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#CODESRIA14

Creating African Futures in an Era of Global Transformations:

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Créer l'Afrique de demain dans un contexte de transformations mondialisées :

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Criar Futuros Africanos numa Era de Transformações Globais:

Desafios e Perspetivas

بعث أفريقيا الغد في سياق التحولات المعولمة :

رهانات و آفاق

**Women Citizenship and Participatory Democracy in Developmental States in
Africa: The Case of Kenya**

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CODESRIA

08 - 12 June / Juin 2015

Dakar, Senegal





Abstract

There has been advocacy of equal rights and opportunities for women, and especially in the extension of women's activities into the social, economic and political life. Indeed, there is a poor record of historical reflections on the relations between women and politics in African countries, at least in comparison with the abundant scientific production on the same in the Western world. Women's access to power and active citizenship has thus been one of the main concerns of people who have been interested in a just and democratic society based on equality and social justice. However, it later became apparent that the political vote alone did not ensure women's full access to the public sphere. This is because the majority of positions of power in education, business and politics have still been occupied by men. What this means is that women are still marginalised as far as access to democratic power is concerned. The room for expanding women's representation and for sustaining a political focus on women's issues has varied widely and is dependent on economic, historical and cultural factors as well as the effect of changing international norms. There has however been little effort to systematically link women's participation to the debates on democratization. This paper examines gender spaces within developmental democracies in Africa. What makes up an African democratic developmental state and why there is need for such a state is discussed. Within this developmental process, it is examined how far women are participants in as far as the gender spaces are concerned. This is done by looking at regional bodies and how representative they are of both women and men. Finally, the integration of women's participation into various initiatives in political, social and economic spheres is discussed.

Key Words: Gender Spaces, representation, democracies, development, power

Introduction

There has been advocacy of equal rights and opportunities for women, and especially in the extension of women's activities into the social, economic and political life. Indeed, there is a poor record of historical reflections on the relations between women and politics in African countries, at least in comparison with the abundant scientific production on the same in the Western world. Women are still generally kept in the domestic sphere and have been excluded from the political world. After decades of fighting for gender equity, women have gradually started to convince the world that they can be involved in the definition and management of power in the public arena, particularly in politics. The process of defining and implementing strategies to promote greater and fairer involvement and participation of women in the economic, social and political sphere of a country is just one way of expanding spaces for women. Women's access to power and active citizenship has thus been one of the main concerns of people who have been interested in a just and democratic society based on equality and social justice. However, it later became apparent that the political vote alone did





not ensure women's full access to the public sphere. This is because the majority of positions of power in education, business and politics have still been occupied by men. What this means is that women are still marginalised as far as access to democratic power is concerned.

There is considerable consistency among different regions and countries when we look at the role women play in the transitions to democracy. However, women's roles in the politics of developmental democracies reveal a much more complex scenario, as political parties reassert their power and women's movements are replaced by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and a variety of grassroots organizations geared to very specific issues. The room for expanding women's representation and for sustaining a political focus on women's issues has varied widely and is dependent on economic, historical and cultural factors as well as the effect of changing international norms. There has however been little effort to systematically link women's participation to the debates on democratization. More attention should be given to the usefulness of gender comparisons in comparative politics, where women's experiences in different public spaces can tell us a great deal about how different political systems are developing the institutions and the values to sustain democratization.

This chapter examines gender spaces within developmental democracies in Africa. What makes up an African democratic developmental state and why there is need for such a state is discussed. Within this developmental process, it is examined how far women are participants in as far as the gender spaces are concerned. This is done by looking at regional bodies and how representative they are of both women and men. Finally, the integration of women's participation into various initiatives in political, social and economic spheres is discussed.

The Concept Of An African Democratic Developmental State

The concept of democracy is generally conceived as voters choosing their leaders through regular elections. Huntington (1991: 7) conceives a political system as being democratic to the extent that its most powerful collective decision makers are selected through a fair, honest and periodic election, in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote.

There has been a global trend towards the replacement of citizen democracy by consumer democracy (see Edigheji 2005). Due to this, the question of democracy has largely neglected issues of economic justice such as access to food, shelter, medical care and housing. We cannot have a democracy if there is unequal opportunity for all citizens. White (1998: 28) says that democratic citizenship is undermined if there is too great a contradiction between the egalitarian norms of a democratic polity and the inequalities of individuals and groups in democracy. These are seen in two basic ways: by fuelling social discontent and political instability, and through the persistence of poverty, by excluding more or less extensive sections of the population from access to the political process and its fruits (Edigheji 2005).





Awa (1991) avers that democracy must be made to deliver some economic empowerment and a higher state of living for the people. A democracy that cannot deliver on the basic needs of the people will be short-lived. Conceived in this way therefore, democracy and development must go hand in hand; they are mutually enforcing (Edigheji 2005). Socio-economic justice is thus at the heart of democracy (Igbuzor and Edigheji 2003). Aina (2000) gives the foundations of democratic development as peace, a condition of well-being, the rule of law, and an environment of social justice and equity.

The quests and struggles of the African people for democratic governance are aimed not only at doing away with repressive and autocratic governments, but also at improving their socio-economic conditions in a way that will lead to a qualitative improvement in their material conditions. This means that citizens should be able to exercise real choice after they have overcome poverty, squalor or ignorance, as these constitute constraints on freedom and equality. This is because social, economic and political empowerment, are mutually inclusive. Embedded in such a conception is citizens' active participation as a necessary requirement in the development and governance process. This approach has important implications for a democratic developmental state.

A democratic developmental state is therefore one that not only embodies the principles of electoral democracy, but also ensures citizens' participation in the development and governance processes. Thus when questioning how the democratic development state can be placed in the African context, it is pertinent to bring citizenship back into politics. Conceiving the democratic development state in this way is not an attempt to do away with representative democracy, but rather to recast the debate by placing greater premium on how 'participatory' democracy complements representative democracy. To be effective, citizens will have to organise themselves to be able to participate in consultative arenas or networks of consultative decision-making. Because of the divergent interests in society, citizens organise themselves into various groups, which are at times complementary. But to ensure the objectives of redistribution and the reduction of inequalities, the form of civil society that is most suitable for that task are associations of politically marginalised groups (White 1991). Hence, marginalised groups have to form popular organisations that will advance their interests. This is because it has been shown that where elite groups dominate the consultative arena, they reinforce inequality.

A developmental state is a state that pursues policies that co-ordinates investment plans and has a national development vision. The implication is that the state is an entrepreneurial agent, which engages in institution building to promote growth and development and one that plays a role in domestic conflict management (Chang 1999: 192-199). Since the democratic developmental state is one that can foster economic growth and development, the state then should not only be able to transform its economic base by promoting productive, income-generating economic activities, but must also ensure that economic growth has the resultant





effect of improving the living conditions of the majority of its population. Development includes a process of economic change involving the construction of more complex and productive economies capable of generating higher material standards of living (White 1991: 20). In line with this, a democratic development state has to have clearly defined socio-economic objectives that require active state interventions.

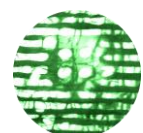
The developmental state must have a combination of steady and high rates of economic growth and structural changes in the productive system, both domestically and into relationships with the international economy (Castells 1992: 58). For the developmental state, economic development is not a goal but a means. Pronk, following Castells, defines a developmental state in terms of its objectives. He says that a developmental state is one which is able and willing to create and sustain a policy climate that promotes development by fostering productive investments, export, growth and human welfare (Pronk 1997: 5). However, what sets a democratic developmental state apart from others is not only the fact that it is able to set its developmental objectives; it should also establish institutional developmental objectives. A democratic developmental state therefore has to be defined also by its institutional attributes. Mkandawire (2001) refers to this as the state-structure nexus, which ultimately enables one state to achieve growth and development while others cannot.

Why a Democratic Development Project in Africa?

Colonial rule by its very nature did not build democracy in Africa. What it built was an empty shell of representational politics built on the foundations of an oppressing and alienating state. The colonial and post-colonial states were therefore fundamentally flawed (Aina 2000). The history of the post-independence Africa state is thus that of monumental democratic and developmental failure. Few exceptions here have been Botswana, Mauritius and to a small extent, the democratic state of South Africa (Edigheji 2005). The evidence for this state of underdevelopment can be found in any social, economic and political indicators.

At the economic level, Africa has been marked by the domain of the primary sector (agriculture, oil and minerals). This is partly as a result of the inability of African states to foster an environment for high value added economic activities. Africa is dogged by foreign aid dependence, heavy indebtedness, high unemployment and the informalisation of the economies where the majority of people live in abject poverty. There is also low domestic capital formation and declining direct foreign investment. Africa is thus unable to compete in the global economy. This has reinforced marginalisation, particularly since the 1980s.

At the social level, the majority of African countries lack basic social and physical infrastructure. Because of these, most African people have no access to basic services such as potable water, electricity, good sanitation, passable roads and healthcare. There is a high level of illiteracy, and especially so among women. The HIV/AIDS epidemic has not made the poor healthcare situation any better. At the political and governance level, the continent is





plagued by political instability, ethnic and religious conflicts and civil wars and authoritarian rules. All these factors actually reinforce underdevelopment.

It has been often asked why it is that some countries in South East Asia like South Korea and even India which were on the same level with Africa in the beginning, and yet 40 years later, have overtaken Africa ten times over, along both the democratic and developmental agenda. It thus becomes useful to find out when the rains started beating the African continent and how the situation can be changed to salvage Africans from the doldrums. More importantly for this paper, we are interested in seeing what spaces are available for women as participants in this whole process. What role can women play as active participants in this process? How can gender be best integrated into the new continental development initiatives including the regional cooperation processes?

The Role of Regional Bodies in a Democratic Developmental Agenda

At the first and second conferences of independent African States, held in Accra in April 1958 and in Addis Ababa in June 1960 respectively, economic problems to be faced by independent Africa were discussed. There was a consensus that the smallness and fragmentation of post-colonial African national markets would constitute a major obstacle to the diversification of economic activity, away from a concentration on production of a narrow range of primary exports, to the creation of modern and internationally competitive enterprises, which would satisfy domestic needs and meet export requirements. It was, therefore, agreed that African countries that had already gained political independence, should promote economic co-operation among themselves.

Two options were advocated for the implementation of the integration strategy in Africa. The first was the Pan-African, all-embracing regional approach, which envisaged the immediate creation of a regional continental economic arrangement. This brought the concept of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). The second option was the geographically narrower approach that would have its roots at the sub-regional levels and build on sub-regional co-operation arrangements to achieve geographically wider forms of co-operation arrangements. The majority of the countries favoured the narrower sub-regional approach. Based on this, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) proposed the division of the continent into four sub-regions: Eastern and Southern, Central, West and North Africa. The OAU Conference of Heads of State and Government adopted the Commission's proposals. All independent African States were enjoined to take, during the 1980s, all necessary steps to strengthen existing sub-regional economic co-operative groupings and, as necessary, establish new ones so as to cover the whole continent sub-region by sub-region and promote co-ordination and harmonization among the groupings for the gradual establishment of an African Economic Community by the end of the century.





Earlier, OAU had been established in 1963. Its intended purpose was to promote the unity and solidarity of African States and act as a collective voice for the continent. It was also dedicated to the eradication of colonialism and established a Liberation Committee to aid independence movements. Though widely derided as a bureaucratic ‘talking shop’ with little power, Kofi Annan the then UN secretary-general praised the OAU for bringing Africans together. Nevertheless, in its 39 years of existence, critics argue that the OAU did little to protect the rights and liberties of African citizens from their own political leaders, often dubbing it ‘The Dictators Club’. It also did little in terms of creating spaces for women in its developmental agenda. OAU was eventually disbanded and replaced by the African Union (AU).

The AU aimed to have a single currency and a single integrated defence force, as well as other institutions of state, including a cabinet for the AU Head of State. The purpose of the union has been to help secure Africa’s democracy, human rights and a sustainable economy, especially by bringing an end to intra-African conflict and creating an effective common market. In general, the focus of the AU objectives is different and they are more comprehensive than those of the OAU. In fact, from AU came the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD).

NEPAD, which was adopted in 2001, is an economic development programme of the AU. NEPAD’s concrete programme focuses largely on agriculture, human resources development (especially in health, education, science and technology), infrastructure, market access and intra-African trade and preservation of the environment. Its four primary objectives are to eradicate poverty, promote sustainable growth and development, integrate Africa in the world economy, and accelerate the empowerment of women. It is based on underlying principles of a commitment to good governance, democracy, human rights and conflict resolution; and the recognition that maintenance of these standards is fundamental to the creation of an environment conducive to investment and long-term economic growth. NEPAD seeks to attract increased investment, capital flows and funding, providing an African-owned framework for development as the foundation for partnership at regional and international levels.

There was a move to popularise NEPAD among women in Africa. Strategies were sought to make this a reality (Butegwa 2002). In order to make the strategies work, women were first and foremost supposed to be motivated. Secondly, an environment conducive to women’s participation was supposed to be created and sustained. Thirdly, avenues for participation by women ought to be opened up. Fourthly, methods of communicating NEPAD to women were to be put in place.

NEPAD has however met with opposition from many African NGOs, civil society in Africa and elsewhere in the world, who see it as a tool for strengthening Western domination over





Africa. The critics argue that NEPAD is structured around the belief that investment from the North is essential to the development of Africa, and resent that little popular consultation was undertaken in the formulation of NEPAD (see Chachage 2005). In 2002, members of some forty African social movements, trade unions, youth and women's organizations, NGOs, religious organizations and others endorsed the African Civil Society Declaration on NEPAD, rejecting NEPAD. African scholars and activist intellectuals in the 2002 Accra Declaration on Africa's Development Challenges endorsed similar views.

In a special meeting in Arusha, Tanzania in December 2005, NEPAD resolved to evaluate specific factors which facilitate the participation of women in transitional and new governments and the identification of measures to involve women in the political process, with particular emphasis on peace building and reconstruction phases. They sought to identify practical measures to be undertaken by governments, donors, the international community, civil society and other stakeholders to support and generate political will and firm commitment to promote the advancement of women and the goals of gender equality. They also wanted to make an assessment of women's participation in political decision-making at the local level as a springboard to greater involvement at the national level. They encouraged grassroot involvement and growth of independent women's organisations and highlighted the role of the media in fostering unity, inclusion and supporting greater participation of women in the democratic process. NEPAD had hoped that from the lessons learnt, this special meeting would develop a set of action-oriented recommendations to advance women's participation in the political process at all levels, while promoting dialogue between people in government, academicians, media and other experts to address systemic problems. If NEPAD were committed to this agenda that it set out, the spaces for gender in an African democratic developmental project would definitely be expanded. It should also be able to work with, and deliver its objectives within the framework of women organisations and NGOs already working on women issues.

The Treaty establishing the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) was signed on 5th November 1993 in Kampala, Uganda and ratified in 1994. COMESA replaced the former Preferential Trade Area (PTA) that had existed from the early days of 1981. COMESA was established as an organisation of free independent sovereign states, which had agreed to co-operate in developing their natural and human resources for the good of all their people. Its main focus is on the formation of a large economic and trading unit that is capable of overcoming some of the barriers that are faced by individual states. COMESA also recognises that peace, security and stability are basic factors in providing investment, development, trade and regional economic integration. Experience has shown that civil strife, political instabilities and cross-border disputes in the region have seriously affected the ability of African countries to develop their individual economies as well as their capacity to participate and take full advantage of the regional integration arrangement under COMESA. It has now been fully accepted that without peace, security and stability, there cannot be a





satisfactory level of investment even by local entrepreneurs. However, COMESA needs to create spaces for women if there is to be any meaningful gains for women and development in Africa.

The African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation (also referred to as the Arusha Charter) was adopted in Arusha, Tanzania, in February 1990, at the end of the International Conference on Popular Participation in the Recovery and Development Process in Africa. This conference was a rare collaborative effort between African people's organizations, African Governments, non-governmental organizations and the United Nations agencies, in the search for a collective understanding of the role of popular participation in the development and transformation of the region. The Conference was organized out of concern for the serious deterioration in the human and economic conditions in Africa in the decade of the 1980s, the recognition of the lack of progress in achieving popular participation and the lack of full appreciation of the role popular participation plays in the process of recovery and development.

At the heart of Africa's development objectives must lie the ultimate and overriding goal of human-centred development that is participatory in nature. In order to achieve this, there must be a redirection of resources to meet the critical needs of the people, in order to achieve economic and social justice and to empower the people to determine the direction and content of development. The political system must evolve to allow for democracy and full participation by all sections of our societies. In view of the critical contribution made by women to African societies and economies and the extreme subordination and discrimination suffered by women in Africa, the attainment of equal rights by women in social, economic and political spheres must become a central feature of a democratic and participatory pattern of development. In fact, the attainment of women's full participation must be given highest priority by society as a whole and African Governments in particular. The charter therefore recognises the centrality of women in the developmental agenda.

The Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community (EAC) allowed for the creation of organs and other institutions of the EAC, one of which is the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA). EALA is the independent Legislative arm of the Community. The three Heads of State for Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania formally inaugurated EALA on November 30, 2001. The Assembly has visited various parts of East Africa to publicize the community and its work and to familiarize themselves with the conditions, resources and challenges of the people of the region. In the formula adopted in the treaty, it was required that the members so elected do represent a diversity of views in their national assemblies as well as having a gender component. However, member states are already crying foul and saying that EALA is already a members' exclusive club, if we go by the 'flawed' nomination process for MPs in Kenya, which took place at the close of 2006. At this rate, we do not know





how far EAC and its EALA organ can deliver on a democratic developmental agenda in the first place, before we even bring in the gender dimension.

A look at the regional bodies discussed above reveals minimum active participation by women in their programmes. In order for the regional bodies to operate justly and fairly within a democratic developmental project, women must be fully integrated into their programmes. As of now, there is still very little representation of women in comparison to male representation. This is probably why you see more of women participation in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other women organisations, and these have played a bigger role in expanding spaces for women within the democratic developmental process.

Women's Organisations in Africa's Development

The role of African NGOs in Africa's sustainable development cannot be overemphasised. The NGOs have a role to play in both the developmental process and democracy in Africa. Faced with a helpless situation, African populations are now coming together to take their destiny into their own hands. The proliferation of organisations of peasant and village women with links to NGOs and civil society is a good indication of Africa's ability to rely upon herself; something of which African NGOs are well aware.

On development organisations, African NGOs and voluntary development organizations and their partners should be fully participatory, democratic and accountable. These organisations should develop and strengthen institutional structures at the regional, sub regional and national levels. There should be a national fora established to enable honest and open dialogue between these development organisations in order to ensure that the experience of grass-roots participatory development informs national policy-making.

African NGOs should now actively contribute to the economic recovery of the continent and to the consolidation of democracy. Therefore, they should design long-term programmes with the following global aims: to promote popular participation, assistance for popular organizations, the integration of NGOs into civil society, democratisation, the protection of human rights, and so on; to reinforce the institutional capacity of grassroots communities; and to set up a partnership with NGOs in the North, based on solidarity, mutual respect and a fair distribution of tasks. African NGOs should work towards an empowerment of civil society, giving people the capacity to make decisions and to negotiate. It is in this context that a development initiative can be regarded as a process of autonomy. This will involve giving power to people for greater commitment to participation in survival and development effort.

Women groups have come some way from the 'activist-oriented' approach of the 1980s, using their collective experience and maturity to move into policy advocacy, research and networking since 1990. In ensuring that the participation of women in the development process is advanced and strengthened, popular women's organizations should continue to





strengthen their capacity as builders of confidence among women. They should strive for the attainment of policies and programmes that reflect and recognize women's roles as producers, mothers, active community mobilizers and custodians of culture. They should also work to ensure the full understanding of men, in particular, and the society, in general, of women's role in the recovery and transformation of Africa so that men and women together might articulate and pursue appropriate courses of action.

Measures to reduce the burden carried by women should be implemented through: advocacy to the society at large, including central and local government levels, the importance of task sharing in the home and community, especially in the areas of water and wood fetching, child rearing etc.; promoting the establishment and proper functioning of community-based day care centres in all communities; and, striving to attain economic equality by advocating the rights of women to land and greater access to credit. To achieve all these, women's organizations should therefore be democratic, autonomous and accountable organizations. At the same time, if the NGOs and women's organisations are to make a visible impact on the lives of African women, then they must have representation right from the grassroot levels. The NGOs should not be only for the elitist educated women locking out the participation of grassroot citizens from the development process. This should bring on board all categories of women; the rural women, the urban women, the self-employed women and the business and professional women.

The African Women Development Communication Network (FEMNET), formed in 1988, is a consortium of five sub regional networks representing north, central, west, east, and southern Africa. FEMNET serves to strengthen the role of NGOs that are concerned with the integration of women in the development process in Africa. The network facilitates collective action and the institutionalisation of systems that monitor project and programme progress toward improving the status of women. The United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) hosts the FEMNET regional Secretariat. We will look at some NGOs and women organisations, which have actually actively involved and integrated women thus giving them space in the democratic development process in Africa.

Gender within a Democratic Developmental Agenda

Development cannot be sustainable if women do not participate fully in all aspects of this process and share in the benefits of progress. There is need to contribute towards an improvement in economic, social and political conditions in developing countries within the framework of sustainable development. To achieve this objective, one of the main areas targeted is the promotion of equal rights and opportunities for women and men in all areas of society. It is not enough for development assistance to apply to individual projects directed towards women, but equal rights and opportunities for women and men must be integrated into all aspects of development cooperation. It is also not a question of simply changing the





attitudes and behaviour of individual women and men. If the process of creating equal rights for women and men is to succeed, a radical development process at a national level is required. This in turn requires political will. It is a question of a long-term change stemming from society's need to utilize the knowledge and experience of both women and men. Gender equality is therefore a national concern and not just a matter of women's rights. We will examine the integration of women's participation into various initiatives in political, social and economic sphere.

Women's Participation in Governance and Decision Making

Genuine democracy presupposes gender equality, equality for women and men under the law and respect for human rights. An increase in women's participation is critical for ensuring democratic development and for ensuring that women can participate in laying the foundation for social development. Women's participation must be strengthened at every level, from involvement in local planning to increased participation at executive level. In order for women to be able to participate fully in social development, their combined productive and reproductive role must be taken into consideration and preparations made to accommodate it. Philips (1991) says that the arguments in favour of increasing women's participation in politics rely on three principles: democratic justice, resource utilisation and interest participation.

It is crucial that women participate in decision-making processes in the public sector so that their experience can benefit the entire community. In addition, this ensures that women's interests are included in the decision-making processes. Experience has shown, however, that female representation has to exceed a certain percentage if gender-specific viewpoints and values are to have a real effect on decision-making. Without a critical mass in key positions, women will continue to be ineffective in influencing the decision-making process and in shaping party and government agenda. In this respect, at least 30 per cent of nominations should be reserved for women on party posts, municipal council seats and state and parliamentary elections. Aggio (2001), Niang (2006) and Jaquette (2000) refer to this percentage as Quota. With more women elected, it is expected that there would be a different kind of politics; one that is consultative, consensual and compassionate. Priorities would also be better balanced in terms of governance. These are steps towards a democratic developmental agenda.

While elections do not equal democracy, they are a critical vehicle through which the people of a country express their political will and choose their leaders. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and every other major international human rights instrument recognize genuine elections as the basis for the legitimacy of government. Elections are also an essential process of democratic governance, providing an opportunity to promote and protect the exercise of other rights and freedoms. Elections must be open and democratic if





people are to have confidence in the political system. There should be improvement on electoral systems and processes. This can be done through civic and voter education programmes, which expand democratic participation, particularly for women and other under-represented segments of society. It is important to ensure that both women and men are mobilized to participate and vote in elections, and the methods that are directed towards men also reach women.

There are women organisations like The Women's Political caucus, the Women League of Voters, both in Kenya, which help educate women on how to vote and vie for elected positions. Various other women organisations have come up with a mission to try and help women be fully integrated into the democratic development process. One good example is ABANTU for Development, which was established in London in 1991 by a group of concerned African women. This was under the leadership of the late Dr Wanjiru Kihoro. ABANTU is an international non-governmental organisation with the aim of empowering African people, especially women, to participate at local, national, regional and international levels in making decisions that affect their lives and enabling action for change. It is an organisation that strives to eradicate the entrenched cultural, legal and political obstacles to women attaining economic independence and equality before the law. It aims to ensure the advancement of women's interests that will benefit men and women as equal partners. ABANTU's approach to development is based on a people-centred philosophy, one that is participatory, African and gender-centred.

The focus of ABANTU's work is on training and capacity building. It gives training to women in Africa on research, publications and communications. This is an area intended to promote gender perspective in all aspects of development through timely research, dissemination of information and the production of high quality materials. ABANTU aims at raising public awareness, networking and carrying on advocacy activities on poverty, conflict, governance and ICTs. ABANTU also does advocacy for women's rights. ABANTU has collaborated with African and International NGOs in various issues concerning gender development. It has had fruitful engagement with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the African Union (AU), and is one of the very few African NGOs that has gained the United Nations Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Commission (ECOSOC) thus allowing it to attend all UN meetings enterprise.

Women and Economic Participation

Women's economic participation in developing countries is limited by a number of factors. Firstly, economic participation has to be combined with other duties such as responsibility for childcare and the household. Women's formal economic participation is also limited because they do not have the same opportunities for education and vocational training as men.





Moreover, women have restricted access to credit and the means of production, a problem that is often exacerbated by the lack of inheritance and ownership rights.

Strengthening women's economic situation means in reality that the family and the local community is supported in a more direct manner than if similar investments had been directed towards the male sector of the population. At the same time, there is need to develop a policy for trade and industry, which ensures that women take part, and to help to direct attention towards women's work and their use of time.

Women's economic participation is often linked to the informal sector and is on a small scale. To have any real possibility of economic participation, women must be given access to loans and credit. Micro-credit is an important method of enhancing women's economic participation. Structures should be set up to ensure that women have no difficulty in obtaining bank loans and credits, and to help them to set up small companies. All democratic developmental states should make an emphasis on the importance of ensuring the financial and social independence of women, since financially independent women are more inclined to participate positively in both political and social life. Quite a few organisations and banks are now available in Africa to help women as far as credit facilities are concerned.

The Kenya Women Finance Trust (KWFT) is one such economic initiative that would assist women in getting small loans. The vision of KWFT is to maintain a sustainable and viable institution of the future, with capacity to efficiently address dynamic and diverse financial and non-financial needs of women using adaptable technology in the changing economy. The mission of KWFT is to advance and promote the direct participation of economically active women in viable businesses, to empower them and improve their economic and social status. For KWFT, the low-income women entrepreneurs and producers are the economic actors. Governments, financial institutions, NGOs and funders have important roles, but banking on low income women entrepreneurs is an effective means to alleviate poverty, encourage entrepreneurship and reach an emerging growth market. KWFT has made a change in women's lives as far as a democratic developmental agenda is concerned.

Women and Education

Education is a prerequisite for promoting sustainable development, securing a healthy environment, ensuring peace and democracy and achieving the objectives of combating poverty, slowing population growth, and creating equality between the sexes. These are the ingredients that make up a democratic developmental agenda. Giving centrality to education is therefore important. Investing in women's education is the single investment that yields the highest social return. Educated women have fewer children whose overall health is better and who are more likely to receive a good education themselves. Education gives improved income opportunities, strengthens cultural bonds and promotes women's participation in





democratic processes. Creating a school system that ensures that girls can exercise the right to an education requires a major political effort from national authorities.

Making basic education available to all should be an objective in order to enhance the opportunity for all girls to get an education. Governments, NGOs and other concerned bodies should organise awareness-building campaigns to encourage families to send their daughters to school. Schooling for girls should be subsidised and school supplies provided free of charge in order to overcome any material difficulties. In fact in Kenya, there are initiatives by different business groups and women groups to provide sanitary towels to girls in schools in order to keep them in schools even when they have their menstruations (one reason for the high dropout rate for girls in Africa).

Ensuring women's access to higher education and vocational training is also important. In many countries, it would for instance be an advantage if there were a greater proportion of female teachers. At the same time, it is through higher education that there will be professional women who should be able to fit in the competitive job market and participate fully in all sectors of the society for development.

The majority of illiterate adults are women. The ability to read and write is necessary if women are to be able to participate in democratic development and benefit to a larger extent from economic development. Women must also have access to vocational training and to the use of science and technology in order to counteract the tendency for women to be marginalized by technological advances. Efforts to combat adult illiteracy should be encouraged by introducing and implementing intensive programmes, with a view to promoting women's participation in political and social life.

How then would African governments have an agenda for education in Africa? Education should be placed high among the priorities of national budgets. Through education, there is the need to instil in society a balanced vision of the role of women and ensure that both men and women enjoy the same cultural and political education. Education should actively promote the mastery and creative use of science and new information technologies by the younger generations and the training of teachers in these areas. The development of education calls for a vast increase in international assistance to education in developing countries. Democratic values should be promoted through education. There should be cooperation among developing countries so that they benefit from knowledge of other cultures and other experiences of development.

Women and Health Initiatives

Good primary health care is essential to maintaining a satisfactory level of health in women. When building up a primary health service, it is particularly important to stress women's needs because they are so vital to the health of the whole family. When a woman's health is





good, there is a ripple effect on the entire family. Thus, the socio-economic impact of investing in women's health is considerable. At the same time, reproductive health includes the whole range of health needs related to sexuality, pregnancy and childbirth. Approximately 30 per cent of women's health problems are related to reproductive health. It is therefore important to maintain a broad perspective on women's health and the need for measures, in keeping with the action plan from the Beijing conference.

Safeguarding women's reproductive health and rights is not only important in a gender perspective. It is also the most strategic approach to stabilizing population growth. Sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS require particular attention. The incidence of AIDS is increasing among women and particularly young girls, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. All parliaments, governments, international agencies and NGOs should acknowledge the social, political and economic impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on men, women, and children. They should actively implement and also accelerate educational programmes to curb the spread of the pandemic and to encourage people to retain HIV negative status.

How then would African governments have an agenda for health in Africa? Poor women and rural women continue to rely heavily on public healthcare services. Privatisation and corporatisation of government healthcare facilities, which have been done in some instances, have led to higher costs and higher user charges. This should be stopped and allocations for the public health sector should be increased. Privatisation, coupled with the unimpeded growth of private hospitals, will affect citizen's ready access to affordable and quality universal health care. African Governments should therefore set up a kind of national health security fund to enable everyone to enjoy affordable access to both the public hospitals and the privatised and corporative health care facilities, and information of how to access these facilities should be readily available to all citizens. In fact in Kenya, there is an improvement on the National Hospital Insurance Fund (NHIF), which now takes into consideration other issues initially left out like maternal and antenatal clinics. African states should control the price of private healthcare services. They should also set up a regulatory body to include public interest participation, like consumers' and women's groups, to formulate a fee schedule and monitor quality of care and services.

In Kenya, there is a health facility, which caters free of charge, for women who have been sexually abused. Nairobi Women's hospital is a shining example in the region. At the same time, one other hospital in the region has incorporated music for therapeutic effects for its patients and has enlisted the services of one Kenyan woman musician who got specialised training on this. This is one way of just ensuring that women are active actors in the health initiatives for the developmental agenda.





Management of Natural Resources and the Environment

Women's traditional duties of food production are an integral part of the ecosystem, particularly as regards management of natural resources and the environment. They live with their families in close contact with the environment and are quick to register threats to natural resources, such as the degradation of soil, plants and water. In many agricultural societies, women carry out most of the work: cultivating the soil, tending livestock, preparing food, fetching water, collecting firewood and wild plants, dealing with waste, and managing the household. In fact, in many African countries, women are responsible for food production for as many as 75 per cent of the households.

Women are often the first victims of local environmental degradation since their workloads increase with regard to fetching water, firewood and other natural resources. Their access to land for cultivation is restricted and their health damaged by pesticides and by being malnourished and undernourished. These women possess knowledge and experience that is essential to decision-making with regard to the environment and sustainable development. This traditional expertise with regard to nature and the environment must be actively made use of. Their experience must be taken into account when deciding whether to implement changes in production. It is therefore important to listen to women as regards their experience and needs and to include them in planning processes, which involve changes to the environment. A local initiative in Kenya, the Green Belt Movement, is being used as an example to show how women are taking the environmental initiative to ensure a safe environment that would work towards a democratic developmental agenda.

The Green Belt Movement is a grassroots non-governmental organisation based in Kenya that focuses on environmental conservation, community development and capacity building. Wangari Maathai, the Nobel Peace Laureate 2004 established this organization in 1977, under the auspices of the *Maendeleo Ya Wanawake* (National Council of Women of Kenya - NCWK). The Green Belt Movement, in organising the planting of trees, performs a double duty. It both reduces the effects of deforestation and also provides a forum for women to be creative and effective leaders. The Green Belt Movement organizes poor rural women in Kenya through, grassroots' projects, to plant trees, thus combating deforestation, restoring their main source of fuel for cooking, and stopping soil erosion. Wangari Maathai has also incorporated advocacy and empowerment for women, eco-tourism, and just economic development into the Green Belt Movement. Working with Green Belt gives women the ability to change their environment and make their own decisions. The movement also involves the transfer of technology from experts to the people, turning small-scale farmers into agro-foresters. The promotion of a positive image of women is one of the most important goals of the NCWK and its Green Belt Movement. Women's image has thus been enhanced through public exposure, and public awareness of environmental issues has also been increased. The Green Belt Movement in Kenya therefore provides a means to reforest the land





as it promotes a variety of social issues. Management of natural resources and the environmental automatically lead to issues of peace and conflict resolution, which is a necessary ingredient for a democratic development process.

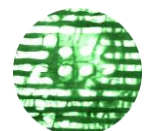
Women, Peace Initiatives and Conflict Resolution

One of the key conditions for ensuring people's participation throughout the continent is the bringing to an end all wars and armed conflicts. The millions of African refugees and displaced persons are those with least opportunity to participate in the determination of their future. Gathered at the Pan-African Women's Conference on a Culture of Peace in Zanzibar in May 1999, and on the eve of the new millennium and the International Year for the Culture of Peace, women considered the conference as an irreversible climax for African women. The participants resolved to launch a Pan African women's peace movement to stop violent conflicts and war.

The Zanzibar Declaration identified women as active participants in peace promotion. They pointed out that the current peace negotiations are male dominated, regardless of women's efforts and initiatives to resolve conflicts and promote peace on the continent including consensus-building and dialogue. Conflict resolution should be harmonised with traditional African mediation strategies. There should be co-ordination of efforts to strengthen women's capacity for peace building (Ekuam 2006). The Zanzibar declaration therefore sent out an urgent appeal to all African governments, the OAU, other regional and sub-regional bodies and organisations such as the African Women Committee for Peace and Development (AWCPD), the international community, including the UN system, to take prompt and effective action to enforce equitable representation of women in decision making processes, notably in the areas of conflict prevention, management, resolution and peace negotiation.

The Zanzibar Declaration proposed the use of appropriate communication tools and technology in order to effectively strengthen networking and solidarity among women at all levels on conflict prevention, management and resolution. In this respect, A Pan-African radio programme on gender and peace issues could be created as an effective tool for civic and peace education, communication and mobilisation which will give visibility to African women's quest for peace. It was also proposed that the curriculum should include counselling and special programmes and training modules in conflict resolution and peace negotiations at all levels of formal and non-formal education in Africa.

There have been sub-regional initiatives on demilitarisation, disarmament and arms control, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Light Weapons and its Programme of Co-ordination and Assistance for Security and Development (PCASED). This is a good step towards a developmental agenda. African governments are challenged to put in place mechanisms for the reduction and control of the arms trade. In Kenya as in other African





countries, there are individual organisations to see to it that illicit arms are surrendered to government. Since 2005, some 12,000 illegal guns were surrendered by the Karamojong of Uganda and the Turkana and Pokot in Kenya. This has been as a result of several peace athletic events organised by the Tecla Lorupe Peace Foundation. This initiative continues to date. Tecla Lorupe is a Kenyan woman who is internationally renowned in world marathon races. The governments from both sides should support any initiatives that promote peace, especially among communities living around the border, but at the same time, African governments and parliaments should reduce military expenditures and re-channel these resources to people's basic development needs.

On resource mobilisation, the AU and other sub-regional institutions, the UN and its agencies like United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), other international organisations, national governments, NGOs and the private sector, are called upon to recognise, as well as to give moral, technical and financial support to peace-making and peace-building efforts. In this respect, the AU, ECA, ADB, the African Women Committee for Peace and Development, all international, regional and sub-regional bodies such as ECOWAS, SADC and IGGAD, as well as NGOs, governments and the donor agencies are all urged to support and implement the Zanzibar Declaration. If peace can be brought to the war torn regions and the participation of women recognised in this crucial area, then this can pave way for a development agenda in Africa.

Women in Information and Communication Technologies

As one means of promoting sustainable development in Africa, decision-makers must facilitate people's access to information, so that solutions to problems can be locally resolved and Africa's human resources are optimally developed. For citizens to be able to hold governments accountable, they need valid and reliable information about all that affect them socially, economically and politically. Without this information, a citizen's right to choose his or her representative, or question a government action, is not fully exercised due to the likelihood of making a poorly informed choice. Women can use information and communication technologies (ICT) as tools for both development and democratisation. This would provide a good agenda for a democratic development project for Africa; modern ICTs can facilitate and improve access to education and participation in the democratic process. ICTs would thus give a voice to the most marginalized in society and bring women from the domestic and private arena into the public domain.

Stakeholders need to be sensitised to the gender dimension of ICT policy. Policy must take into account the needs of women, as well as men, at all levels - from urban professional people to rural populations. Gender issues relevant to ICT production, use and access should be identified. Women need to be equipped to participate in ICT policy discussions through





improved technical expertise, needs identification and understanding the regulatory framework.

One of the major problems facing African women in the socio-economic field is the limited access to relevant information on a continuing basis about health, education, food production and process. This limits their participation on an equitable socio-economic development process. There is a need to set up community information network centres for women. These centres would be an extension of already-existing community structures such as schools, health centres or religious establishments. Such centres promote networking and can help strengthen women's associations.

Through ICTs, women could also be made aware of how the legal system and parliaments function. These should also help women appreciate the relationship between the local and the national scene and between the national and the global bodies. Information as an advocacy instrument can be used to promote constructive debate and influence policy, as well as to promote, at the community and national level, a different gender relationship within the new generation. There are specific cases of how African women are currently using ICTs. For instance, Uganda's Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE) uses information gathered by women parliamentarians from the Internet to address essential issues, and as input in reviewing laws enacted by parliament. Women's Net in South Africa is also providing training and building the capacity of policy-makers and members of civil society to influence policy-making processes so as to redress gender-based inequalities in that country. Information is provided on how to draft proposals for parliamentary committees and how to bridge the gap between those who have technology and those who do not. The Information and Experience-sharing Project on Conflict Prevention and Resolution could be linked to the AU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. As far as ICT is concerned, there is still need to expand spaces for gender on a democratic developmental agenda.

Conclusion

History and experience both teach that this world never works in isolated compartments. African states ought to form active regional blocks in order to succeed in its democratic developmental agenda. If Europe has done it through regional bodies like the EU, why can't Africa do it and do so successfully? Inevitably, and irresistibly, popular participation will have a vital role to play on the continent of Africa. Development and transformation in Africa cannot proceed without the popular participation of its people. True democracy and development can exist only in a society where representatives from all spheres of life take responsibility. In this case, this representation must be full participation by both men and women, thus necessitating the need to expand gender spaces in as far as the democratic developmental process is concerned. It is therefore necessary to recognize that a new





partnership must be forged among all the actors (both male and female) in the region in the process of social, political and economic transformation and change. Without this collective commitment, and without bringing gender on board, popular participation is neither possible nor capable of producing positive results in the recovery and development process in Africa.

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