

Citation

perspectives
on gender discourse

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Abbreviations

CBOs	Community Based Organisations
CCGD	Collaborative Center for Gender and Development
EAS	East African Standard
ECK	Electoral Commission of Kenya
ECWD	Education Center for Women and Democracy
EPPP	Engendering the Political Process Programme
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FIDA	International Federation of Women Lawyers
FORD	Forum for the Restoration of Democracy
FREDA	Friends of Esther and Deborah
IDEA	international Democratic Electoral assistance
IDIS	Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies
KANU	Kenya African National Union
LKWV	League of Kenya Women Voters
LPK	Labour Party of Kenya
MP	Member of Parliament
MYWO	Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organisation
NARC	National Rainbow Coalition
NCSW	National Commission on the Status of Women
NDI	National democratic Institute
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations
NWC	NARC Women Congress
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme



I like to use an axe, to see what life I can bring to parts of wood that are not talking to me ... (Sculptor: Irene Wanjiku)

Preface

Kenya went through remarkable elections in the year 2002 that saw the emergence of a new dispensation under National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC) in 2003. To the rest of the world Kenya had clearly demonstrated that democracy was possible in Africa. There is no change that is not riddled with criticism and the 2002 elections was no exception. Many lessons have been hopefully learned and the challenge for us is to put these lessons into practise so as to achieve even better results in the future.

During the first half of the year 2003, The Gender Forum, coordinated by the Heinrich Böll Foundation, held a series of discussions on the experiences of women in the last general elections, also focusing on how far women have come in engaging in politics. Significant questions were raised as to why should women be involved in electoral politics, what are their challenges and what lessons can be carried forward to improve the quality of women engagement in politics?

Though answers to some of these questions seem obvious, what came out of the discussions was most illuminating. It was evidenced that politics is about power which women have not been associated with and the patriarchal society has not yet accepted women leadership. For women to emerge and be accepted as equal partners in political representation and other decisions making positions, there is need for them to rise above social stereotypes and demonstrate to the world their potential and capabilities. In addition, there is also the need to institute supporting mechanisms in order to create a level -playing field for both men and women. An even more critical issue raised is the role of media in shaping opinions and conveying information to the general public. Media as a critical tool in communications needs to read the signs of time and provide coverage to women in their public life more than they are doing.

This publication contains a series of presentations and discussions, which will illuminate and sensitize the public at large and those who are particularly working

on gender issues. The resource people in researching on pertinent issues put in a lot of quality work. Our gratitude goes to all of them. We wish to also thank Prof. Maria Nzomo for her work in editing the whole document and giving an introduction. Some beautiful works of art have been included. These are some of the pieces exhibited at the exhibition dedicated to the contribution of Kenyan Women to the recent peaceful political transition. We wish to thank and encourage the Hawa artists for their contribution of these artwork. Last but not least, this would never have been a success without the participation of all the participants who have continued to make our monthly gender fora a very worthwhile engagement through their rich and diversified contributions. We thus thank all those who participated in whichever way and urge more to be involved in this discourse.

Lastly the challenge is to all of us. The value of knowledge is when it is shared and applied. Let us all translate these lessons into practise and see Kenya transforming into an even more mature democracy.

*Aseghedech Ghirmazion
Heinrich Böll Foundation*

Grant

Introduction

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Nowhere in the world has universal suffrage provided women with political power on an equal footing with men. In formal terms women have had the same rights as men for many decades, but this has not led to radical changes in predominant ideologies and social structures which are necessary in order to give substance and cogency to the right of women to participate. Globally, with a few exceptions, the public political domain for many centuries has been, and continues to be defined and controlled by elite men. This divergence between political ideals and realities is a problem with ethical as well as power implications. The alienation of women from formal politics and women's marginality within the political systems, have remained fundamental weaknesses of democratic forms of governance and one of the persisting gender problems of our times.

Concerned with the marginality of women in established political structures, numerous scholars have tried to account for this phenomenon. (*Haavio-Mannila et. al. Eds. 1985; Parpart & Staudt (eds) 1990; Bystydzienski (ed), 1992; Nelson & Chowdhury (eds.) 1994; Nzomo 1992, 1994 & 2002; & McGlen & O'Connor, 1995*). Some of these scholars have pointed to the forces of patriarchy, capitalism, and industrialization that have kept many women out of the high levels of public sphere, effectively confining their work to the family and to the lowest paid, low-prestige occupations. Other scholars have faulted Marxist analysis for assuming that women would achieve political equality with men when the means of production were owned collectively. They note that even in countries where attempts were made to socialize the means of production, oppressive traditions and policies aimed at keeping women primarily responsible for the family, mitigated against gender equality in political and other spheres. Others also point to colonialism as an important factor contributing to sources of female exclusion from politics in formerly colonized countries. Most scholars however concur that, though there is no country where women have political status, access to resources, or influence equal to men's, the extent of women's political subordination to men varies, depending on the nature of the prevailing cultures, economic arrangements, and regimes.

In most societies, there is a complex matrix of power centers located at different levels of social hierarchies, politics, economics, culture, religion, law and gender relations. But amidst these complexities, men in any social category are more able to be active in politics than women of their group. The secondary status of women in each realm is reinforced by the total pattern of male privileges, often legitimized by existing legal and policy frameworks. The resulting gender inequalities on the one hand, negate the principles of basic rights, freedoms and justice, but on the other hand, generate opportunities for resistance, innovation, and transformation.

During the 2nd half of the 20th century, gender issues have gradually arrived on the public political agenda, thus making women's politics visible. Despite this progress, the allocation of political resources and critical decision-making power, still indicate unacceptable gender power imbalances.

One of the notable barriers to women's participation especially in Africa, has been the male character of the structures of political recruitment, especially political parties, local councils, and to some extent labor unions. In this connection, political alliances, lines of conflict and structures of political recruitment are so firmly male establishments that many prospective female politicians have found them difficult to penetrate.

Women's increased participation in formal politics and public decision-making in particular and progress towards gender equity and equality in general, depends then, not only on the more equitable sharing of reproductive, domestic, productive roles, but also on the democratic transformation of the norms and rules of institutions of political recruitment, including political parties and their affiliated organisations, as well on the strength of civil society.

Underlying gender disparities in most African countries, has been complex and deep-rooted patriarchal socio-cultural, economic and political structures and ideologies, legitimized by undemocratic systems of governance. Under such conditions, women were excluded from participation in key governance capacities and endured deprivation of basic human rights and access to and

ownership of strategic resources. With the democratic transitions and legal reforms that began in most African countries in the 1990s and continue in this first quarter of the 21st century, the status of women is improving significantly, hand in hand with the pace of legal/policy reforms and the rise in civic and gender awareness. Kenya is a good example of these gradual political changes, amidst numerous challenges that must be addressed if steady progress is to be sustained.

This book concerns itself with gender aspects of political representation and electoral participation in Kenya. It analyses and seeks to explain the key factors that continue to limit the involvement of women in formal politics, their minimal presence in parliaments and legislative bodies, and their marginal presence in the top echelons of political parties, cabinets, and bureaucracies of Kenya's governing institutions.

Written shortly after the 2002 Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government elections, the contributions contained in this book are not only a response to and a reflection on these elections, but are also informed by the pre and post 2002 political scenarios and prospects.

The 2002 general elections marked an important political watershed from the 40 years of post colonial Kenyatta and Moi's regimes under the Kenya African Union (KANU) as the ruling political party, to Kibaki's regime under the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) as the ruling coalition of over 14 political parties, that removed KANU from power. In Political terms, the year 2002 and to some extent 2003, can be regarded as a historic and an important political moment of systems change in Kenya, when the distribution and forms of power were in a state of flux, and when no single political party individually yielded the virtual monopoly of power to determine the ultimate outcome of the 2002 general elections and the post election's power sharing arrangements.

This is part of the argument advanced by Nzomo in the chapter :-*"Taking Stock-Women's Performance in Kenya's Parliamentary Politics in the 2002 General Elections"*

Her thesis is that in this more fluid and often less efficient political period, women of Kenya could have exerted more influence on political parties and alliances from within, as well as from without than they did. The disorderliness that made political life in this period tenuous, had opened up opportunities for women, if they were politically organised and willing to act, strategically as a gender interest group, rather than fall victim to divisive politics of ethnic, class, religious and other social identities.

Reviewing women's performance in Kenya's parliamentary politics in the 2002 general elections, she argues that, despite the notable gains women have made in the struggle for political empowerment since Kenya's return to political pluralism in December 1991, women clearly squandered a strategic political moment in the 2002 political transition. They failed to fully exploit a historic and fluid political moment, where women as a major voting bloc could have negotiated for a better outcome both, in the party nomination and electoral process, as well as in the post-election parliamentary and other public decision making appointments. Consequently, women did not register a significant presence by becoming major political players, with adequate capacity to negotiate effectively at the pre and post election-negotiating table. It is at this table where key political positions being shared among the principal players with their allies and strategic policy decisions regarding Kenyan's future charted out. This chapter attributes the slow pace of progress in the political arena both to the legal/policy and institutional retrogressive socio-cultural barriers, but also to low levels of women's political socialization, undemocratic culture, and a divisive crisis of social identity among women.

Thus, despite the fact that the gender sector and the women's movement in particular has been an active and sometimes effective lobby group in engendering democratic change in Kenya since the beginning of the political transition in 1992, trends indicate that the female gender still has a long road to travel before attaining equity and equality with men, especially in the area of electoral politics. Nzomo however concludes that all is not lost. Women can now build on the limited gains made and the lessons learnt. In particular, there is need for greater engagement in political parties, persistence in building individual political profiles

and skills, constituency mobilization as well as building alliances with the women's movement and other strategically placed groups.

Oyugi's chapter: "*Redefining women's political participation through party politics: The context of Kenya's Political Transition*" also makes a case for women's greater involvement and participation in political parties as the most effective way of gaining entry into electoral political decision making structures. He argues that once women begin to enter the lower party ranks, they could directly increase pressure for representation at the highest level. In other words, women's participation inside the party as party activists at the local level, as organizers of intra-party women's groups, and as internal office holders should buy women power in the party. This power should increase women's opportunities and resources to lobby for further support of women candidates. Women's party activity also creates a new pool of politically experienced women. Local government elections can provide useful training grounds for political participation at the national level and increase the number of women representatives within parties. The chapter notes that one of the significant lessons the current political transition from KANU to NARC, has been that women do not benefit automatically every time the democratic system is reordered by successful transitions. It takes awareness, questioning and organizing by women inside and outside the mainstream to turn transitions into something good for women.

This is not to deny the continuing achievements on many political and policy fronts that at many levels that women have gained, but to underscore the obstacles that have to be overcome, including the nature of the Kenyan women's movement, the economic and political contexts and the way these have interacted.

Miruka's chapter on "*Financing for Politics: which way for women?*" argues that finance is not the key determinant of women's political success and hence should not be given undue attention. The chapter concludes that the constitutional provisions in Kenya's 2003 draft constitution have good intentions but do not constitute salvation to women's political ambitions. However, the chapter acknowledges that finances have a central role to play in politics, although the

best-financed candidate does not necessarily win the elections. Thus, while finances are important, determinants that could improve women's electoral performance are:

- Track record and affinity with the electorate that is ensured through grassroots networks and consistency at politics.
- Credibility as a serious candidate demonstrated by well timed declaration of candidature, choice of party, seriousness of campaigns and evidence of preparedness.
- Ability to mire in party politics without apology; claiming space in party activities and echelons of power and not expecting an easy ride just because of your gender.
- Packaging messages and ideas on addressing gender imbalances without projecting the image of being a representative of women only.

Wanyande's Chapter on "*Affirmative Action for Kenyan Women: An Analysis of the Relevant Provision of the Draft Constitution*" focuses on Affirmative Action (AA) as one of the strategies Kenyan women are employing in seeking gender equity with men in politics and public decision making. Examining AA as provided for in the Draft Bill of the Kenya proposed new constitution, which is expected to be finalized before mid 2004, the chapter attempts to analyse and assess the significance of AA, and identify its potential impact on effective representation of women in major decision making institutions, notably political parties, Parliament and Local Councils.

The chapter gives a cost- benefit analysis of the proposals on AA. The main argument of the chapter is that while the proposed AA principle is a major victory for Kenyan women that mark a positive step towards gender parity in Kenyan politics, it will not lead to gender parity in the medium and long term and may take a long time to achieve. The chapter further argues that Kenyan women have to find a way of influencing the nominating authorities such as leaders of political parties and the president, in the case of cabinet appointments. Furthermore, among the criteria for selecting individual beneficiaries of AA should include a woman's capacity not just to understand women specific issues

but also to articulate and champion their views and concerns effectively on non-gender specific issues.

Makoha's Chapter on "Media Portrayal of Women Politicians – An enabling or inhibiting Factor" advances the argument that the media has continued to be gender insensitive in its coverage and portrayal of gender issues in the Kenyan media. The chapter argues that the media has in particular given inadequate and/or inappropriate media coverage to women politicians while privileging male politicians. *Makoha* thus argues that the media needs to begin to recognize and give visibility to women politicians, their voices and, their contributions in decision-making, and their capacities as representatives of communities. Thus the current media portrayal of women only as beneficiaries of affirmative action, and as people who are disinterested in politics and hangers – on, must be debunked to promote women's political empowerment.

Kamau in her chapter: "Do women bring a different perspective into political leadership" argues that the presence of women in political positions in Kenya is one of the most effective and immediate ways of ensuring their participation in the decision making process not only for the good of women, but also for children and the nation in general. She asserts that women bring into politics a leadership style and perspective that is both complimentary to that of men but also serves as a positive demonstration effect to younger women and men who look up to women political leaders as role models. *J End*

The major theme that runs through most of the chapters contained in this volume is that, there is an urgent need for political capacity building of prospective women politicians, as a key to their political empowerment. This is despite the fact all contributors are alive to the fact that, having a total of 18 women in the 2003 parliament, is a major step forward compared with the 1963 parliament where there was not a single woman M.P. But considering that there is a total of 221 MPs in the current parliament out of which 18 are women, the latter begin to look like a drop in the ocean and a far cry from the minimum one-third (about 70 women MPs) required for women to make a significant difference in influencing policy decisions in any institution. Furthermore,

considering that it has taken forty(40) years after Kenya gained its political independence to have 18 women MPs, is in it self an indication that major ideological and structural constraints persist. To close the wide political gender gap requires reinforcement and persistence in the struggle for gender rights and more innovative and strategically inspired approaches, informed by past failures and successes.

Maria Nzomo

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