

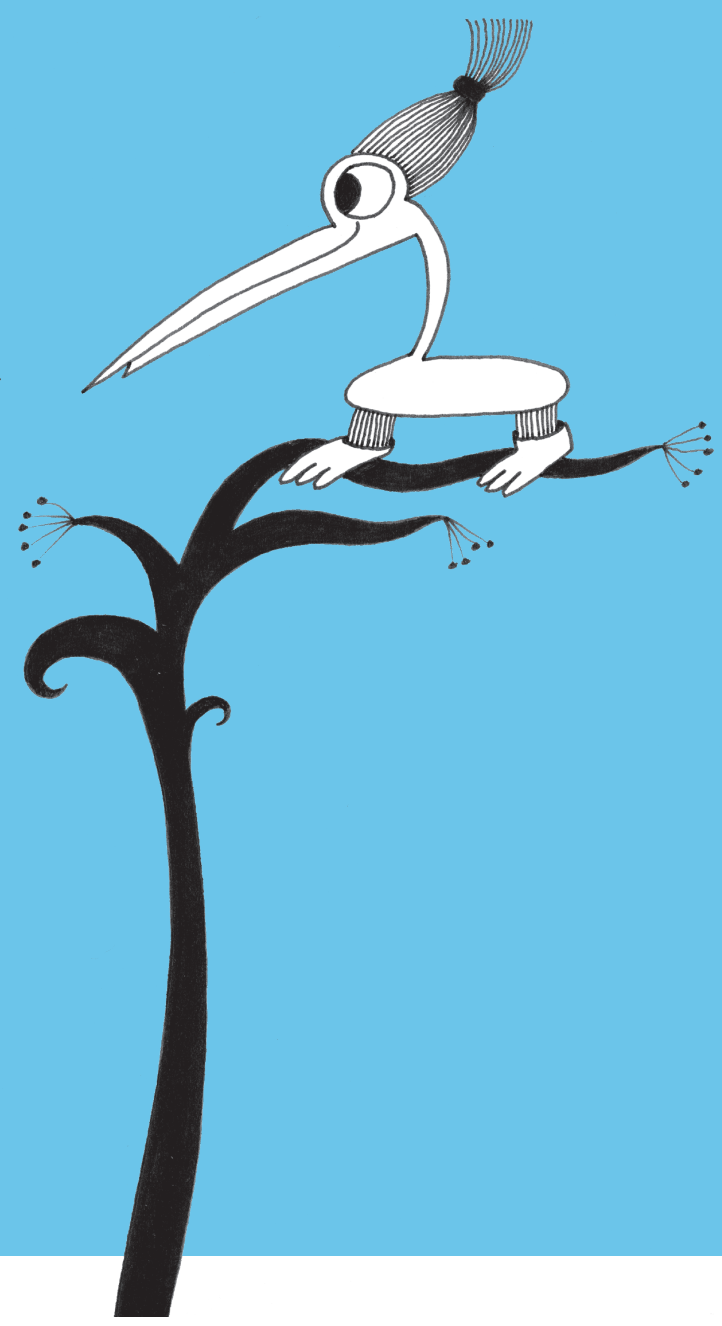
FOKUS

FORUM FOR WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT

special edition
iFokus

In power – with power?

AFRICAN
CONVERSATIONS
ON WOMEN
AND POLITICS





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African conversations on women and politics



Preface

Affirmative action is certainly a politically more sensitive, but also more critical issue than FOKUS prepared for when we started this project. The deeper into the matter we went, the more complicated, but also interesting it became. Professor Drude Dahlerup at Stockholm University kindly reminded us that “Gender quotas are, strictly speaking, only about increasing the number of women—for which ever purpose elected women want to use the seats in the Assembly, being feminists or non-feminists.”



Yes, it is definitely about numbers, and all the things hiding behind them! We have tried to pose relevant questions for us who think that any true democracy must have a fair gender balance at all levels, particularly at the highest level of parliamentary decision-making bodies. We have searched for answers to questions like; who are the women that constitute the constitutional quotas? for what purposes are they elected?, who supports them?, who counteracts them?, who do they support and seek advice from?, who are they accountable to?, and how big is their political space and leverage? Last, but not least; what is the effect of gender quotas on the legislation and implementation of progressive policies for gender equality in general, and regarding gender based violence and women’s entitlement to inheritance and property in particular?

The space for civil society organisations in East-Africa is shrinking. After talking with people from different walks of life it became clear how difficult, and sometimes dangerous, the situation can be for women’s- and human rights’ activists in East-Africa. Surveillance and political persecution mean that many are afraid to speak critically of their government as it may have serious repercussions for individuals and organisations. There are cases where even big international organisations like Oxfam have been threatened with deregistration after criticising the authorities in Uganda. (See Editor’s note on land grab). Therefore, several interviewees preferred to be anonymous, others were extremely cautious not to be perceived as critical to the government unless they had clear evidence. Another challenge was that the political context changed during the project period. There were presidential elections in Uganda in January 2016, and a referendum on constitutional amendments in Rwanda in December 2015. In Kenya there is ongoing discussion regarding the implementation or indefinite postponement of the Kenyan provision that ‘not more than two-thirds of the members of elective public bodies shall be of the same gender’.

FOKUS has called this project of studying women’s political participation “In power- with power?” The project is twofold, and has resulted in two different publications. The first with the subtitle “reaching the critical mass,” is mainly a desk study on contextual issues, structures and systems. This publication with the subtitle “African conversations on women and politics,” is based on what people told me during my visit to Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda in January 2016.

One aim has been to explore the strategies and measures suggested by African colleagues to strengthen the political influence of civil society and progressive forces within parliaments. Listening to Miria Matembe, Joseph Kibugu, Annicent, Justus and others, and the opinions of the Kampala workshop participants, you will hear some very clear recommendations and priorities. That is valuable knowledge for us as international partners.

We have gathered experiences we think may be useful for different actors working to promote women's democratic participation in Eastern Africa. Some are the same regardless of country. For example, the necessity for female quota representatives to cooperate with civil society, the women's movement and progressive male parliamentarians in order to achieve substantive results towards gender equality. The great impact of female role models like Miria Matembe and Wangari Maathai is striking. They are well known and honoured for their achievements, by men and women from different social classes, such as Henry, the taxi driver in Kampala, Joseph Kibugu, the participants at the Kampala workshop and more. During our conversations, people have shared their views on opportunities, as well as obstacles to achieving a more gender equal society. Mary says the Rwandese have to take advantage of a women-friendly government, while the peace and security expert shared his experience of how gender is treated as a joke among some high-ranking officers. The anonymous gender expert tells how the five perpetrators of gang raping a 16 year-old girl in Kenya, injuring her so badly she had to go abroad for surgery, first were ordered to slash grass in front of the police station as punishment. She also tells us about the strong position customary law still holds in Kenya and Uganda.

From all three countries we heard that women in parliament do not necessarily support what most of us regard as women's interests, such as maternity leave, decriminalisation of abortion, and economic rights in connection to marriage and divorce.

I started with a workshop in Uganda, where twenty participants developed recommendations on how to make progress in favour of gender equality. It was an excellent kick-off where I got up to speed on context, actors and other relevant issues before the face-to-face dialogues started. One of the people I talked with was my taxi-driver, who was very interested in politics. He made the hours stuck in heavy Kampala traffic into the most useful lectures. Two newspaper-sellers outside the Stanley Hotel downtown Nairobi shared their well-founded views, so did one of the receptionists in another posh hotel. I was surprised to learn that their views were far more consistent with my African civil society colleagues, than I think would be the case in Norway. Gender equality and women's rights seems more frequently on the political agenda in the East African region, than in Europe. FOKUS was in Uganda when the election campaign was at its peak and gender was a central theme in many debates. Having said that, some of the comments and "news" relating to gender that I saw in Uganda was also extremely sexist and would not have passed in Norwegian media due to exactly that.

Based on what I heard people say, it seems like the major differences in view are between the urban and rural population in these rapidly developing countries. It is a limitation that the rural grassroots perspectives only appear from secondary sources in this project.

Thanks to all the people that have assisted us in Norway and East-Africa for your friendliness, generosity and time. For different reasons I have not quoted all the people I met. Nevertheless, you are all reflected in the text by the perspectives I have chosen, the questions I have asked and the comments I have made. I am very thankful to all of you!

Many thanks to Iben Sandemose, my good friend and brilliant artist, for the lovely creatures you have made exclusively for this publication. Your illustrations force us to see how simple this really is: ENOUGH TALK- WE NEED ACTION!

Introduction

Only 22 per cent of all national parliamentarians were female as of August 2015, a 100% increase from 1995. There are 37 States in the world in which women account for less than 10 per cent of the seats in single or lower houses, including six chambers with no women at all¹. Why do so few women engage in politics at parliamentary level and what are the consequences? Do a large proportion of women in parliament necessarily result in women-friendly laws and budgets?

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the number of women in parliaments increased from 13 percent in 2000 to 20 percent in 2012. The explanation for the fast increase is usually the introduction of women's quotas. Rwanda has received much international attention and acclaim for the highest number of women parliamentarians ever, worldwide, with an impressive 63.8 per cent! Unfortunately, most other African countries rank very low on global statistics regarding women's rights, participation and gender equality.

FOKUS wanted to assess and analyze means to increase female political representation and influence in East Africa, where gender issues are high on the political agenda. Countries in the region have introduced different strategies to achieve women's political representation, as described in a preceding report ("In power – with power? –reaching the critical mass), a desk study of the use of gender quotas in Uganda and Rwanda. The report states that quotas alone is not sufficient to make fundamental structural changes towards gender equality, even if it may be an important first step to reach the critical mass of female representation. However, seats in parliaments without mandates, political networks or political experience, could make women more vulnerable to manipulation and control by political interests and less accountable to their constituencies.

FOKUS wanted to discuss these, and other findings with women and men in Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda. In January 2015 we met professionals, rights activists and ex- politicians, as well as "ordinary" people. The conversations we had in the respective countries make up most of this publication. We hope we manage to convey the engaged and passionate atmosphere in which they took place.

¹ <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>



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Henry, Lillian, John and Nelson

Henry, driver in Kampala, Uganda:

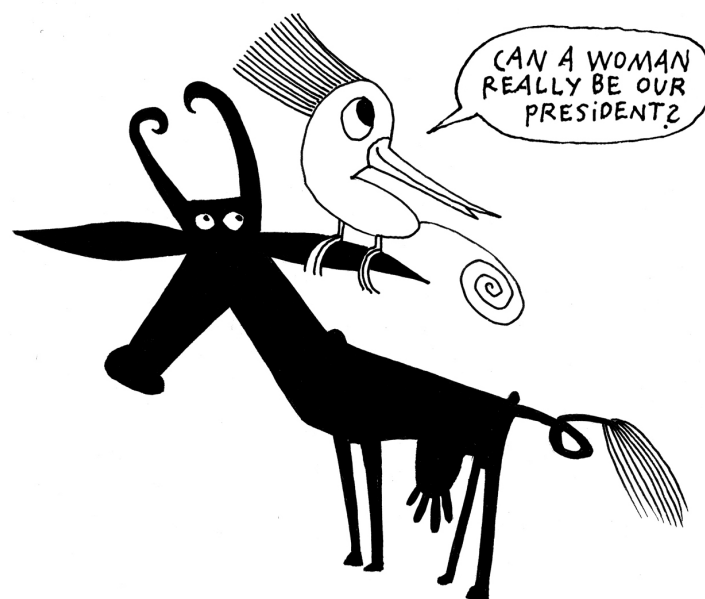
– *Uganda is not yet ready for a female president. Actually, it seems like we are not ready for any other president than Museveni. Challenging him will be too harsh for a woman. Nevertheless, we do have some well-qualified female ministers but they all play by the old man's rules. I remember well Miria Matembe. She refused to accept the way Museveni took more and more power away from the Parliament. **Things look difficult now, but may change when the old man is gone. Maybe then we are ready to consider a female president.***

Lillian, receptionist in a big hotel in Nairobi, Kenya: single- no children

– *I do not think Kenya is ready to be ruled by a woman yet. Men would not allow that. They vote for men themselves and many of them will not allow their wives to vote. One reason is that it takes a lot of time to vote if you live in rural areas. First, you need to get to the polling stations and then maybe line up for several hours. Who will look after the house and the children if women must spend a whole day to be able to vote? and if you have a paid job; - the husband will not accept the loss of income. Getting married is difficult, I prefer to stay single and keep my independence.*

For male voters in Kenya there are two issues much more important than the program of a political party, that is that the candidates are male and from their own their tribe. Women politicians are victims to all sorts of disgusting smear campaigns.

Nevertheless, women are coming up as good leaders and role models. These women inspire and encourage other women to work and pursue a career of their own. This is rapidly changing traditions here and one day we will be ready for a female president. I am sure that will be good for Kenya!



John and Nelson, newspaper-sellers at a stand downtown Nairobi:

“Women leaders are fine; the female head of Kenyatta University has done so much better than her male predecessors. After she started there is less conflict”.

So could a woman become president in Kenya? Here the two disagree; John says that president of the state is the only top job a woman cannot have.

“She will be bullied out of the position due to the strong male traditions in Kenya. We do not yet foster that kind of women here.”

Nelson on the other hand believes there could be a female president if women started to support women;

– Unfortunately women do not vote for women. If they did, women would soon be in position because there are many more women than men in our country. If they came together and organized, they would win and fundamentally change Kenya. This paper stand is our university. We have international papers and magazines so we read about other countries and see what how other countries do things. Now we are talking with you, we like to talk with many of the people that come here and we learn. Most people in Kenya lack the right kind information and education to make informed choices; the leaders do not inform them. That is why it is difficult to change and make progress.



Anonymous gender expert

– If you look at the progress in the three countries, it is quite clear that Rwanda has come the furthest due to the political will of the president and his personal belief that women are capable leaders. In addition, the post-genocide /post-conflict situation might have led to more women in leadership particularly in parliament. There was an extreme unbalance between men and women after the genocide and very few had formal qualifications. Women composed 70 per cent of the population. An additional factor for the executive's support of women could be that women seem to be more loyal to the president.

Rwandan female parliamentarians have been influential on many fronts including passing strong laws on land reform, equal ownership and inheritance of family property, family bill and gender based violence bill among others. On the other hand, women in the Rwandan parliament have on several occasions also voted against progressive bills such as abortion law, and the maternity leave law. When parliament first discussed the proposed maternity law, the female majority reduced the leave from 3 months with full pay to one and a half months.

I think religious beliefs influence the vote on the abortion law as Rwanda is a very religious society, heavily dominated by Catholics. However, my expectation was to see women in parliament going beyond religious beliefs and vote for a law that would advance women's reproductive health and rights and yet they failed to meet that expectation.

I say it is difficult to rank women's political influence in in the three countries: Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya. There has been much progress in Rwanda and the environment is much more conducive on gender equality and women's rights due to the strong political will by the highest leadership,- the President. Although, there is less progress in terms of the quality of laws/bills passed on gender equality in Kenya and Uganda, the women MPs in the Ugandan and Kenyan parliaments might have worked harder to influence due to unconducive environment towards women's rights and limited political will. Last, but not least, women in these two parliaments are much fewer compared to the Rwandan parliament.

In my opinion, Kenya is the most patriarchal of the three countries and has the highest rape figures in the region. In a case of gang rape of a 16- year old, the "punishment" by the police when they caught the perpetrators was to slash grass in front of the police station. The girl had severe injuries and had to go abroad for surgery. She has recovered and with the assistance of women's organisations managed to bring the case to court. Finally, two of the five men who raped her were convicted on counts of both gang rape and grievous harm and sentenced to respectively 15 years and 7 years in prison. Unfortunately nothing happened to the police officers that thought a bit of gardening was an appropriate reaction from the Kenyan state to such a horrible violation of rights.

The women's MPs who come in through nominations in Kenya are often ridiculed, marginalised and insulted. Named "flowers". Women, nominated to the senate, do not have voting rights there (but can vote in parliament). Unlike in Rwanda, where nominated women MPs are as respected as any other MP. Many middleclass women have reacted to the strong patriarchy in the region by refusing to conform to societal gender expectations for example by choosing not to get married or not to have children, a choice that few women would dare to take if you go back a few decades.

In Uganda, even educated, middle-class women from one of the larger ethnic groups have kept up the tradition of kneeling while serving their husbands food. It is done publically, and particularly in front of his family as a sign of “respect”. It can look like professional women keep the tradition in order to tell; “See I have my career, but I am still a subordinate and respectful wife”.

Rwandan women have equal rights to the family property in a divorce case, provided it is a registered marriage. Women usually get custody to the children in such cases. Also victims of marital rape have legal protection, although there are no marital rape cases brought to court, which does not necessarily mean that marital rape does not happen. Rwanda still has problems with the police, despite the gender desks etc. We see that women face strong pressure to withdraw reports of gender- based violence. The option of withdrawal must end, if the states really wants to combat violence against women. However, legislation to end gender- based violence is more women-friendly in Rwanda than in Uganda and Kenya.

Customary law plays a much stronger role in Uganda and Kenya. Even in parliamentary discussions on formal legislation, beliefs and traditions are have much weight. In Kenya there is a very strong gender division on such issues as property sharing after divorce. Most of the women were in favour and men against women’s rights to the property. Male arguments in Parliament were. “You women will just want to marry us men to get our property”

It has become less popular to mobilise around women’s issues and politics. The private sector may be a more tempting arena for women wanting to make a career.

To make further progress towards gender equality we need to establish mechanisms to force countries to follow up their international obligations and introduce sanctions if they neglect or undermine these obligations on the national level.



Miria Rukoza Koburunga Matembe

“The marriage and divorce act” is the mother of all women-friendly legislation in this country. Now many female MPs are against the act. It is as if slaves were in favour of slavery!

Miria Rukoza Koburunga Matembe, a lawyer by profession has been a strong advocate of women’s rights in Uganda. For over two decades beginning in 1989, she was a member of Uganda’s parliament. She was minister for ethics and integrity from 1998 to 2003 and she has been a member of the Pan-African Parliament representing Uganda.



She was a member of the Constitutional Court (1995) that created the Ugandan Constitution and the co-founder and former chairperson of Action for Development, one of Uganda’s leading women’s advocacy organizations.

– The quota system, or affirmative action, is by far the most important strategy to increase women’s political participation. The system works best in when women are elected on the local level to ordinary seats, however reserved seats for women’s representatives are in many countries the only opportunity to reach the critical mass of women in Parliament. Affirmative action has increased the numbers and the influence by women. The barriers against women’s access to the public space were broken while the space for well-qualified female politicians opened. We created new role models for women and girls and we gave them inspiration and aspirations. That was very important. I had no such female models when I grew up. It is a great pleasure knowing that I can be a model for many younger women who want to participate economically and politically in society. Women can now even nominate themselves as presidential candidates.

Uganda has certainly built a platform for women that no one can ignore. However, just increasing the percentage of women in Parliament is not sufficient. The system has not been effective in terms implementing women-friendly policies. When affirmative action was first applied, the impact was enormous in terms of shaping legislation. Female parliamentarians’ collaboration with Uganda Land Alliance resulted in the “Matembe ownership clause”, won on consent in Parliament. The clause ensures women’s co-ownership to the plot of land where the family house is built.

With the new parliament in 1996, things changed according to Matembe:

– Despite our loud protests it got more and more difficult to make progress. The Museveni government lost interest in gender issues. These days, the few things they do are only window-dressing to maintain support from women. Currently the Government uses the women’s representatives as its make-up. Affirmative action has lost its purpose of giving space and influence to women’s voices in Uganda. It has become a system to create “jobs” for women with personal, rather than political ambitions and to support to the government. The multiparty system has created an atmosphere where it is more difficult for women MPs to strategize and work coherently through the women’s caucus. “The marriage and divorce act” is the mother of all women-friendly legislation in this country. Now many female MPs are against the act. It is as if slaves were in favour of slavery!

Matembe continues; – *Women’s political participation is now days being regarded as a privilege, not a right. Many women see Museveni as the one who has given them that privilege and they do not want to bite the hand feeding them. Their loyalty lies with the executive, rather than with the women in this country.*

– *Affirmative action was certainly a necessary first step to increase women’s voices and make political progress. The weakness was that it came from the top. During the Ugandan Bush War, (1981 - 86) men and women fought side by side, and women gained respect and position. We were listened to then and we wanted a say in decision making the new Uganda. We made the grounds for affirmative action, but before we managed to make real changes, Museveni developed the “big man- syndrome”. He became a chieftain clinging to power and violating the constitution. (Miria Matembe broke with Museveni and left the movement that was under his leadership in 1996, when he changed the constitution to be able to sit for another period. (Museveni, who a long time ago said that “The problem of Africa in general and Uganda in particular is not the people, but leaders who want to overstay in power» was in February elected for his 5th term after 30 years in power.)*

The legendary Maria Matembe’s conclusion is that: – *While we have made progress with laws against female genital mutilation, domestic violence, human trafficking, repayment of bride-price etc., little has happened on the ground. **The laws are merely paper tigers as there is no political will to provide the necessary resources and support services for legal enforcement. To overcome this we must bridge the gap between civil society organisations and the Parliament. We need to engage vocal, educated and informed men, parliamentarians need advisors that can provide them eloquent and informed arguments and it will require passionate women MPs with a base in, and clear sense of accountability to civil society. That could be a wonderful strategy with a very big impact.***



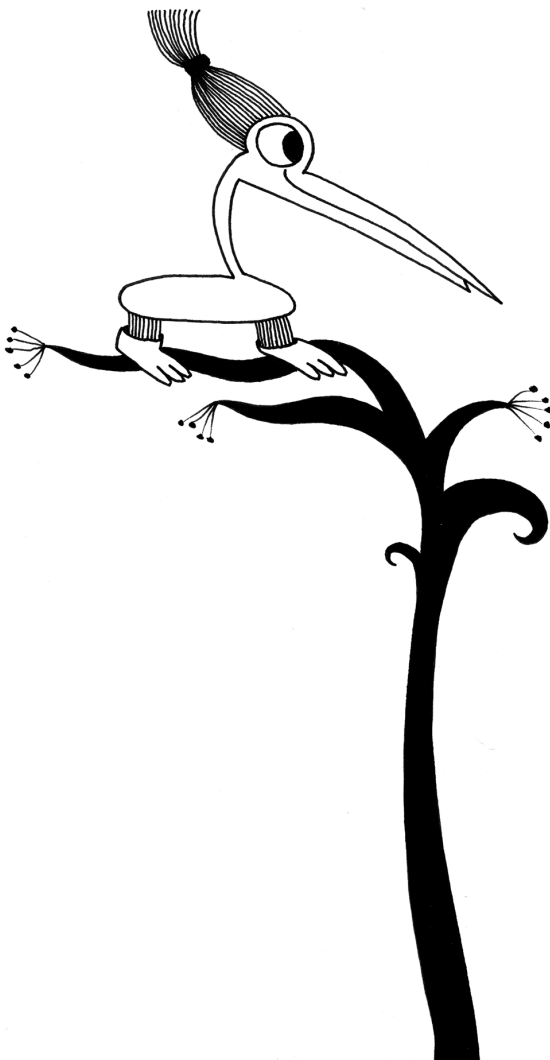
Joseph Kibugu

Human Right's Lawyer Kenya:

We must mobilise to create the real political will which is necessary to include women on an equal footing in Parliament.

– Wangari Maathai's creation of "The Green Belt Movement" can serve as an example of effective mobilisation. I was lucky to be able to attend one of her 2-day courses in 1999. It was amazing to see how she made people understand that the environment is about livelihoods; it is about food, water, livestock, crops, health and more.

Maathai was not the obvious feminist, but she knew that women were disproportionately affected by the environmental degradation. She made grass-root women into social activists by reaching out in a way that was inclusive and appreciated. Most of the participants had personally experienced the grave problems she described, and she could offer a solution that was practical and feasible. In her bottom-up approach, Maathai taught communities the importance of planting trees. Her message was simple, and she creatively used role-plays, cartoons etc. as means of communication. Wangari Maathai and the communities shared the same vision of a healthy community development. Affected communities became her major constituency when she made it all the way to Government (and to the Nobel Peace Prize).



Joseph Kibugu says that lessons learned from the work of Wangari Maathai are that:

- *Bottom-up is the only approach to sustainable social mobilisation,*
- *It is important to use real life examples people can identify with,*
- *Core messages must be in a language that people understand,*
- *The better you communicate with affected communities and people, the more potential there is for a mass mobilisation.*

He continues: – *Currently there are many political challenges regarding the situation of women in Kenya. As the country facilitates big investments and development projects, politicians striving for gender equality should pay more attention to how some of these investments may infringe on women's human rights. As Maathai discovered, women are particularly vulnerable to environmental degradation. Due to their gender, they are also more vulnerable to abuse and harassment when large groups of male workers come to their communities. Traditionally it is also more difficult for women than for men to get paid work at the sites. Finally, yet importantly, in countries where women have little or no ownership to property or money, the possible compensations for lost livelihood usually go to the men. Not seldom do men take the compensation and leave the area whilst women caring for children and the old stay behind and struggle to survive when their livelihood is gone. **So yes, we need smart and conscious parliamentarians of both genders to ensure that women are around the table in the planning, building and operation phase of big investments... That will be in the interest of the entire society, as women tend to look after the interests of the whole community more than men do.***



Wanjira and Wangari

Wanjira Mathai, Director, wPOWER Hub (Partnership for Women's Entrepreneurship in Renewables) at the Wangari Maathai Institute for Peace & Environmental Studies in Nairobi. Wanjira is also the daughter of Wangari Maathai, Founder of the Green Belt Movement and Nobel Peace Prize laureate 2004:



– My mother was raised in rural Kenya. Her parents had not planned to send her to school, but her older brother insisted she should join him. She was, from early age, an outstanding student who was the beneficiary of many scholarships and awards to study. It was a scholarship that made it possible for her to go to the United States in 1960 as a Kennedy Scholar.

In the documentary “Taking Root”, Wangari Maathai tells that the 5 ½ years she spent in the US totally transformed her. She says it was a shock to return to Kenya, where so little had changed. That was when she realised the limitations African women were facing due to their gender. Until that point, she had never thought of herself as a woman. Nevertheless, according to Wanjira Mathai, her mother never let her gender hinder her in achieving her goals:

– She was not a traditional Kenyan woman in the 1960ies and 70ties when she continued to pursue her academic career after she got married and had children. It is correct to say that Wangari was an environmentalist working with women, rather than a feminist engaged in the environment. She was weary of romanticising female leadership, urging to focus more on impact rather than on gender alone.



– My mother saw that women suffered the most from the environmental degradation and the loss of livelihoods. They had to walk further away to collect firewood and water. It became difficult to grow, collect and cook healthy foods for the families and deficiency diseases and poverty was increasing. Wangari's method for mobilising was inclusive. She invited men to seminars as well. There they identified their problems and examined the linkages to the root causes of environmental degradation, lack of democracy and weak protection of Human Rights. In most cases women were closest to the problems, they had a strong potential for organising and taking action and the women become the backbone of Green Belt Movement.

“Entire communities also come to understand that while it is necessary to hold their governments accountable, it is equally important that in their relationships with each other, they exemplify the leadership values they wish to see in their own leaders, namely justice, integrity and trust.” (From Wangari Maathai’s Nobel Lecture)



Wangari Maathai born in Kenya 1940, died 2011. She was the first woman in East Africa to earn a Ph.D. (University of Nairobi). At the aged of 38 she was the first woman to hold a professorship at the same university. Maathai launched the Green Belt Movement in 1977 seeking to end and remedy the devastation of Kenya’s forests and lands. “Women needed income and they needed resources because theirs were being depleted. So we decided to solve both problems together.”

Green Belt Movement has planted more than 30 million trees in Kenya and engaged approximately 30 000 women. What started out as an environmental movement, became a movement for democracy and human rights. “Nobody would have bothered me if all I did was to encourage women to plant trees,” she later said. “But I started seeing the linkages between the problems that we were dealing with and the root causes of environmental degradation. And one of those root causes was misgovernance.” Maathai challenged the government and as an outspoken critic of the dictator Daniel arap Moi, she was beaten and arrested numerous times. Wangari Maathai remained a vocal opponent of the Kenyan government until Moi’s political party lost control in 2002. She earned a seat in the country’s parliament that same year, and was appointed assistant minister of environment, natural resources and wildlife. She won numerous awards, the most prestigious was the Nobel Peace Prize 2004. She got that for her “holistic approach to sustainable development that embraces democracy, human rights, and women’s rights in particular.”

According to the “Mail and Guardian” the grounds given by Wangari Maathai’s husband when he wanted to divorce her was that she was “too educated, too strong, too successful, too stubborn and too hard to control.”

When President Moi was denouncing Maathai’s campaign to save the Uhuru park he said the following about Maathai in a speech; “According to African traditions women must respect their men. I ask you women, can’t you discipline your own, one who has crossed the line?”

“Because I am focused on the solution, I don’t see danger.”

—Wangari Maathai

Ugandan Women's rights activist

Within the women's movement we tend to look at rights somehow isolated, without looking at how women can get empowered. Rights are quite meagre if you do not know how to exercise them.

– At the last half of the 1990`ies, gender equality issues made great progress in Uganda. It happened within a politically and financially enabling environment. Uganda delivered on most development indicators, including on women's empowerment issues. Unfortunately, things have changed and Uganda's social development has since stagnated.

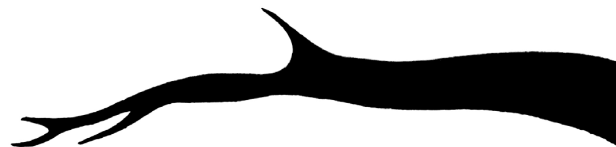
It is very unfair to judge the efforts of women's organisations by the final political outcomes these days. We still work very hard to influence the parliament and we have a strong, competent and well-organised women's movement. What we have seen several times when working with the parliament, is that things may seem to move in the right direction, parliamentarians are actively engaging, but suddenly we lose out without notice. The decisions seems to be taken elsewhere. That was recently the case with the proposed budget allocations for training of more midwives as a response to the high maternal death rates in Uganda. The proposal had parliamentary support, but when the final budget was presented, there were no such allocations.

The lack of land rights is a huge problem undermining women's rights. Traditionally it has been a problem that when the husband dies, his relatives often take the land and chase away his widow and children. An additional and fast growing problem we are facing now are land grabs, when people are being forced away from what they see as their land while investors and developers move in. Women are rarely compensated as they usually lack formal entitlements or ownership to the land, even when compensation is actually offered. There have been cases in North-Uganda, where women of all ages have stripped off all their clothes in front of representatives from the authorities, as a last protest and in utter despair; - you have stripped me of everything, what more can I do?



This is a form of protesting with traditions in the region. It has been quite effective in some cases and has helped bringing the issues to the table. When such stories hit the media people start to ask about the root causes of the desperate acts and the background for the marginalisation of these women.

With the light that currently shines on the oil and gas investments, it seems to be a sector where they actually pay compensations. Again, due to the inherent discrimination of women in our property and inheritance legislation, women do usually not get any of it.



Land grabs in Uganda

Land grabs is a very sensitive issue in Uganda. In 2012 the Guardian told the story of how Oxfam and the Uganda Land Alliance were threatened with deregistration by Uganda's internal affairs minister Hilary Onok, after publishing a report which highlighted the concerns of communities affected by the operations of the New Forests Company in Mubende and Kiboga districts, Uganda. The report told the story how more than 20,000 people had been evicted from a government-owned forest to make way for a British forestry company, incl. how Ugandan security forces enforced the evictions, by setting fire to homes and crops, beating and imprisoning some people.

<http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2012/may/10/uganda-oxfam-land-grabbing-claims>

Stripping and being stripped

Nakedness as a political weapon

In the documentary “*Taking Root*” about Wangari Maathai and the creation of Green Belt Movement, she and other pioneers tell how they stripped to curse the police men who attacked them. In the film Maathai says: – *In the African tradition any woman the same age as your mother, is your mother and you must treat her with the same respect. If men beat women, it is like sons violating their mothers. The mothers respond by cursing them and they do that by showing them their nakedness.*

One of the women from Green Belt Movement tells how she defended Wangari Maathai, whom the police attacked particularly brutally. The woman quickly undressed and fought the police naked in order to make way to get Maathai who at this point was beaten into coma, to hospital.

Acholi women strip in protest against land grab

In April 2015 News 24 wrote in Uganda writes that women belonging to the Acholi tribe stripped naked in front of two ministers who came to facilitate their removal from a 40-square kilometer piece of land in Apaa, between Amuru and Adjumani Districts. The act was later justified by the Chairperson of Acholi Parliamentary Group who said: – *Whoever is criticising the women for stripping should put themselves in the shoes of the individuals who were on the verge of losing the only valuable asset that they own in the hands of uncaring government agents.*

Police stripping female politicians

Ingrid Turinawe, then leader of Uganda’s Forum for Democratic Change Women’s League, was in April 2012 on her way to an FDC rally when the police attacked her. They dragged her out of her car, groped, mauled, and tore off her top. Ugandan women responded with protests where they stripped off their tops. In October 2015, the politician Zainab Fatuma Naigaga was accompanying the major Ugandan opposition presidential candidate, Kizza Besigye. On her way to a rally she was brutally dragged out of the car and stripped by the police. The incident was taped and the intimidating abuse can still be seen on youtube. The head of the police, Kale Kayihura first explained that Ms. Naigaga had actually stripped herself in front of the police and that they demanded an apology from Naigaga. This time many women participated in a protest using the hashtag #SomeoneTellKayihura.

“My dress, my choice”

The Guardian referred 28 February 2014 to reports of the arrest of seven men in the eastern part of the country for targeting women in miniskirts and stripping them naked. The attacked women were on their way to church when it happened. The background is the so-called miniskirt ban in the Anti-Pornography Act that was signed a few weeks earlier:

– *According to a report in the Daily Monitor, mobs, including bikers claiming to help police enforce the law, have undressed eight women wearing miniskirts and even two men wearing low-slung trousers. Elsewhere women describe the level of street harassment as intensifying. ‘Sexual harassment has been taking place in this country for some time’, says Nargis Shirazi, 29, an activist who works for the Woman to Woman Foundation in Kampala. ‘Now it’s like the*

locals have a reason to stand up and use violence. If we don't do anything about it, it's going to get worse`. The problem, according to Shirazi, is that the law is extremely vague. `The leaders themselves do not understand it`, she says. `Lokodo claims that women excite men if they dress like this. The tabloids pounce and there you have your front page: `Miniskirts banned`. It gives men reason to get violent`.¹

25 September 2014 .Lizabeth Paulat reports on www.care2.com that in one month early 2014 more than 50 women were publicly stripped in Uganda for wearing mini-skirts in public. She writes that when the women of Uganda organised and fired back news of harassment went quiet for a while before there were new incidents. She tells of some women attending a rally car show when some men began to scream they were dressed inappropriately:

– They were harassed by a rowdy crowd that were attempting to strip them of their clothes. Some patrons, including an elder Hajji (older Muslim man) whisked the girls away to hide in a pit latrine until the police showed up. However, when the police finally arrived, it was the women who were taken away from the scene, rather than the men who had attempted to sexually assault them.²

He for she put on miniskirts in Nairobi

“Just three days after he signed the HeForShe pledge, Erick co-organized #MyDressMyChoice, a big protest in Nairobi. The event was inspired by the act of some men stripping and assaulting women simply because they were wearing a miniskirt. An outraged Erick decided to use social media to ignite action: He dressed in a skirt, posted the photo online and called for other men to do the same. At the protest, a lot of men wore skirts in solidarity and to help end the myth that a dress code should define women”.³

1 www.theguardian.com/fashion/fashion-blog/2014/feb/28/uganda-miniskirt-ban-attacks-women

2 www.care2.com/causes/a-revival-of-miniskirt-harassment-in-uganda.html#ixzz44NeEwjw5

3 www.heforshe.org/en/newsroom/identity/my-dress-my-choice



Shrinking space for Ugandan Civil Society

On June 13, 2016, 31 Ugandan and international organisations signed a letter to the inspector general of the Ugandan police force (UPF) expressing their grave concerns about a wave of break-ins targeting organisation's offices, apparently to steal confidential and sensitive information. The signatories claim that the police has failed to make the necessary efforts to investigate and ensure evidence to bring perpetrators to justice.

Excerpts from the letter:

“Since September 2012, there have been over two dozen break-ins at NGO offices across Uganda. Private security guards have been killed in the course of two break-ins, registered in July 2015 and May 2016. Documents, electronic data, and other confidential and sensitive information has been stolen in many cases, and indeed, appears to have been the objective in cases where expensive technology was left untouched.”

“In some cases, the UPF has provided no response to the complainant, or more commonly, no substantive update as to the status of investigations. Recent comments from official UPF spokespersons have provided no reassurance that investigations have been robustly carried out or that police are determined to identify and bring to justice perpetrators. Based on discussions with those affected, we are unaware of any instance among the over two dozen break-ins reported to the UPF since September 2012 in which there has been a successful prosecution for any charge.”

“On the early morning of May 22, 2016, intruders broke into the offices of the Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF), an organization that provides legal support and representation to marginalized people. The assailants beat to death the security guard, Emmanuel Arituha, ransacked the offices of the director and the deputy director, and stole documents and a television screen. The assailants did not take computers, laptops and other electronic gadgets.”

“The lack of accountability and persistent impunity for attacks on human rights defenders and their offices sends a message that such attacks are condoned and tolerated by the authorities, which has apparently led to a situation in which attackers are willing to resort to extreme violence, including killing a security guard, in order to accomplish their aims. Ending impunity is essential to ensure a safe and enabling environment for human rights defenders.”



Male peace and security expert, African Union

Gender issues are often dealt with as a joke

– Often, even in formal high-level meetings with 50 – 60 male participants and 2- 3 women, gender issues are something the participants joke about. High-ranking African officers will say something like “Female soldiers in combat ha-ha-ha” and when there is a reaction or the chair stops the joking, they say that they are just joking and that of course they take gender very seriously, and then laugh again.

And next time someone raise the issue of gender balance there will be other similar jokes indicating that the idea has no place in peace keeping in general, and particularly not while there is war in the region. I have also overheard many comments that any regulations on minimum numbers of women in peace and security is ridiculous and something imposed as a funding condition by the former colonial powers.

On the other hand, I guess we only need to go back 20 years for the same attitudes in Europe, and it is definitely changing fast in Africa. I come across many impressively well qualified young women, sometimes working under less competent middle-aged men that try to hold them back from making a career. These women seem to have found a way of coping with intimidations and they are ambitious. I am optimistic and I think it is just a matter of time before the women working here will reach the critical mass to be make substantive positive change.



Cyprian, Teresa and Grace

Teresa Omodi, FIDA Kenya, Grace Mbugua, Women's Empowerment Link and Cyprian Nyamwamu:

If we lose the affirmative action gains now, we are back in the 1960ies in terms of gender equality.

According to Cyprian, Teresa and Grace the entry point of affirmative action is always numbers, numbers, numbers.

Since 2013, the ground is softened for contact and influence between the gender equality movement in Kenya and parliament, due to agreed affirmative action policies:

– *Civil society in Kenya is a player and an agenda setter in parliament. Nevertheless, we still live in a patriarchal society here and we need affirmative action until it is just as natural for women as for men to go for any position in society.*

“Nothing about us, without us”, - with the increase of women representatives the agenda is changing. The work we do as civil society and activists benefit from the 86 women's representatives in parliament. We collaborate on strategies and building alliances. Sexual and domestic violence must expand from a women's issue to a family-, and a human rights issue. If we manage that it will be easier for men to play an active role in moving policies and legislation in the right direction.

While working on the “sexual offences act”, the most efficient thing we did as a movement was to engage one of the older, most respected men in parliament to speak up. We learned much from that strategy and we have used it while working on protection against domestic violence and the marriage act. We try to find and engage respected men. Unfortunately, many of the younger male parliamentarians seem more sexist than the older ones, and they use the opportunity to push their female colleagues down rather than to collaborate with them. These men are often the strongest opponents of affirmative action policies.

The current process in Kenya aim at backtracking affirmative action policies, such as the agreement that not more than two-thirds of all elective or appointive bodies shall be of the same sex. The Kenyan Supreme Court ruled in 2013 that further legislation on how to meet the one-third women requirement should be in place by August 2015, to be implemented as an issue for the general election in 2017. That slowed down and distorted the process. It exposes that patriarchy knows how to renew itself, repack itself and reappear. You think you have moved forward and settled issues, and suddenly they come up again.

Some are now arguing that we should totally skip affirmative action, claiming that women should compete on equal terms with men. That is not yet possible because we are so far from a society where you can speak of men and women as if they were on equal terms.

Affirmative action is about numbers, but it is also a generator for visions. Young women need to see women in all sorts of top positions to learn that gender equality is possible. They need role models to feed their ambitions and dreams.

However, being a pioneer often comes with a price. Many women who have been in the forefront of politics have been hounded out of office. Even their families and children can become legitimate game for the media. We have had several cases in Kenya where media and male politicians

have gone after the family-members and family relationships, when they did not succeed in attacking female politicians directly.

*We are worried because the current political situation in Kenya is anti-gender. There is certainly reason to suspect that the various cases of public scandalising of women politicians are being used in campaigns against affirmative action by conservative forces. Their major arguments are that the increase of women's representatives is a burden to the society because parliament has become huge and expensive, secondly that women representatives are incompetent, that they have not performed well, nor delivered as promised. The fact that women representatives have not been given offices, funds and other mechanisms to move the agenda is not part of this story. **They are also saying that the women's representatives are not legitimate and do not represent anyone.** Another argument is the divide between urban elite women and rural women, meaning that well-educated, urban women cannot represent the rural women's interest. That is strangely enough, never used as an argument against male MPs. Again, patriarchy reproduces itself.*



Annicient and Justus

In the rural Cattle Keeping Communities, men owned the cows and women owned the milk and milk products for home consumption. When milk became a Commercial commodity, men took ownership of both the cows and the milk.

Annicient Busingye and her husband Justus Twebaze sees the right to own and use property as the most important gender issue in Uganda. A country where traditional and “modern” living co-exist, resulting into a complex and contradictory reality. Without property, women have no security for loans and very limited possibilities to utilize their business potential. With little or no access to credit, it is difficult to become independent.



The couple emphasize that “gender” must include boys and men:

– Men need to understand the potential and advantages of economically active women at the family level, as well as the social level We need to repackaging the messages and make the issue relevant not only to women but to both genders in order to succeed.

They both agree that Uganda’s gender policies were very relevant when introduced, but that implementation and further progress has stagnated since there were no proper sustainability plans.



Annicient who has been leading a multinational enterprise emphasizes the need for Organizations to promote Gender Inclusive Programmes in the Workplaces. She says that;

– Women leaders in the business sector are critical in promoting gender issues, such as maternity leave policies and inclusion of child centers at the workplaces, and they should remember that they are also role-models. How the enterprise deal with these issues and how women employees are treated, depend on the ownership. Some owners do not respect gender related issues and try to push unsupportive policies, which move the whole country gender program backwards. To move forward we need to learn from the good examples and create the necessary policies accordingly.

Justus, who is the managing director at StratProjects Uganda Ltd, works with rural development programs, focusing on gender inclusiveness in agribusiness and related poverty alleviation projects. He says that;

– In many communities women who have their own property are regarded as disrespectful to their husbands. On the other hand, in nearly every village women are now organizing themselves in saving and credit clubs/groups to be able to access credit for their agricultural and business activities. The groups act as the necessary security for loans from the micro finance institutions and the benefits of buying in larger quanta. In these groups women trust each other and collectively protect the funds they have saved from the members’ husbands, and to ensure that the credit extended to the Group is paid back.

Annicient and Justus have both succeeded in their respective careers despite coming from a poor, rural background. Annicient's father lives traditionally with his 3 wives and more than 12 children, the majority being daughters. Nevertheless, he is also a progressive man insisting that all his girls should get a good education. He is committed to send all the children to the country's best schools. Annicient has made it to the top of a Ugandan industry. She and Justus live in an unusual marriage, where they are on equal footing and share the domestic responsibilities. They strongly support each other and co-own StratProjects Uganda Limited. They are true role models in a rapidly changing Uganda.



Norwegian People's Aid Rwanda

You must always keep in mind that there is a strong political will from the very top to improve the general situation for women in this country!

Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) has been present in Rwanda since 1995 and presents its work as an evolution from "an emergency approach, following the end of the genocide, to a robust governance programme supporting civil society and citizens. In cooperation with a range of local partners, NPA is currently involved in two projects, The Public Policy Information, Monitoring and Advocacy Project and Ending Gender Based Violence. NPA's overall objective in Rwanda is to support Rwandan civil society partner organisations become accountable institutions to their constituents, and promote meaningful citizen participation in processes that affect their lives".

Country director Felipe Atkins and some from his team says:

– The entry point to any discourse on the current situation for women in Rwanda is the current political will and commitment. There has been remarkable progress, in particular the increase of women's formal political participation.

We have seen comprehensive, radical improvements in the legislation, such as the comprehensive acts on gender based violence, inheritance and marital laws, the introduction of a hotline for domestic violence in Kigali, the gender desks at the local police stations and the compulsory gender budgeting in all governmental institutions. Many of these initiatives come from the executive. At times, the parliament appear side-lined in decision-making on these issues. There is not always evidence that the rapid progress on gender issues is a direct result of the women majority in



parliament. On paper, progress is fast, and extraordinary. Implementation, on the other hand, is not necessarily always very fast, as the different bodies and sectors responsible don't yet seem to understand the relevance of gender. Therefore, while there is no doubt about the serious commitment to women's empowerment issues from the President's office, you cannot always trace the same commitment further down in the societal structures.

Rwanda is one of the few African countries where you should think twice before you beat your wife. We do have legislation to protect victims of domestic violence and to some extent also the institutions to support women in pressing charges and punish the perpetrators. In practice, it can be very difficult for a family if the man is imprisoned and can no longer provide for the family. That certainly keeps many women from reporting gender-based violence.

Another obstacle is the police. We have plenty of examples, also of educated women in Kigali who, when they turn to the police for assistance after violent abuse, are sent back to their houses and abusers. So you can imagine what it is like for poor, rural women trying to exercise their rights at the local police station.

Society still sees men as heads of the household, but perceptions have changed over the last 22 years. There is a clear divide in progress between the urban and the rural. While women in an urban, Rwandan setting enjoy much larger degree of gender equality than their sisters in most African countries, that is not yet the case in rural communities.

Abortion is a criminal offence in Rwanda. Tradition, religion and social norms are strongly opposed. It is important to note that the opposition against a liberalisation of the penal code on abortion come from the grassroots. Things are changing though, so while the sentencing used to be 5 to 15 years of imprisonment it was reduced to 1 to 3 years.

So how does the Rwandan Parliament function? You will find little public criticism of the Government, but in our experience, the executive listen to controversial debates, as long as it is backed by research and evidence. 30% of the women in Parliament are the women quota, the other 34% have been elected through the ordinary channels, by merit.

With a large majority of women in Parliament, one would think support for what is regarded as women's issues would be strong. However, when the Rwandan Parliament discussed the proposed Maternity Leave Rights Bill in 2015, the majority at first wanted to reduce the proposed leave from 12 to 6 weeks. The final bill however, when approved in February 2016, grants mothers 12 weeks leave with full salary.

Rwanda's inheritance-and marital legislation applies only to registered marriages. Even though registrations are increasing, research published by Dfid, USAID and genderindex imply that a large group, maybe even the majority of marriage-like relationships are not registered, thus leaving women and children with no legal inheritance rights.

– NPA's partners strongly encourage registered marriages in the Ending Gender Based Violence project. An important element in our partnership work within the Public Policy Information, Monitoring and Advocacy Project is to facilitate CSO partners to organize large meetings

between civil society, incl. rural citizens, and the Government. In these meetings, we present well-documented research and have fruitful discussions. Through active participation, the grassroots have formulated policy recommendations. This has proven to be an effective way to increase policymakers' awareness of their demands. Our partners actively use radio and television as channels of communication.

Facts Rwanda:

Article 162 of organic Law no 1/2012/OL stipulates that:

“Any person who carries out self-induced abortion shall be liable to a term of imprisonment of one (1) year to three (3) years and a fine of fifty thousand (50,000) to two hundred thousand (200.000) Rwandan francs”.

200.000 Rwandan francs is the equivalent of US\$268 (63 percent of Rwandans earn under \$1.25 a day).

According to Rwanda Demographic and Health (RDHS) 2014-2015, 35 % of women say they have experienced violence after the age of 15. 58 % of the perpetrators were the current husband or partner. The statistics have gone significantly down since the RDHS from 2010 when 41 % had experience violence. The citizens' acceptance of partner violence has also gone down. However, the discrepancy between women and men who believe a husband is entitled to use violence against his wife if she is “disobedient” is still very high. The survey states that:

“More than 2 in 5 women and nearly 1 in 5 men agree that a husband is justified in beating his wife for at least one of the following reasons: if she burns the food, argues with him, goes out without telling him, neglects the children, or refuses to have sex with him.”



Mary Balikungeri

Founder & director, Polyclinic of Hope Rwanda Women's network (RWN):

The executive has understood the societal benefits of women's empowerment and gender equality. So how can we take advantage of that? We definitely need to take the advantage of current favourable environment. Look at our neighbouring countries! I disagree with people who say that we do not have sufficient critical discussion around gender issues. We have enough talk, what we need is action. The Government has provided us with a women friendly platform, now it is up to us to ensure enforcement.



The Polyclinics of Hope was established after the 1994 genocide. It was initially services for women survivors who were raped and living with HIV and AIDS. Rwanda Women's Network (RWN), existing of 52 grassroots organization members, was established in 1997 to continue the Polyclinics work. The outreach has expanded to other vulnerable women including the poor, victims and survivors of sexual and gender based violence.

– Rwanda has a hotline to report gender-based violence; it is very overwhelmed but works as a first step for many women. After that, support services for the victims become scarce. It is urgent with services that can offer women's safe spaces and learning environment for women.

We collaborate with Norwegian People's Aid on the "ending domestic violence"-project. We are also hosting The African Network of Women Shelters (ANWS), a continent-wide organization with membership of 50 organisations drawn from across Africa. The ANWS aims to ensure availability of women's centres and safe spaces across Africa, as well as raise awareness about women's rights.

RWN offers medical services, with gender-based violence, HIV/Aids, mental and reproductive health as major focus areas. The centres are built around the women's priorities and offer home-based care when needed. We organise saving groups where we train women in saving and our goal is to establish a women's bank. We also train trainers in advocacy around gender based violence and inheritance laws, and in practical support to women through legal processes on gender-based violence.

The women's movement in Rwanda challenged the role of the women's reps in Parliament when they first reduced the maternity leave law, and as a result, they retabled it. On the other hand, the first decision made by the executive to establish a three-month leave with the establishment of a maternity fund, to back up institutions for replacement, was not realized. Now when the law is retabled and in its final stages for implementation and comes with budget allocations and plans for financing the service.

Gender equality will only be achieved when also marginalised women have a place around the decision-making table. To gain the necessary level of confidence to fill such a role women need support from their fellow women and men in the decision-making, and resources to be redirected to women lead organisations.

We have e.g. built strong alliance with men regarding the need of reforming the inheritance-, and marital legislation. Remember that also men born outside of formal marriage are denied inheritance rights.”

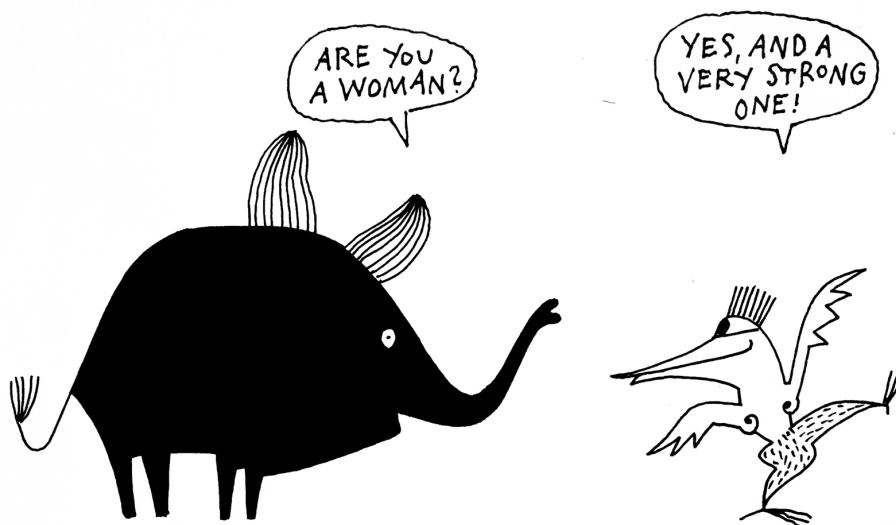
In 2012, the members of the African Network of Women Shelters (ANWS) and partners from Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Zimbabwe formulated the Kigali Call to Action:

“Many women want to escape the violence and find refuge and safety because their homes or communities are unsafe. But, the vast majority cannot find refuge and safety.”

“Women’s centers and safe spaces, where they exist in Africa, provide life saving services to women fleeing violence, often working in dangerous places with minimal support, resources and protection. Cultural barriers often inhibit these centers from operating openly and this means that victims often face a lifetime of discrimination, stigmatization, poverty, and increased risk of further victimization.”

“We emphasize the lack and/or inadequate provision of women’s centers and safe spaces in States across Africa. The African Network of Women Shelters therefore calls on African governments to:

- Enact and implement policies and legislation to establish and support shelters and safe spaces for women and girls in Africa;*
- strengthen political will and invest and allocate funds for survivors of violence to guarantee service provision and access safe spaces and refuges. We note the importance of women driven shelters and safe spaces in women survivors’ confidence building, and thus the need for their support with appropriate infrastructure to offer holistic interventions with prevention on GBV and women empowerment programs.”*



Recommendations from the Ugandan women's and human rights movement

Twenty participants from twelve women's and human rights organisations gathered in Kampala in January 2016 for the workshop "In power, - with power?" arranged in collaboration with FOKUS' partner Isis-WICCE. The aim was to explore to which extent women quotas in the Ugandan parliament had influenced progress in the specific areas of gender-based violence and of women's inheritance and property rights. Furthermore, to identify the driving forces and obstacles against making progress on these arenas, and finally to develop recommendations for strategies on a national and international level.

The workshop was held under "Chatham House Rule", meaning that participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed. Thus, the following quotes are anonymous.

What is it like in a women's seat?

– Women in Parliament deserve recognition, because they bring up unpopular issues. We need to keep in mind that they have to play by the rule and engage in more than what traditionally are seen as women's issues. A militarised regime like ours requires that you fit in and know your place. Otherwise, there are repercussions and marginalisation. It can be difficult to combine the political role with the traditional roles of women.

– Women can be given access to Parliament, but real influence is based on culture and is controlled by men. Grassroots women must be engaged to make real changes in society.

– Some women's representatives see themselves as representatives of their district not their gender, despite being elected as women's representatives. Independent candidates running for reserved women's seats are often celebrities, which is very helpful in order to access the necessary funding for the election campaign. These are often more popular than the ordinary members, but often less accountable in terms of what they campaign on, and where they choose to put their effort once elected.

– Women candidates often ridiculed, as 'trying to be men.'

The executive and the parliament

– From 1995 to date, male parliamentarian's support has been crucial to get women's rights into the constitution. That was very much the case during the best period of the women's caucus with pioneers like Rebecca Kadaga and Miria Matembe. Unfortunately, there has been a negative development. The executive has more influence over Parliament than before, when it used to be the other way around. The executive has currently little interest in women's issues or social issues, so there has been little progress. When dealing with oil and gas however, it seems like new legislation passes very fast in Parliament.

Building alliances

– *We need to make political and religious leaders to accept that women have a role in politics and that it is not destroying men's image.*

– *Many male politicians are afraid of losing power and influence if they engage in our issues. However most men, even if they beat their own wives, will not accept it if their own daughters or mothers are beaten by other men. There is a need for us to repackage the messages. Remember the saying: 'Train as a thief to catch a thief', - we need to collaborate more with men and find a way to communicate that we have common interest.*

International collaboration

– ***International advocacy is very important; we need to build worldwide campaigns to emphasis the endemic nature of gender-based violence. International pressure ended slavery and apartheid. This struggle has many more victims and is certainly just as important.***

– *International aid to the Ugandan government should be withheld until the it allocates the necessary funds to follow-up on its human rights obligations towards women subject to domestic violence.*

– *International funders and partners should assist us in bring forward our concerns to pressure the government to keep its promises and obligations. One way of pressuring is to work with other donors and attach clear conditions to loans and aid.*

– *Ensure support to programs for political and economic empowerment of women. Select and share best practices and tools.*

What are the important gender issues?

– *We have so many gender issues to deal with in this country; bride-price, violence, property & inheritance, you name it. We need to mobilise around **one issue at the time** and conclude them before we move on. We must ensure proper implementation before we move on to new issues. The elections are coming up now and we need to engage in the campaign. We have to strategize around how we can continue to strengthen and influencing the Parliament, how we can communicate around the relevant bills, how we can express our messages in a more positive way."*

Progressive legislation, so what?

– *Unfortunately, few things have changed, despite the new act on violence against women. Worst of all is the fact that most Ugandans are unaware of the legislation, maybe as few as 10% have heard of it. The government has done nothing to inform the people, and there have hardly been any court cases on the act. There is little public demand for implementation and support services.*

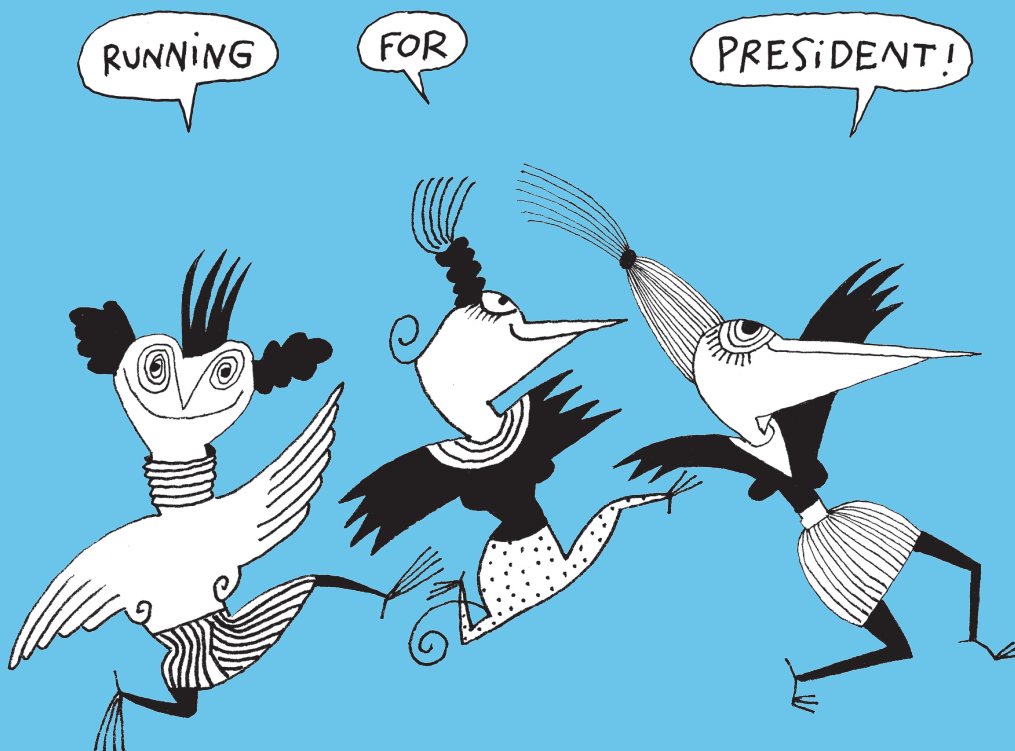
– We need to train judges to make them more gender-sensitive on property cases, and we need to explore how women can find “friendly” courts to settle their cases. We have a domestic violence act, but is it implemented? If we imagine a woman beaten by her husband who wants to make use of the act, how does the police treat her when she wants to report the case? And later if she against all odds manage to rise the case, how do courts treat her and her demands regarding a fair share of the property and custody for the children in case of divorce? What are the general attitudes towards battered women and her position in the communities?”

– Conservative parliamentarians working against progress for women often refer to customary law as their reasoning. I think we should use the legislation as our Bible against gender-based violence. With the act we have only reached the first step.

– Now, how can we secure implementation? First law language must be simplified so people can understand it, and we must use different means of reach-out to communities, such as role-plays, films and cartoons. We need to sensitise and train politicians at all levels, men’s organisations, communities, media, schools, police and the courts. **Our main message should be that life improves for the whole family when violence stops. It will change communities and subsequently it will transform the society. To get the message across we need to work with local community assemblies. We need to build strong alliances, find some unexpected people that can front the issues and we must include “conservative” women, in this context that is rural / grassroots women. We also need more men in the movement against domestic violence.**

– The upcoming election provides a momentum to raise the issue in the different debates. We should push candidates to make promises and when elected keep them accountable. We need to be at the doorway of the young parliament as soon as it takes its seats. Representatives are more accessible early in their period. Studies show that they do most during their first year as parliamentarians.





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