WOMEN AND THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS IN AFRICA

Report of UNESCO Regional Meeting of Experts
Windhoek, Namibia
18 to 22 October 1994
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AND THE DEMOCRATIZATION
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FINAL REPORT OF REGIONAL MEETING OF EXPERTS
ORGANIZED BY UNESCO IN
COOPERATION WITH THE NAMIBIAN
NATIONAL PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR THE
FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN
18 TO 22 OCTOBER 1994

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Regional Meeting of Experts on Women and the Democratization Process in Africa was organised by UNESCO in cooperation with the Namibia National Preparatory Committee for the Fourth World Conference on Women as part of UNESCO activities in the social sciences and their applications for the advancement of women and the promotion of their participation in economic, social, political and scientific life. This meeting likewise comprises part of regional activities undertaken by the Namibia National Preparatory Committee for the Fourth World Conference on Women. The meeting took place in the Kalahari Sands Hotel in Windhoek, Namibia from 18 to 22 October 1994.

Twenty-one academics, policy makers and representatives of non-governmental organizations from the African continent participated in the conference, from the following countries: Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, the Congo, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Senegal, Swaziland, Tchad, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Members of the Namibia National Preparatory Committee for the Fourth World Conference on Women participated in the conference together with 17 representatives of institutions and organisations in Namibia. A representative from the Women and Youth Affairs Division, Commonwealth Secretariat, as well as from UNIFEM likewise participated in the conference. UNESCO was represented by the Regional Adviser for Social and Human Sciences in African the Sub-Regional Adviser for Social and Human Sciences in Southern Africa, and the Regional Officer for Information in Africa. A list of participants and; representatives is attached as Part X of this report.
The meeting discussed the following topics:

1. **Opportunities opened up for women’s increased participation in political life and decision-making roles within their countries in the post-independence period and constraints faced during the last two decades**

2. **What roles are women playing in the current wave of democratisation in Africa: for example their roles in social movements, NGO’s, political parties, as part of the new generation of leaders in local and national governments?**

3. **Challenges for including more women in policy-making forums and for placing gender issues onto mainstream policy agendas as part of a strategy for humanizing society and consolidating democracy**

4. **Widening the definitions and practices of political life and democracy to take into account the need for a more equitable sharing of responsibilities and power between women and men**

5. **Social, cultural and economic factors limiting women’s participation as informed and active citizens in nation-building**

6. **Proposals on strategies and measures to promote more balanced gender relations and increase women’s involvement in political life and the democratisation process at grass roots, national, regional and international levels.**

   The conference set up three working groups to examine more in depth the above issues, and to make proposals on strategies and measures to promote more balanced gender relations in the democratization process and political life.

   The conference began on Tuesday, 22 October morning with speeches by Ms. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Namibia; Timothy Ngakoutou, Regional Adviser for Social and Human Sciences in Africa, UNESCO Dakar Office. The conference was then formally opened with an address by Dr. Mose Tjitendero, Speaker of the National Assembly Republic of Namibia.

   In her presentation, the Deputy Foreign Minister Nandi Ndaitwsh, expressed her satisfaction to continue work with UNESCO.
for promoting women's participation in economic, social and political life which had been initiated already during the national liberation struggle. Although constituting a numerical majority within their countries, women in Africa have not been equal beneficiaries in the independence and democratization process. Many constraints are still faced, among which negative attitudes persisting in society about women's capabilities, which should be demythisized by looking at the real facts.

Despite women's increased participation in political life, they still tend to be stuck at the lower levels. When they reach higher positions, such as posts of ministers and permanent secretaries, they are more often than not assigned to specific areas such as education, hearth and social welfare. Education in all fields (including politics, international relations, economics, science and technology) as well as an enabling legal and social environment constitute tools that will help women enter political life.

Women's issues are part and parcel of the national agenda, and should be examined seriously by women and men alike. Democratization must also necessarily include women and the population at grass roots level and in rural areas. In addition to identifying problems and seeking solutions, it is necessary to muster the political will and commitment of governments and the international community at the highest levels.

Timothy Ngakoutou, UNESCO Regional Adviser for Social and Human Sciences in Africa, welcomed all participants and the host country Namibia on behalf of the Director General of UNESCO. He noted that all over the world democracy has gained a new legitimacy. In this process of democratization, participation and citizenship are crucial. With civic rights, come likewise the responsibility to educate and inform oneself, and to become an active, informed and alert citizen. Democracy is not just an electoral act; it likewise means active participation in associations within the civil society. For many, and in particular women, participation in institutions at local level seems more real and makes more sense. African women in fact have a crucial role to play within this context. However it is furthermore important to create the conditions and encourage people to extend their participation to the national and international levels.
Obstacles posed to women's participation as full citizens within their societies in Africa include the high level of illiteracy, especially among women; as well as the persistence of age-old images and stereotypes which influence the attitudes and behaviours of women and men and contribute to maintaining an unequal gender balance within societies. In fact there still is a lack of knowledge about historical, economic and social factors which contribute to the development of such stereotypes that blur our perception and understanding of the real roles of women in a society in evolution.

In conclusion, Timothy Ngakoutou noted that a redefinition of relations between men and women would have an impact on all social activities. One of UNESCO's roles is to help bring into existence a new image of women, together with a new image of men; and encourage a new diversity of roles and potentialities in order to establish a more just society.

Dr. Mose Tjitendero, Speaker of the National Assembly, Republic of Namibia, welcomed participants to the meeting. The topics being examined were of enormous significance for contemporary societies moving through a fast changing present and into the twenty first century. First treated as second class citizens, women are now beginning to take up positions and hold responsibilities together with men in all areas of national life.

In order to eradicate social and economic injustices and promote equality of women and other disadvantaged groups, old structures and policies need to be overhauled and backed up by steps and measures to give these goals and policies practical meaning.

For changing people's attitudes towards the development of women, more and broader education is needed, both for the discriminators as well as for those who are suffering discrimination and striving to safeguard their human dignity and obtain their basic rights.

As part of the dynamics of change sweeping across our societies and taking advantage of higher educational opportunities, some women have emerged onto the formal political scene. What
is new is that this generation of women is showing interest, as well as being recruited and appointed to some posts in non-traditional fields such as foreign affairs, economic planning, housing, military and the police.

In order to move towards a vision and reality of a more just society, it is important that more and more women take part in planning and policy-making and that a gender perspective is taken into account in policies in all fields, whether land reform, economic planning, social development, demilitarization.

The Speaker of the National Assembly expressed the hope that, as our socialization processes become adapted, joint partnerships of women and men working together for fundamental social, economic and political changes would become more frequent. In conclusion, he urged participants to draw upon their experiences in proposing a plan of action for joint activities in research, training and networking in Africa concerning issues of gender and democracy.

The conference then proceeded to select officers. The host country, Namibia, was invited to serve as Chairperson for the conference, with the following two specialists rotating in this function:

Maria Kapere, Under Secretary General, Department of Women's Affairs, Office of the President, Namibia; and Nashilongo Shivute, Director, Department of Women's Affairs, Office of the President, Namibia.

Anastasia Msosa, Judge and Chairperson of the National Elections Commission in Malawi; and Nicholas Tiangaye, President of the Human Rights League of Central Africa (Central African Republic) served as Co-Chairpersons of the conference.

Winnie Mitullah, Researcher, Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi (Kenya); and Onalenna Selolwane, Professor of Sociology, University of Botswana, worked as rapporteurs for the meeting.
II. WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENTS ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENT AND OPPORTUNITIES OPENED UP FOR THEM DURING THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD FOR INCREASED PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LIFE AND DECISION-MAKING ROLES WITHIN THEIR COUNTRIES

Two papers were presented on the first topic for discussion "Women's contribution to independence movements on the African continent and opportunities opened up for them during the post-independence period for increased participation in political life and decision-making roles within their countries" by Pierrette Koné, Professor of Psychopedagogy at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, Senegal and by Pashukeni Shoombe, Member of Parliament, National Assembly, Namibia.

Pierrette Koné presented a background document prepared for the meeting, which provided a conceptual basis to the issues being discussed. By questioning the concepts of "women" and democracy", it was hoped to arrive at a reformulation of these concepts or at least their methodological approaches so as to develop "a vision of democracy including women". She mentioned certain discourses surrounding the analysis of democracy and human rights in traditional and contemporary societies which are often used to justify the gender bias against women and their marginalization in power wielding circles. She maintained that reference to women's hidden roles, or their participation in collective mobilisation activities for economic and election purposes should not be used to hide the facts or to justify resistance to giving up all sorts of autocratic, intolerant discriminatory habits.

In referring to constraints faced by women in participating in the democratic process, Pierrette Koné referred to three concepts which occur in the discourse and characterise this situation: difference, integration and participation.

According to her, more often than not differences between men and women, which have been socially constructed, are used as a mechanism to confine women to certain areas of activity. It is considered socially permissible for women to pursue activities
representing an extension of their reproductive and maternal functions. Women's and men's social and professional spaces have been kept separate. However there is hope that social spaces will begin to be shared more and more, as women gain greater access to executive positions and gender relations slowly began to change.

She cautioned against integration of women within current institutions, such as political parties, unless women can at the same time maintain their own identities, objectives and values, and become participants in their own right. A top-down-approach to participation should likewise be avoided.

What is needed are further steps towards bringing together the spaces of women and men, and action to encourage a gender cooperation system whereby both genders can work together towards the political, social and economic development of African societies. Both women as well as men will need to be educated about the needs for a more equitable distribution of rights, duties and tasks required by life in common. They should be trained for the future to function in "a mixed culture". Women, in general the more disadvantaged, should be given particular help in this respect.

Pashukeni Shoombe, Member of Parliament, National Assembly of the Republic of Namibia, presented a paper on the Namibia experience concerning opportunities opened up for women through the national liberation struggle and by attaining independence. In colonial Namibia, women suffered discrimination on the basis of race, gender and as colonial subjects. The discrimination and injustice they and their communities faced led them to join the struggle for their country, which was carried out both from outside and within the country itself. In addition to more traditional supportive roles, some women served in political and military functions. Some were fortunate enough to benefit from training opportunities in new areas, such as engineering, telecommunications, hotel management etc.

Some doors were opened up for Namibia women's increased participation, with a progressive Constitution adopted at independence. The Constitution contains provisions for affirmative action for women and other historically disadvantaged groups. It is now important for women to gain understanding of their rights and
learn how to use them. In order to work out concrete programmes of assistance for women, a Department of Women's Affairs has been established in the Office of the President, and there is a Sub-Committee on Women and Law within the Law Reform and Development Commission.

Namibia has made a start on the way to getting women into senior positions of government and into Parliament, but is still aiming at a higher percentage of women in all policy making bodies. At local authorities level, in part helped by a quota system, women have actually succeeded in being elected to 144 out of 362 positions available.

Nevertheless, gender discrimination still persists in practice, and has its roots in the family. In conclusion, Pashukeni Shoombe emphasized that the problem of women is a national problem and should be solved by the whole community. Discriminatory laws and traditions should be abolished, women should be given authority and not only responsibilities, and should be provided more opportunities to become members of policy making bodies.

DISCUSSIONS

Referring to participation, it was mentioned that this should include participation of women at the grass roots level. With regard to Pierrette Koné's comments on whether "women" should be looked at as a common group, or within their different sociological categories, several participants were of the view that looking at women's common points of oppression and exclusion provides the basis for a united front for action. Such action can translate itself into the formation of groups in the political arena, such as the Zambia Women's Action Lobby Group and non-partisan women's political parties.

Looking back thirty years or so, to the beginning of independences of African countries, it was observed that the aspirations and initial commitments for open, accountable democratic systems for, by and with the people hod for the most part failed, and most countries had reverted back to one party or authoritarian rule. Women had worked hand in hand with men
during the nationalist struggle, and yet -after the initial euphoria and inclusion of some women in government- were then quickly pushed to the sidelines of political-life and economic policy making. A culture of democracy had not taken sound roots, since many governments were still intolerant of political opposition, and do still not on the whole encourage active political participation of the population at large. This has led to the insistent demands of social groups, who have not been able to benefit from the fruits of independence, for political change, followed by the current return to trying out liberal democracy and multipartism. However, even in democratic states, women are for the large part excluded from decision-making, at household, community and national levels.

Multipartism as such does not necessarily mean more democracy. Constraints of poverty, family tasks, agricultural activities and other economic responsibilities, level of education, and lack of time, exclude or discourage women from taking on active roles in political parties or in political life in general. Furthermore it was observed that women need to take steps to have confidence in themselves and in other women's capabilities, and to use their rights to vote them into office. The current situation is that women are supporting men's political activities; are voting them into political positions; and are supposed to be grateful for any appointments they receive here and there.

Use of the quota system was seen as a useful short-term strategy to break through some of the obstacles and help get more women into decision-making positions in local and national governments.

The road to democracy has not been easy, even when progressive constitutions have been put into place. This is the case in Mozambique, where possibilities to provide people with social and economic benefits were stopped by the civil war. The high rate of illiteracy, more acute for women, places limits on possibilities for active political participation. The few women in parliament are not in a position to represent and speak out for other women. In the current multi-party phase, despite political parties' announced intentions to take into account women, few women are actually being included on the list of candidates.
According to several participants, participation in democracy raises a problem for many women and men alike. What does participation in this elusive "public thing" (in French, "chose publique") mean exactly? For many women in particular, lacking information and education, political and public life is conducted in a language which they often do not understand, or in which they do not feel comfortable.

On the more positive side, it was observed that women have the power and should take more initiatives to change their situation. So as not to lose the momentum of having women in positions of elected and appointed office, since it was seen that there was a decrease in the number of women in parliaments in many countries after independence, young women should be socialized and encouraged to become familiar with and interested in political life and democratic institutions. It was emphasised that women's issues are national issues, and that some men policy makers are beginning to recognise this fact.
III. WHAT ROLES ARE WOMEN PLAYING IN THE CURRENT WAVE OF DEMOCRATISATION IN AFRICA

Two presentations were given on the topic "What roles are women playing in the current wave of democratisation in Africa: for example their roles in social movements, NGO's, political parties, as part of the new generation of leaders in local and national governments?" by Gladys Mutukwa, Advocate and member of the National Women's Lobby Group in Zambia and by Bience Gawanas, Advocate and Chairperson of the NGO Namibia National Preparatory Committee for the Fourth World Conference on Women.

In her presentation, Gladys Mutukwa observed that, replacing a single party system by a multiparty system, or pursuing a multiparty system together with liberal economic policies, is not an automatic guarantee for democracy. During the current wave of democratisation, the ground rules still remain the same. Thus women are being left by the wayside of the democratization process, since inequality within the family remains, and structures and institutions in which we operate, notably in the political arena, are still intact. Political parties have not yet espoused practices of gender equality. Furthermore their women's branches are most often used as a place to confine women's issues, and not let them become part of the mainstream proposals and programmes of these parties.

To tackle these exclusionary mechanisms and to be present where the political action and decisions take place, a group of non-governmental organisations created the National Women's Lobby Group in 1990. Gladys Mutukwa also spoke in favour of quotas for certain key positions at grass roots up to national levels, so that women will have visible role models, and be able to break open some of the closed doors of political life.

In her presentation, Bience Gawanas stated her conviction that it was imperative to take necessary action to make the personal political. For instance the case of domestic violence must be brought into the political arena, as a violation of basic human rights. Women must be part of the law making and decision-making process. When in positions of responsibility, they tend to be treated like a "glorified man". It is useful to test the practice of democracy at the level of the household.
Putting equality into practice, thus for instance ensuring that certain social and economic benefits are given without discrimination to both women and men, costs the State money. She urged that women become vocal in order to change discriminatory legislation and administrative practices that might still remain in their countries. They should not just be listened to during elections for voting purposes.

In devising programmes and strategies, it is important to prioritize the various issues, taking into account the needs of different women (for instance urban and rural), and paying particular attention to the most disadvantaged groups of women (the most marginalized, the disabled and handicapped, etc).

DISCUSSIONS

One obstacle to the process of democratisation is that political parties by and large remain undemocratic in their behaviour and practices. Rather than debating ideas and making proposals for nation building, they become involved in nepotism, personalization of power, and ethnic clientalism. Examples from several countries show that, just to have many political parties, does not necessarily make a difference. Nor do political parties generally include any proposals concerning women's advancement and participation in their policy platform, despite the existence of women's branches.

It was regretted that the many women's associations and non-governmental organisations now existing in most countries still have little influence on political life, nor are they being invited to the national conferences being organized in some of the African countries.

One participant observed that, during a short period of three decades, it is unrealistic to expect that age-old mentalities and traditions regarding women would change just like that. The struggle to gain recognition and especially power sharing would be almost as difficult as a class struggle. One should not buy the argument that democracy comes first, and thereafter women's participation and gender issues. In this case, women can remain marginalized and ignored for a long time.
Various participants considered that women can no longer remain outside the political system, since such a strategy has not been successful. They must organize together and put their issues onto mainstream policy agendas. Their presence in the political arena will furthermore provide them with a possibility to work to change political structures and practices from within. Recognizing the limitations of the multi-party system, every effort should be made to change this system to better suit needs for social justice and women's participation.

G. Mutukwa
IV. CHALLENGES FOR INCLUDING MORE WOMEN IN POLICY-MAKING FORUMS AND FOR PLACING GENDER ISSUES ONTO MAINSTREAM POLICY AGENDAS AS PART OF A STRATEGY FOR HUMANIZING SOCIETY AND CONSOLIDATING DEMOCRACY

Three presentations were delivered on the topic "Challenges for including more women in policy-making forums and for placing gender issues onto mainstream policy agendas as part of a strategy for humanizing society and consolidating democracy" by Rudo Gaidzanwa, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Zimbabwe; by Dominique Aguessy, sociologist and writer from Benin; and by Moriba Touré, Deputy Executive Secretary of CODESRIA.

In her presentation, Rudo Gaidzanwa recalled that during the nationalist period, women, the poor and the dispossessed, were mobilised in order to win the elections. They were not needed thereafter, and thus tended to be ignored by policy makers. This reflects the fact that existing politics are organised along class, gender, age, and ethnic lines. The structures for representation, notably political parties, most NGO's and pressure groups are likewise structured along these lines. These structures in turn have an effect on the representation processes and their products. This illustrates how so-called democracies today can exclude women, poor people, minorities.

In some cases gender issues are mainstreamed in policies and programmes, but on an exploitative basis, not beneficial to the majority of women nor favouring the aim of consolidating democracy. It is necessary to ask the question: inclusion into what and on what terms?

Many women in political parties have succeeded in getting there since they have adapted their behaviour to conform with the political and social outlook of these parties, and men have let them in.

Our democracies should recognize that there are various organisations in civil society that should be allowed to act as channels for political participation, such as women's organizations.
and other NGO's. This type of participation should not remain the exclusive monopoly of political parties, nor should political life be seen as confined solely to a national legislative body.

Another strategy is to elect gender-sensitive women, who also can elaborate and propose attractive gender-based agendas that offer options for the poor and other disadvantaged groups. However it cannot be assumed that all women being elected will automatically represent gender-based interests.

Dominique Aguessy, in her presentation, urged that democracy be taught within families, within schools and at all levels of society. Women learn the art of negotiation within their families, and should be encouraged to further develop these skills as part of their training for political participation. It was regretted that those women who managed to obtain qualifications and high levels of training, often get stuck and stopped by what has been referred to as the "glass ceiling". That is to say, at a certain level, they are prevented from any further promotion prospects.

Moriba Touré, in his presentation, emphasized the importance of the economic aspect of democracy. All groups and individuals should have access to the means of production, in particular women.

In order to sensitize researchers and policy makers to gender issues, and to encourage research on gender-related issues, CODESRIA has now started an annual gender studies programme, which takes place from July to October in Dakar, Senegal.

DISCUSSIONS

The point was made that merely increasing the number of women in policy making positions is not enough. The quality of the representation must be looked at, in particular whether the women are prepared to advance issues of gender equality and women's interests. On the other hand, one participant mentioned that she did not know why women elected to policy-making positions were being so strictly questioned on their representativity and quality of inputs, whereas the question of qualifications should be applied equally rigorously to men.
It was noted that, unfortunately cultural and sociological obstacles, account for the double standard applied to women. They are supposed to be much better than men to qualify for and obtain a position. At the same time women often under-value their own merits, qualities and qualifications.

The view was expressed by a number of participants that increasing the level of women's participation and providing channels for allowing women to express their views would have a favourable impact on policy making in key fields. For instance, if women are able to make their voices heard and contribute to economic planning and food security, agricultural production will certainly be enhanced, since they are in charge of all phases of the food production process.
V. WIDENING THE DEFINITIONS AND PRACTICES OF POLITICAL LIFE AND DEMOCRACY TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE NEED FOR A MORE EQUITABLE SHARING OF RESPONSIBILITIES AND POWER BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN

Two presentations were given on the topic "Widening the definitions and practices of political life and democracy to take into account the need for a more equitable sharing of responsibilities and power between women and men" by Anastasia Msosa, Judge and Chairperson of the National Electoral Commission of Malawi, and by Onalenna Selolwane, Professor, Centre for Continuing Education, University of Botswana.

In her presentation, Anastasia Msosa referred to the definition of the concept and practice of democracy. Democracy is a system of government by the whole people of the country, especially through representatives whom they elect. Democracy means treatment of all citizens as equals. It is a fluid process, changing and never finished; and thus must be constantly struggled for.

Yet democracy remains unfinished, in particular as far as women and their participation in political life are concerned. Although a majority in most African countries, in politics women constitute a visible minority. The case of Malawi was no exception. Women played an important and significant role during the transitional period from a one-party to a multi-party state, and participated actively in various capacities during the registration of voters, the election campaign and on polling day. However their role has not substantially changed since the former government, since their primary role was to support men leaders and candidates of the four political parties. Some women however were elected to leading positions: for example 10 women members of Parliament out of a total of 177 members, one woman minister, and two women deputy ministers. No women yet hold positions in the diplomatic service.

Various women's organisations have emerged with the opening up of Malawi political life, and they are urging the government to make top positions available to women with the
required qualifications. The National Commission on Women and Development, established in 1984, is in the process of re-organizing and restructuring itself so as not to be associated with the former ruling party and to elaborate a programme for working with the various women's organizations.

The new Constitution of Malawi, which came into force on 17 March 1994, contains provisions for promoting women's equality with men. The National Commission on Women has produced a book on women and law, explaining women's rights under law, and what areas require revision and reform. Law and education are vital tools for women to work for their upliftment in a country where the majority of the population lives in rural areas, where poverty is still rife, and where 50 per cent of the population is illiterate, of which 64 per cent are women.

In her presentation Onalenna Selolwane highlighted the problematic nature of democracy. The ideal and practices of democracy have evolved over time from their origins which have been traced in ancient Greece. However democracy is not an idea and practice that only came from Europe; societies over time have functioned according to some democratic practices. The period of independences on the African continent should actually be looked at as a period of democratization, since there were widened possibilities for the population to participate in selection of their leaders and in decision-making processes. However the process went off track, with most countries turning to one party systems or military rule, often leaning on ethnic constituencies to legitimize their power. The period was likewise accompanied by a sharp deterioration of the economy and social conditions in many countries. The current so called wave of democratization has been brought about by popular pressure from those population groups excluded from the fruits of economic development and national independence. The changes in governance occurring are characterized by a move toward multipartism and electoral activities. However one can question whether all this is a real democratization process.

In fact the ideal of democracy and democratization almost always has remained incomplete. Ideally it should entail the participation of as many people and groups as possible in decision
making and sharing resources. Yet the ideal has actually rarely been put into practice, and there are always some exclusionary elements. Democracy in ancient times had been defined so as to exclude women, slaves and foreigners; early liberal democracy was open for those who met qualifications of property ownership. Present day democracies in Africa continue to exclude certain groups, among which women and those with little education, no longer formally, but based on informal mechanisms. Thus for example you are required to be conversant in a specific language and belong to a political party in order to have effective access to political life.

A more realistic way to look at democracy is as a process, whereby different groups are struggling to be included in power sharing. Women are a case in point. They most often lack autonomy and "full personhood" in the family, the workplace, extended up into the political arena.

It is a mistake to confine democracy simply to the political arena as a means of selecting leaders and multiparty politics. Democracy and democratic practices should be an integral part of social life.

DISCUSSIONS

Participants shared experiences from their countries, indicating that the location of the idea of democracy is not important, but the issue should be whether it is workable within the movement for empowering women. Women's participation in the process of democracy and political life was definitely considered problematic, since they are faced with the burden of a socialization process which discourages them from taking up a public role and the exclusionary nature of political life and practices themselves. Their limited self esteem and faith in themselves often leads women to consider men candidates more qualified and to vote for them, rather than uniting as a front to make their own demands. Women might also be hesitant to run for office, especially at national level, since this would mean the displacement from their place of residence and families.

One participant remarked that, improving the lives of the population and of women, who live mostly in the rural areas, is a
prerequisite before any real political participation can take place. Africa should find appropriate forms of participation which include women. She noted that women are too involved with many other assignments, and their participation is not possible within the existing political structures.

One participant observed that women should not just sit in top positions like window dressing, but must have an impact on policy making in favour of women and a more humane society. There seems to be a problem of isolation and break-down of communication between the few women in policy-making positions and the majority of women. Women in power must try to help others, and re-enforce their connections with women's organizations and women at the grass roots level. In addition they must also take on the responsibility to serve as role models for other women. They should help ensure continuity by encouraging other women, including the young, to take an interest and actively participate in political life.
VI. SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS LIMITING WOMEN’S FULL PARTICIPATION AS INFORMED AND ACTIVE CITIZENS IN NATION-BUILDING

Patricia Mc Fadden, Head of the Gender Relations Research Division, Southern African Regional Institute for Policy Studies, delivered her presentation on the topic "Social, cultural and economic factors limiting women’s participation as informed and active citizens in nation-building". She noted that the concept of democracy is androcentric and uses maleness as a basis of defining the meaning of democracy. In many cases women do not question concepts, especially those defining men as knowers. Women have been left out of the definition of democracy and citizenship.

She identified several problematic aspects of democracy, among which:

- the exclusionary character of democracy

- hegemonization of the meaning of democracy, which is posited as including everybody, irrespective of race, nationality, ethnicity, gender and social class.

Patricia Mc Fadden noted that women need to deconstruct politics and give it a new meaning. The playing field is not neutral, and women need to transform the situation in order to give new meaning to democracy, reflecting their real life situations. The fact that men own and define the public arena and the channels of entry was criticised. The idea that democracy can only be processed through political structures, with disregard to organisations within the civil society, should likewise be challenged.

It was noted that culture has been constructed in a particular way. In many cases it is a reinvented narrative and means different things to various people. Women should challenge culture. Roles for women, as defined by culture, are traps. The impression conveyed is that their roles are immutable and static. In contrast one doesn't refer to men’s role, or their role in politics, which is assumed to be a dynamic role.
DISCUSSIONS

There was a consensus that democracy has to go beyond party politics, and include all types of women's organizations and other institutions within the civil society. Often those advocating for change are outside the formal system of political parties and established women's organizations. The minority of women entering the political sphere are extremely visible, and often criticized and vilified, especially if they are single, divorced or non-conventional in any way.

Several participants urged that some women at least must be brave enough to enter into the unequal playing field of politics and political parties, in order to fight in favour of necessary changes for women and at the same time take steps to transform the rules and practices of this very playing field. At this point it would also be possible to seek to redefine the concepts related to women and democracy. The constraint was noted by one participant that most women are illiterate and not in a position to redefine the prevailing concepts seen to subjugate them.

Democratization must likewise necessarily occur at the level of personal relations within the family.

H. Kishindo, C. Marias, P. Mc Fadden, G. Mutukwa
VII. DISCUSSIONS AND PROPOSALS FROM WORKING GROUPS

A. PROPOSALS FROM TWO OF THE WORKING GROUPS CONCERNING AGENDA ITEMS 1 TO 4

1. Opportunities now exist. The focus is now on formulating strategies and taking some practical measures to help increase women's participation in political life.

2. Women in power already should reach out to the grass roots to encourage more women to become involved in political life at all levels.

3. Scarcity of resources, technology and poverty inhibit women from playing more participatory roles.

4. The quota system is a good strategy for helping to bring more women into both politics and community life. Quotas should be used as a short term strategy, and longer term strategies should be articulated.

5. Awareness creation campaigns should be launched so that women can learn about their social, economic and political rights enshrined in their countries' constitutions and laws. Other social actors should furthermore be informed and sensitised about these issues. In this respect everyone, including traditional leaders, young people, women and men, should be sensitized about the need to change traditional laws and practices that discriminate against women, such as for example the taking away of land and property from widows.

6. Women should be trained to take up challenging and nontraditional professions, e.g. mining, chartered accountancy, executive and managerial positions, careers in science and technology, international relations, politics, foreign policy, and communication. Mechanisms should be put into place to enable competent women to be placed in policy making positions.

7. Democratic practice should include the economic arena, in that women should be provided an opportunity for equitable sharing of and access to resources. Women should be economically empowered.
B. STATEMENT AND PROPOSALS FROM THE THIRD WORKING GROUP CONCERNING "SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS LIMITING WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION AS INFORMED AND ACTIVE CITIZENS IN NATION-BUILDING"

OBSTACLES IDENTIFIED

1. The necessities and tasks of daily survival take up all women's time, require their constant attention, and limit their motivation. They are thus left with little time to engage in political activities.
   
a. These needs of daily survival are linked to all the activities that women must undertake in order to reduce poverty, in particular income generating activities and other production activities.
   
b. Other problems are raised by women's precarious health, malnutrition, ensuring the material survival of their children, lack of appropriate technologies, fatigue from long hard working days, added to the lack of any sharing of family responsibilities with their spouses.

2. Socio-cultural constraints likewise constitute hurdles to women's participation in political life.
   
a. Society has a fixed image of women, a specific vision of the socially constructed limitations to their roles. These social limits to their activities are maintained by traditional leaders, politicians, and even by other women.
   
b. Women are considered as second class citizens. In certain countries legislation does not encourage changes in this regard. In other countries, socio-cultural imperatives take the upper hand and eclipse the provisions of any legislation.
   
c. The weight of traditions also manifests itself in the form of pro-natalist mentalities, so that women go through repeated pregnancies which exhaust them, and make them more weak and vulnerable. The impact of traditions on their lives is such that sometimes they do not react to unjust legislative provisions, for instance in the area of inheritance.
3. Institutional obstacles are such that messages transmitted to women to assist them, do not reach them, or -because of their preoccupations with material survival- do not relate to the concrete realities of their lives.

a. In fact there are no structures accessible and close enough to women to be of assistance, due mainly to the centralisation of government services.

b. The mechanisms and programmes put into place by government and other institutions to assist women are too bureaucratic and thus most of the funds made available are taken away by intermediary bodies before reaching them.

PROPOSALS FOR ACTION

1. Increase and reinforce the economic power of women, so that they can diversify their means of survival

a. Provide support to women’s traditional self help activities, notably to their collective saving groups

b. Reassess the allocation of national budgets, in order to reduce military expenditures and to redeploy these funds to social sectors, related to heath, information and appropriate technologies. Hearth deserves particular attention due to the problems of AIDS which are decimating the active labour force.

c. Diversify productive income generating activities in order to help assure that women have a steady income.

d. Include the needs of women in national planning.

e. Lighten women’s work load, through appropriate technologies and by providing support services like day care centres, so that they can use this time for obtaining information and training in various areas, including on political life.
2. With regard to socio-cultural obstacles, a two-fold approach is recommended: legislative action together with training and information.

   a. In the short term, legislative changes in favour of gender equality are required. In the words of one participant: "It is not possible to wait until mentalities change; laws are needed to help force changes!"

   b. For the medium and long term, a concerted campaign of information and training is recommended, adopted to the different groups, men and women, so as to push for changes in mentalities and behaviour patterns. Groups to be reached by this campaign include traditional leaders, youth, men and women.

3. Institutional obstacles will be tackled by:

   a. Permanent consultation between the grass roots level and the top levels, development of communication networks for mutual exchange of information, identification of the most urgent needs of women, efforts to involve more women in decisionmaking processes and to make sure that their needs are reflected in national development plans.

   b. Decentralisation of public services, including decentralisation of programmes and budgets to the local levels, will bring women closer to the services and assistance they and their families require in their communities.

   c. Support parallel mechanisms to government action, such as non-governmental organisations and local women's groups, where it will be easier for women to become involved.

   d. Reassess the type of assistance given to women, so that it will be more adapted to their needs, and improve the mechanisms through which women can obtain this assistance.
VIII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE REGIONAL MEETING OF EXPERTS ON WOMEN AND THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS IN AFRICA

After a rich exchange of ideas and experiences on these issues, participants at the Regional Meeting of Experts on Women and the Democratization Process in Africa adopted a series of CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, which are set forth below.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

PREAMBLE

1. CONSIDERING the lack of special measures pertaining to women at the constitutional level,

2. CONSIDERING the limited number of women in African governments and Parliaments,

3. CONSIDERING that the amounts budgeted for the social sector are very limited,

4. CONSIDERING the failure of States to implement the international instruments pertaining to women which they ratified,

5. CONSIDERING the lack of attention given to women's concerns in development plans,

6. CONSIDERING the fact that administrative centralisation is an obstacle for the participation of women in decision-making at the local level,

7. CONSIDERING the need to bring more women into the political arena and to ensure the continuity and increase in the level of their participation,
The Regional Meeting of Experts on "Women and the Democratization Process in Africa", held in WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA from 18 to 22 October 1994 RECOMMENDS THAT:

1. National constitutions make special provisions for equality for women, which should likewise be reflected in legislation.

2. The allocation of ministerial portfolios to women should not only cover traditional areas (social affairs, education, health), but should be extended to assure the effective participation of women in leadership positions in all fields of national life.

3. Military budgets should be redistributed in such a way to increase expenditures in the social sector, and to finance programmes for women.

4. International instruments ratified by States, notably the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, must be ratified, implemented and applied at national and local levels.

5. Concerns of women and gender should be taken into account when national development plans are prepared in order to guarantee the effective participation of women and the integration of gender issues in development programmes.

6. Women should set deadlines for implementation of their programmes in collaboration with their national and international partners, evaluate progress achieved, and define new objectives.

7. Women who hold positions of influence at policy making and decision making levels should be helpful in grooming other women through various mechanisms, such as training, to ensure continuity in women's participation at such levels.

8. Efforts should be made to encourage young women to become responsible citizens and to participate in civic and political life.
9. Any savings arising from the cancellation of external debt should notably be used for measures geared towards enhancing women’s participation in socio-economic development.

10. Governments should initiate or accelerate the decentralisation process in order to make resources and know-how more accessible to people at grass roots level, and to allow women to participate in decision-making at all local government levels.

11. All possible measures should be taken to increase women’s participation in national political life, whether it be within national legislative bodies, in ministerial posts, in civil service positions.

12. Finally, UNESCO, the international community at large, governments and non-governmental organisations should provide all necessary assistance for the implementation of all the above recommendations.

IX. CLOSING SESSION

The meeting was officially closed by speeches of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, and UNESCO Sub-Regional Adviser for Social and Human Sciences in Southern Africa, Carrie Marias.

Françoise Ngendhayo, Historian and Researcher from Burundi, then delivered a vote of thanks on behalf of the participants of the meeting set forth here below.

VOTE OF THANKS

The participants in the Regional Meeting of Experts on Women and the Democratization Process in Africa (Windhoek, Namibia, 18 to 22 October 1994):

1. Convinced of the necessity of the democratic process in Africa and the usefulness of organising such a forum during this very crucial period for Africa,
2. Recognizing that, as part of the democratisation process, many things can be done in order to improve the life conditions of women, thereby facilitating their full participation in the democratic process, a process which in turn promotes development of our societies,

3. Expressing our great appreciation to the host country, the Republic of Namibia,

4. Address our sincere thanks to the Government and people of Namibia, notably those who, far away or close by, have contributed to the organisation of this meeting, especially for the warm welcome which we have received during our stay in this country,

5. Express our profound gratitude to UNESCO for the organization of this conference which has been so useful, not only for furthering the goal of promoting women's participation in the democratic process, but likewise is very beneficial to all the African families represented by the mothers that we are.

    Long live the Republic of Namibia!

    Long live UNESCO!

    Long live international cooperation!
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Long live the Republic of Namibia!
Long live UNESCO!
Long live international cooperation!