driven initiative.'

Policy Making Parliaments and Civil Society

If NEPAD is not people based nor people focused, as it is not, we need to ask to whom is the emerging leadership responsive? The participants further to highlighted a major omission by calling attention to the fact that, conceptually, there is a major gender gap in NEPAD, as it does not give enough attention to gender-related issues." The participants further revealed the degree of responsiveness by the 'emerging leadership' by advocating for an interface and mechanism for effective participation and representation of civil society organizations especially those of women and event went further to advocate for the discussion and endorsement of NEPAD by parliaments in each of the African countries.

From these concerns we can surmise easily surmise that the new development strategy that has failed to seek partnership with major stakeholders in Africa can not be perceived as new or responsive to the majority of its constituents in Africa. This form of exclusionary and insular policy making ought to be a sobering reality for gender advocates who in the recent past have invested a disproportionate amount of their energy advocating for an increase in women's representation in decision-making bodies, a point to which we will return below. Suffice it to say here that while women's increased political participation is a legitimate concern, equal weight ought to be given on reforming democratic institutions so as to enhance women's diverse interests through legislative and policy initiatives.

There were other examples of lack of responsiveness by African leaders that was highlighted by the aforementioned meeting and focusing on the democracy and governance initiative. The participants recommended the need for inclusion of women's human rights and the acknowledgment of international human rights instruments that African leaders have already signed. What this point underscores is the well-entrenched practice by most African governments to espouse gender equity, without series risk of being held accountable-of having to operationalize the promises make in top-level rhetoric (Goetz, 1995). In the case of NEPAD, even the rhetoric regarding women's human rights is missing.

Building on the Past

As was pointed out by one of the participants at the conference, there is a need for stocktaking of existing mechanisms put in place since the Beijing conference at the national and regional levels that could 'play an important albeit late process of engagement' in NEPAD. If it found that various initiatives such as the women's ministries and Commissions at he national level, the women's units at the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the Economic Commission of the Untied Nations (ECA) have not been really effective, other options will have to be considered. The major messages of the submission is the need to learn from existing initiatives, shift away from a top down approach and ensure a systematic consultations of women at all levels (Ige, O. 2000:39). While the spirit of the recommendation is well taken, the stocktaking would much more instructive if a longer time frame dating back to the formation of gender units in OAU, ECA in sub-regions and individual countries were to be undertaken.

Toward a Conducive and Responsive Environment

Another participant at the same conference (Butegwa, 2002: 78) called for explicit commitments including resource commitments and using NEPAD as a tool for mainstreaming gender in all sectors and strategies and for narrowing gender gaps in each sector. More importantly the author called for the creation of an environment conducive to optimum participation of women in the NEPAD project. Not only constitutional provisions and international human rights instruments that are ratified by African governments not implemented but most African governments have failed to use national budgets as tools for narrowing the gender gap and as instruments for promoting equality.

On the contrary argues Butegwa the existing trend indicates national budget allocations that exacerbate the gender gap. One of her major recommendation calls for the participation of gender experts and women generally in the formulation of policy at the macro, meso and micro level. Such a measure, she argues, would bring to policymaking women's own expertise, experiences and concerns, and most likely ensure a gender responsive policy framework.

Implementing Commitments and Ensuring Participation

The second gender-focused review of NEPAD undertaken by MATCH International entailed a comprehensive point-by-point review of the entire NEPAD document. One of the first observations made by the document is that the people-centered element found in the Omega plan is lost. Echoing points made by the previous review, the recommendation calls for the promotion of the empowerment of women by NEPAD in tune with the proposal outlined in both the African Platform for Action adopted in Dakar, Senegal and the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995.

In addition to calling attention to the debt crisis, the need for gender disaggregation of issues such as poverty, the document calls attention to the lack of synergy between the growing democracy in Africa and the process of preparing NEPAD with a large percentage of the African continent scarcely knowing about the whole process. As for leadership, the document calls for 'visionary, open to public participation, honest and courageous enough to embrace female perspective that was either missing, marginalized or ignored' (Match International, 2002).

In order to appreciate the persistent pattern of sidelining women and women's interests in state structures and development strategies, a consistent culture that is clearly highlighted by NEPAD, we need to go back and briefly examine previous experiences.

Lessons from the Past

A Quick glance at the historiography of the colonial and the post colonial period in terms of women's political participation or lack thereof would provide useful insights into what now appears to be a well entrenched pattern of women's heightened self mobilization followed by period during which women are underrepresented in subsequently formed governance structures. Although mainstream African historiography is silent about women's participation in anti-colonial resistance and protest movements, we can now draw on the sources accumulated by gender aware historians of the period. For purposes of the major point being made by this note, we will divide these movements into two, namely women's resistance movements in a selected number of countries prior to the emergence of armed national liberation movements followed by a brief foray into women in liberation movements.

Since the emergence of gender aware historiography mostly in the 1980s, we have been able to have a glimpse of women's role in the anti-colonial resistance movements. Based on these sources, one can in fact argue that in a large number of cases it was women's self mobilized resistance that was the catalyst of the anti-colonial movements as well as the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. Support for this assertion can be found in studies of women's resistance to colonial rule in Nigeria, Kenya, Cameroon and of course South Africa. In Nigeria, women resisted colonial domination by protesting against specific economic and political policies of the colonial government.

The Women's War in Nigeria

The best documented of these resistances include the Aba Women's Riots of 1929 and the Egba Women's protest of 1947. Invariably known as the Women's War and the Women's Revolt, women protested the colonial administration's most egregious taxation policies and policies prohibiting assembly (Mba, 1992; Akpan and Ekpo, 1988; Dike, 1995). While the records show the level of destabilization posed by these women initiated and led revolts, chronicles of African leadership omit the names of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti the women who

organized the Egba women's protest and that of Margaret Ekpo the women who played a pivotal role in the creation of the Nigerian nation-state.

Kenyan Women Destabilizing Colonial Authority

Women's resistance in Kenya and Cameroon seem to have been triggered by the same cause and interestingly using almost identical methods of resistance. In the case of Kenya women engaged in open rebellion in the 1930 and 1950s following attempts by the colonial administration to force women to undertake soil conservation measures such as terracing, planting trees and engaging in mixed farming. These measures increased women's workloads and limited the time for their other myriad activities.

In 1948, women in Muranga district resisted soil conservation measures. An estimated '2500 women from Muranga danced and sang and informed they would not take part in soil conservation mainly because they felt they had enough to do at home.' When the district Commissioner ordered their arrest, 'they were quickly released by a large crowd of their own sex brandishing sticks and shouting Amazon war cries'. The colonial commissioner opined that "if left unchecked, (they) might have precipitated a landslide in government authority" (Oduol and Kabira, 2000: 107). In the early 1950s, women joined the Mau Mau where they made up about 5 percent of the guerrilla fighters but a much larger size of women supported the struggle through the preparation and carrying of food, hiding firearms and conveying messages.

As a result of their active participation a handful of women rose to leadership position within the Mau Mau. Cases in point include Marshall Mughoni who became a Field Marshall and Wanjiru Nyamarata who became a judge in the Mau Mau courts in Nakuru town, administered oaths and recruited guerrilla fighters. Despite the active participation of women in the various forms of anti-colonial struggle, the most influential African political group of the time, the Agikuyu Central Association maintained leadership as a male preserve, a measure that led to the marginalization of women their subsequent withdrawal to form their own organization ((Oduol and Kabira, 2000: 108).

The response of the colonial government to women's growing militancy was the establishment of a national women's organization known as Maendeleo Ya Wanawake. The major activity of this new organization was limited to teaching women traditional 'female skills'. However, the noteworthy feature is the form of cooptation utilized by the colonial government that was to set a precedent for postcolonial government in most parts of Africa. In

this case, the colonial government sought the support of some Kenyan women in return for which they were exempted from forced labor.

The ANLU Rebellion in Cameroon

In Cameroon, women in North West Cameroon launched a three-year period of revolt in 1958- 61 known as the ANLU Rebellion was provoked by the colonial imposition of vertical contour farming. Through public singing, verbal insults, dancing and demonstrating in public and seizing control of resources, women signaled the intensification of their anti-colonial protest and seized political power from Kom men (Ardener, 1975). Subsequently, women in Cameroon played an active role in the struggle for independence as well as the Unification of Cameroon. What is most striking these series of protest is the lack of continuity and erasure from societal memory, cooptation of the leaders into emergent state structures and the transformation of the methods of resistance such as singing and dancing into activities legitimizing authoritarian rule for most of the independence period.

Long Journey to Gender Justice in South Africa

In the case of South African women, their organized resistance dates back to 1908 where women of East London protested against high rents and threats of arrest. By 1912 and 1913, women's protest had become broader-based culminating in a sophisticated campaign against the pass laws. The women's anti-pass campaign used the tactics of the newly used by the newly formed South African Natives National Congress (SANNC) including petitions to the Ministry of Native Affairs, but went further and engaged in mass action including refusal to carry passes and attempts to block arrest of its members. Subsequently black women formed their own autonomous organization known as the Native and Coloured Women's Association whose major activity revolved around fund raising and building support for jailed women activists (kemp et al, 1995: 132).

In her comprehensive documentation of women's anti-pass struggles, Julia Wells (1993) posits that the resistance of women 'far exceeded the actions of their male counterparts in militancy. However, their militancy was inspired by a more conservative concern for their roles as mothers and homemakers and neither these protests or the formation of women's organization was able to confront' the underlying systemic, aspects of women's subordination' (Meintjes, 1998; 69). Although the earlier antipass campaign was suspended at the break of the

First World War, a national antipass campaign was reactivated in the 1950s by which time there were a large number of women's organizations as well as other organizations such as the African National Congress.

During the conference of these emergent organizations in 1954, a Women's Charter was drafted establishing the principle of full equality with men. It was through the joint effort of organizations such as the African National Congress Women's League (ANCLW) The Federation of South African Women (FSAW) and other organizations that women were able to organize a march of 20,000 women in Pretoria in 1956. When the Freedom Charter was drawn up in 1955, organizations such as FSAW 'ensured that the issues of concern to women were reflected in the Charter. Since the 1950s to the formation of a post apartheid state, women in South Africa have formed numerous organizations with varying degree of success. The point of these brief foray into the history of the South African women's movement was to indicate the crucial importance of an autonomous women's organization(s) that could articulate women's diverse and changing demands and be able to form coalitions with other organizations and political parties.

African Women and Liberation Movements

The third type of engagement of women in the political arena has been through their active participation in armed struggles that took place from Algeria to Zimbabwe. The pattern set during the Algerian liberation movement seemed to have persisted with minor variations throughout the rest of Africa. During the war, women played an active role in the network of distance, provided assistance to the men in combat and helped with intelligence, communication, provision of food and care of guerilla fighter's families. Women militants acted as liaison agents, collected medicine and transported weapons. However, "in risking their lives in the anti colonial war, women were fighting for nationalism and national liberation not for their cause as women (Charrard, M. 2001:185). In her interviews with ex women combatants, Charrard was informed about the absence of a women's project in the nationalist struggle. despite the involvement of the women in the war.

It was only on the eve of independence that the FLN expressed some intention to associate women with public life and the development of the country. Although leaders of the nationalist movement were aware of the tension surrounding family law and codes of personal status, they avoided taking a clear stand for the duration of the nationalist struggle. In the context of a growing rhetoric of equality during the immediate post independence period, hopes about family law and the expansion of women's rights were raised. In the 1960 and 1970s,

‘women did not come together in an organization that could have taken as its agenda the defense of women’s rights’ (ibid: 188). Although there was the National Union of Algerian Women, it was entirely under the control of the FLN. Consequently:

“as Algerians, men and women took nation building and the development of the new country as the top priority at independence, issues of family, law and women’s rights were subordinated to other political agendas. The promises made by political leaders in the euphoria of independence were unfulfilled. Instead, family law quickly became caught in disagreements among conflicting tendencies and in struggles among forces competing for power in the new national state. ---In adopting the Family Code of 1984, the Algerian state catered to social and political forces with vested interests in the preservation of the extended partilineal kinship structure sanctioned by Islamic family law. In doing so, it sacrificed women’s interests and the transformation of family law to political considerations.” (Charrard: 2201: 189).

These then is the overall pattern in most liberation movements. Active participation in nationalist movements with very little gains in the post independence period or a dramatic reversal of the gains made as illustrated by recent return to customary law in Zimbabwe. Women in South Africa seem to have drawn lessons from the successes and failures elsewhere when they fought hard for an inclusive consultation process, a democratic constitution and system of governance and on going debates on tackling gender issues in post-apartheid South Africa.

Despite amassing a type of women’s political leverage at a strategic stage in the political transition, not yet seen in this Continent, South African women were still excluded from the negotiation process and while they registered impressive gains in reproductive rights and rights of freedom from violence against women, they were less successful concerning socio-economic rights beyond those related to basic needs. As one observer put it, despite the great stride made, South Africa’s constitutional stipulations tended to overlook deeply entrenched socio-economic structures and deep rooted beliefs about gender relations. Moreover in practice, it proved easier for the new government to ‘talk the talk’ than walk the walk’ when it came to funding the advancement of gender equality” (Beall, J. 2001:142).

Women in Democratic Transitions in Africa

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the current phase of democratization in Africa that has emerged since the late 1980s is women's increased visibility and voice as interdependent political actors. An illustrative example is that of women in Zimbabwe following the recent elections. Replicating the long and entrenched pattern of omitting to acknowledge the role of women, debates on democratization in Africa fail to include the role of women in the 1990s.

Women played very active and most visible role in protests against authoritarian rule in Mali, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Guinea and in Niger. In Kenya women were at the forefront of protests in support of imprisoned human rights activists and in protest against human rights abuses. It was the demonstration of women and youth that led to the eventual downfall of Moussa Troare. In the case of Niger, several thousand women demonstrated against the exclusion of women representatives from a preparatory commission charged with organizing the country's National Conference in 1991 (Tripp, 2001).

Despite women's increased and active participation and perhaps because of it, most political parties are unwilling to adopt measures that would increase women's representation, to adequately address women's concerns. The most noteworthy achievement in terms of women's political participation has been the phenomenal increase in women's autonomous organization. Marking a significant departure from the 1950-1990 era during women were mobilized through a party wing, a mass organization of women under the auspices of the ruling party that in most cases suppresses women's rights issues, women all over Africa have been forming a plethora of independent associations with bold and new programmes as well as coalitions.

In terms of political participation, the efforts of women's nonpartisan organizations have tended to focus on increasing the number of women in positions of leadership, advocating for reform of constitutions and other discriminatory laws and practices. In some countries like Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe for example women are leading figures in the anticorruption and antisectarian struggles. Yet good governance agendas including NEPAD limit judicial reform to the creation of an enabling environment for the local private sector and especially removing barriers in the path of free trade and capital flows. Women's organizations have to continue to advocate for the construction and or strengthening of countervailing institutions to executive power, such as genuinely democratic and non-corrupt legislative bodies, an impartial judiciary

as well as to the build new institutions within civil society that would functions watchdogs over the sate

The project of increasing women's representation in legislatures, it has become clear that it is only through policies of affirmative action policies and quota systems that women can have a significant presence in formal politics. It is through these mechanisms that women in Uganda, South Africa, Namibia and Mozambique have registered a significant presence in the legislature.

Strengthening the Legislature

However, in most countries, leading political parties have remained remarkably more resistant to women's increased participation. In the meantime, in the meantime, new debates that reflect on the many aspects of the disabling environment facing women legislators and bureaucrats are emerging. In situations where most African parliaments do not have the power to scrutinize the governments economic agenda, and this role is taken up by insulated technocracies, there is little that women parliamentarians can in the realm of enhancing women's economic rights even if there was a critical mass of women parliamentarians. Thus advocates of gender justice have to play leading roles in civil society movements advocating for transparency and accountability.

In the recent past women have also increased their presence in state bureaucracies and have attempted to influence policy formulations and implementation through efforts to transform the state from within. These government units often known as National Machineries emerged as a result of the UN Decade for Women and take the form of women's bureaux, women's ministries or women's desks within another ministry. However, in most countries these institutions lack a stable or continuous history. As one observer noted, these offices have been "promoted to ministerial status under one regime, brought under the chief executive's wing in the president's office in the next or shunted from one peripheral ministry to another (no women's unit or ministry) has been able to consolidate a place in the national bureaucracy (Goetz 1995, 14).

Not only do they lack stability, but these units are heavily donor dependent and have faced major challenges in the context of civil service reforms, severe budget and demonstrative cuts. More significantly, these gender focal units are affected by the significantly weakened capacity of public administration and generating 'deeply entrenched bureaucratic malaise'

(Razavi, 2001: 114). It is for all these reasons that women have to be vigilant in advocating for a gender aware civil service reform and capacity building programs. The NEPAD initiative provides an entry point to such forms of advocacy.

In terms of ensuring gender-equitable development, at least three areas of capacity building that are of strategic importance can be identified. One entails the provision of training opportunities and confidence building of women with a long-term view of creating a gender-balanced civil service and private sector. Secondly, concerted effort ought to be made to foster gender awareness and competence among both men and women in the civil service, the policy process and in planning practices. Thirdly, a much more committed effort ought to be invested to substantially increase the number of women in the tertiary level of education. These types of measures can result in increasing the representation of women in government decision-making and managerial positions. These types of new roles for women have the potential of changing societal perceptions of women's capabilities and options. In turn, these types of changes can positively influence ideologies and opportunities for women.

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