

**EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON
DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA: STRATEGIES FOR
GREATER PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN**

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OVERVIEW PAPER

*Prepared by: Shireen HASSIM
and
Sheila MEINTJES*

**United Nations, New York
Office of the Special Adviser
on Africa**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
I. CONTEXTUALIZING DEMANDS FOR REPRESENTATION: INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS	5
The Beijing Platform for Action.....	6
SADC Declaration on Gender	7
UN Resolution 1325.....	7
NEPAD and the AU	8
The African Protocol on the Rights of Women.....	9
II. WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN PEACE BUILDING AND POST- CONFLICT SITUATIONS	10
III. INCREASING WOMEN’S REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT	15
Representation and Electoral Systems	17
Quotas as a ‘fast-track’ to increasing representation.....	20
Local government.....	24
IV. The role of International Civil Society and the Media in building gender sensitive democratic societies in Africa after conflict	26
V. Critical issues for reflection	28

INTRODUCTION

1. In the past two decades, feminist activists and scholars in both older democracies and postcolonial states have begun to pay much closer attention to the ways in which the formal institutions of liberal democracies have failed women. After a period of intense debate, alongside a cynical view of institutions such as national machineries in Africa, we have recently witnessed renewed engagement by women with political parties and the state. As Aili Mari Tripp argues, this stems in part from regional and global influences on women's organising, which have foregrounded a rights-based approach to women's mobilization. This has involved a "diffusion of norms to increase women's political representation" (2005: 10).

2. The importance of women's representation and political participation has gained new currency around the world in the wake of global campaigns for electoral quotas. Various feminists argue that women's exclusion (or at least marginalization) from the political arena cuts across historical and regional differences. They argue that regardless of race, class, ethnicity, etc, women are consistently defined as political outsiders or as second-class citizens, whose entry into the public sphere is either anachronistic and short-term, or conditional upon their maternal social roles. Flowing from this perspective, there has been a strategic emphasis on challenging exclusion. The political projects that are associated with this approach are, for example, women's enfranchisement, struggles around women's representation in national parliaments and the emphasis on electoral systems, quotas and other mechanisms for breaking political-systemic blockages. This form of feminism is crucial in creating some of the necessary conditions for the removal of gender inequalities, although it has the danger of leaving the structural basis of inequalities intact. Thus, for example, the South African Women's National Coalition, while recognizing that formal equality was a limited political goal, nevertheless maintained that inclusion into formal institutions was a common interest that would hold together a wide range of women's organizations and that questions of policy content would be dealt with separately once women were in parliament.

3. Increased representation in decision-making bodies – rather than the ghettoisation of gender politics within national machineries – has led to massive campaigns for electoral quotas. Women's representation in African parliaments has increased sharply as a result of a deliberate strategy adopted by many women's movements to support the use of quotas, as well as (in some cases) the extension of systems of political patronage to incorporate women. Women's movements have joined the international campaign for increased, even equal, representation of women within legislative bodies, including the African Union, which has adopted a fifty per cent quota for women.

4. These strategies are based on the view that if properly constituted, and the international 'benchmark' of 30 percent representation of women has been widely accepted as the 'critical mass' necessary for their presence to make a difference to policy, African democracies can overcome the historical legacies of women's subordination and that new

relationships can be built between state and civil society, based on democratic participation, the development of policies that are responsive to the needs of poor women and accountability of elected leaders to citizens. The demands to break down the barriers to equal political participation reflect an important tone in contemporary women's movement politics in Africa, as women's movements on the continent begin to take formal politics and political institutions seriously. They signal that there is room for women's agency to shape politics, and that formal political rights are an important precondition for advancing equitable social policies. The quota campaigns and the emphasis on representation are undoubtedly part of an important renewal of feminist activism on the continent.

5. This introduction paper sketches the kinds of strategies that have been advanced in a range of different African countries to increase women's participation in decision-making. In Part One, the paper lays out the key international and regional instruments that have been developed to push national governments into recognising women's political rights. As we show, there is a high degree of synergy between the demands of women's movements in the local and national contexts, and the demands of the global women's movement. Combined pressure at both these levels have resulted in a fairly widespread formal consensus that women's participation in decision-making matters for democratization, but there are ongoing challenges of domestication and implementation of international protocols.

6. In Part Two, we address the challenges of including women in decision-making in post conflict situations. Women have been both victims and agents in violent conflicts. Although violent conflict has been enormously disrupting in Africa, it has also, paradoxically, opened new opportunities to change gender relations. We show the gendered nature of conflict itself, as well as the gendered nature of peace building and maintenance. This area is receiving increasing attention at the international level, as shown in UN Resolution 1325, and we address some of the challenges that face women in transforming and democratising their societies.

7. In Part Three, we examine more closely the practical strategies that have been used by women's movements in the context of transitions to democracy. We examine the role of electoral systems, arguments for and against the use of quotas, and the outcomes of different strategies on the numbers of women at both national and local level. We consider the experiences of different African countries in seeking to increase women's representation.

8. In Part Four, we address the role of international human rights agencies and the media in advancing the struggle for women's political empowerment. We argue that international civil society is vital both for keeping the issue of gender equality at the forefront of human rights debate and decision-making as well as strengthening local efforts of women's movements.

9. Finally, in Part Five, we identify the key issues that confront gender activists and national governments as they seek to domesticate and implement the commitments to increasing women's participation in decision-making.

I. CONTEXTUALIZING DEMANDS FOR REPRESENTATION: INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS

10. The first United Nations 'Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace' began with the United Nations Women's Conference in Mexico City in 1975 after nearly a decade of women's global activism for a change in their secondary status and subordination. While the most vociferous voices were those tied to the rather loose 'women's liberation movements' of the north, from at least the mid to late 1970s women in the developing world claimed rights in ways that focused on what Maxine Molyneux has called their 'needs and interests', that is, social and economic rights (Molyneux, 1985). Women organised around housing, food, access to employment and to credit, among other issues. These spheres reflected the diverse roles that women played – as caregivers as much as producers and workers – and were expressed in the organization of both social movements and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that promoted women's equality and development. The effect of the specific claims made by women was to spell out the social differences between women and men. Their activism also created a political and public space for women to express their private needs and interests. The 'personal is political' had real salience in the lived experience of women's political activism in the decades that followed. In the following decades, women's activism began to focus not only on pressuring national governments from within their countries but also on using international human rights and other instruments to advance their struggle for full citizenship. Women were able to find common ground globally in the recognition that formal political rights were both necessary for gender equality but not sufficient to ensure that the conditions of women's lives would change for the better. In this section, we outline the key international and regional instruments that have been developed in the last two decades. These instruments reflect an increasing consensus in the global human rights environment that increasing women's participation in decision-making is a vital aspect of the process of democratization.

The Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

11. The outcome of the first women's decade, which included the second UN Women's Conference in Copenhagen in 1980, was the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), first ratified in 1979. CEDAW provided a template for signatory countries to begin a process of creating at least a legal and policy environment to tackle discrimination against women in all fields. Included in its terms (article 4) was the idea that affirmative action was one mechanism to enhance the equality between women and men. CEDAW entered into force in September 1981. As of December 2003, 175 countries have ratified the convention, pledging to implement its terms. However, the idea of equality between women and men was seldom fully defined. Formal rights would not necessarily lead to equality, since men and women do different things in society and occupy different statuses in both public and private life. CEDAW recognised this

limitation and in Article 4, made provision for special measures. Full equality would require a process of social transformation that would alter the balance of gender power in society.

The Beijing Platform for Action

12. In July 1985, the Nairobi World Conference acknowledged that unless ‘equity’ and the institutionalization of women’s issues in mainstream programmes became a strategy in integrating women into politics and development there would be little change in the subordinate and secondary status of women in society. In Africa, the mobilization of women for the Nairobi conference was an opportunity especially for elite women to make demands for political representation in their countries. The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women identified equality both as a goal and as a means to promoting women’s equal rights. The document recognised, too, that political will was a critical factor in promoting development that would recognise women’s pivotal role in society and alter the secondary status of women (paragraph 21). But it would take another decade before the idea of integration was conceived of as ‘gender mainstreaming’ and was adopted into international prescriptions – at the Fourth Women’s World conference in Beijing in 1995. The Beijing Platform for Action provided the most comprehensive evaluation of the areas where women’s lives needed to be changed.

13. The ‘Critical Areas of Concern of the Platform for Action’ identified twelve spheres that shaped women’s status and experience in society - poverty, education and training, health, violence against women, armed conflict, the economy, power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms to advance women, human rights, media, the environment and the girl-child. Countries had to report on how they implemented the Platform for Action in ensuing years. In the evaluations undertaken by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, perhaps the most significant change since the Beijing conference is that governments have begun to undertake policy shifts that integrate a gender equality perspective – including adopting principles of ‘gender mainstreaming’. The latter has seen some changes in the numbers of women in politics and education, training and employment, but the somewhat technicist approach has meant that women have still not seen significant changes in their secondary status. Even at the level of political representation, change has not been as rapid as was anticipated. Although 189 member states endorsed the Beijing Platform, very few achieved the ‘critical mass’ of 30% deemed by the UN to be the threshold level at which women’s representation would lead to effective policy intervention. The Inter-Parliamentary Union has shown that women’s representation in national parliaments rose from 10% in 1995, to 12.7% in 2000. By 2005 this number had risen to 15.7%. The Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Anders B. Johnsson, notes that at this rate ‘we will have to wait until 2025 for women’s overall representation in parliament to reach the critical mass of 30% and until 2040 to achieve gender parity’ (IPU Press Release No. 202, Geneva/ New York 3 March 2005).

SADC Declaration on Gender

14. The Beijing Conference gave impetus to Southern African gender activists. In 1997, they were successful in winning support within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) for a Declaration on Gender and Development. This Declaration commits member states to use ‘whatever methods available to increase the participation of women at all levels of decision-making to 30% by 2005’. Member states are required to report annually on progress towards this target. Increasingly, quotas have been mooted as the best available method to achieve this goal. In 2000, the SADC Secretariat instituted a regional programme on Women in Politics and Decision-Making (WIP), as part of the Plan of Action for Gender. The WIP aims to advance the 30% target by providing skills training and sharing best practice examples to women members of parliament across the region.

UN Resolution 1325

15. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, was adopted in October 2000 and followed decades of advocacy and analysis by peace researchers and NGOs on the specific violations experienced by women and children in situations of civil conflict and war. The Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action in 1995 singled out violence against women as one of the most significant factors in depriving women of their human rights in society. Beijing +5 called its outcome document ‘Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century’. This was followed by the Windhoek Declaration and Namibia Plan of Action on ‘Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multi-Dimensional Peace Support Operations’ (May 2000). Further recognition of the experience of women in armed conflict came with Resolution 1325, which, although not legally binding, enjoins governments, the UN and parties in conflict to adopt a gender sensitive approach to peace processes and to develop special mechanisms to protect the human rights of women and girls in conflict situations. Significantly, Resolution 1325 emerges from the activism of women’s organisations and NGOs in the area of women, peace and security, rather than from member states directly.

16. The terms of Resolution 1325 embrace five broad issues: the protection of women in conflict situations from sexual violations such as rape; the end to impunity and the prosecution of those responsible for gender-based abuses both during and after conflict; the adoption of a gender perspective in all aspects of the peace process (including funding gender training); and, finally, tied to gender mainstreaming, it proposes the participation of women in decision-making, conflict prevention and conflict resolution (i.e. as both civilian and military personnel). The Resolution reminds all state parties of their various legal obligations under agreements that tie them to respect international laws. Finally, the Secretary General was ‘invited’ to undertake ‘a study of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, the role of women in peace-building and the gender dimension of peace processes and conflict resolution...’(paragraph 16), and to report to the Security Council on the study.

17. Studies by NGOs, such as Amnesty International, have shown that warring parties and states have honoured Resolution 1325 more in the breach than in its implementation (Amnesty International, 2004). Women continue to experience rape as a weapon of war, acts of violence against women are not investigated and perpetrators continue to act with impunity – the AI study showed how women in the DRC, for instance, were systematically raped in order to force them to flee from mineral-rich land, women in Darfur in internally displaced persons camps were raped both inside and outside (ibid, 5 & 6). In the DRC Inter-Congolese Dialogue, no women were official participants; in the Sudan, no women were involved in the peace-talks, although they have been part of a commission of enquiry into the peace-keeping mission. The United Nations Gender Resource package provided a template for gender training. But when training courses have been held for peace-keepers, it was found that only a few civilians attended (ibid, 15). Nevertheless, many women's organisations are beginning to use it as a basis for leveraging their access to decision makers (IfjP, 2004: 134).

NEPAD and the AU

18. The international environment created by the UN Women's conferences has established a normative framework that has forced many countries to adopt women-friendly policies. Combined with this global imperative, African countries have seen the growth of women's NGOs and women's movements that have pressurised some countries to adopt gender equality provisions in policy and legislation. These changes are reflected in the articles of union of the African Union, a pan-African institution that aims to advance democracy on the continent.

19. The African Union was inaugurated in Durban in July 2002 and committed itself to the principle of gender equality in article 4 (1) of its Constitutive Act. Within the AU, there is absolute gender parity in the appointment of Commissioners, senior, professional and technical appointments. The AU adopted the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights in 2003, which was amended to include an additional protocol on women's rights. The significance of the adoption of principles has to be set alongside a real commitment to change in African countries – that is, to evaluating how far the principles could achieve their goals given the particular political and social context of how gender equality was defined and how it was implemented. Gender equality has in most countries been seen as a simple process of 'empowering women'. This understanding poses little threat either to a male-dominated public sphere nor to the formal economy, which is very much a male preserve in most African countries.

20. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), signed in Abuja Nigeria in October 2001, provided a rallying call for a new relationship between African countries and between them and the international community. NEPAD seemed to acknowledge the part played by African leadership, bad governance and dysfunctional economies in its assessment of why African states were so weak. It posited a new political will of African leaders based on new concepts of security, self-identity, democracy and state legitimacy as the basis for transformation. Included in its agenda was the promotion of women's role in

social and economic development through education and training, income generation, facilitating credit and ‘assuring their participation in the political and economic life of African countries’ (paragraph 49).

21. Feminist scholars in Africa have been singularly sceptical of this commitment and have argued the NEPAD framework was cast in such a way that it would ‘actually undermine a gender equality agenda’ (Randriamaro, 2002, 1). The whole document was ‘gender blind’ in that there was no acknowledgement of the critical productive and reproductive roles played by women on the continent. Moreover, the general goals of ‘people-centred development’ (Part VIII), failed to address the marginalization of women in policy processes and in development programmes. The notion of ‘people,’ let alone women, participating in decision-making was not even mentioned. Sara Longwe of FEMNET in 2002 suggested that the lack of strategies or plans of action in NEPAD to address gender inequities meant that some of the principles would simply remain on paper (Longwe, 2002). A much stronger criticism, though, was that no guidelines were provided to assist in understanding what gender principles meant, including ‘gender gaps or forms of gender discrimination’ (ibid, 4). Moreover, Longwe presses the point by showing that goals of ‘gender equality and empowerment’ are conflated with ‘eliminating gender disparities in enrolment in primary and secondary education’ (paragraph 65 of NEPAD). As she points out, NEPAD was written as if there were no binding international instruments to refer to in relation to action plans. The authors of NEPAD ignored the Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW among others.

The African Protocol on the Rights of Women

22. Intense activism by women’s movements on the continent, most notably the Solidarity for African Women’s Rights Coalition (SOAWR), led to the introduction of an addendum to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights, known as the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa. The Protocol was adopted by the AU in July 2003. In 2004, following the Beijing +10 evaluations, the African Heads of State, pushed by their own women’s machinery and organizations, produced a ‘Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa’ at the third Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, at which they undertook to sign and ratify the Protocol by the end of 2004. By October 2005, 15 countries had signed the Protocol, with 38 member states of the AU still to follow-through on the commitment. With the minimum of fifteen signatories reached, the Protocol will now come into effect within 30 days (by the end of November 2005). The Protocol grew out of a recognition of earlier failures to fully address the feminization of poverty, the high incidence of HIV/AIDS and the burden of care borne by women. The exclusion of women from peace processes when they bore ‘the brunt of conflicts and internal displacement, including rapes and killings’ was also referred to. Women’s reproductive rights are explicitly set out in articles dealing with women’s right to medical abortion and with the prohibition of female genital mutilation. Lack of access to resources, including food, education and jobs, was linked to the under-representation of women in decision-making. In its final agreements, the Declaration on Gender Equality proposed that concerted action was needed in the economy, in society and the law to improve social

services and HIV/AIDS support. Women had to be participants in all aspects of conflict prevention, resolution and management. Campaigns against child soldiers and gender based-violence, including sex slavery would be launched ‘within the next one year’. Legislation was proposed on violence against women and to promote land, property and inheritance rights. Other agreements proposed to strengthen gender machineries and ensure adequate resources for their task of promoting gender equality, including setting up a ‘Special Investment Fund for Women’ to support women’s entrepreneurship. Heads of State also agreed to be ‘agents of change and personally undertake and champion advocacy campaigns to address all the se issues...’.

23. As with all international and regional agreements, the central challenge is to effect the shift from ratification to domestication, implementation and the realization of rights. As Pambazuka News has pointed out, there are many obstacles. ‘At the societal level, the strength of patriarchal (interpretations of) culture, tradition and religion, the co-existence of multiple legal systems and the public/private dichotomy continue to disempower African women. At an organizational level, the weakness of the African women’s movement and key alliances and partnerships within it continue to militate against African women’s empowerment. At the national level, gender machineries in several African countries are characterised by powerlessness and poor resources” (2005). Like many other such agreements, the Protocol does not contain sanctions for non-compliance.

II. WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN PEACE BUILDING AND POST-CONFLICT SITUATIONS

24. The African continent has been ravaged by a series of wars- both internal and between states – in the last quarter century that have been a major obstacle to development. Some are of recent origin, such as in Côte d’Ivoire, others of long duration, where conflict has lasted for twenty-five years, as in the Sudan. Conflict has tended to promote a highly masculinist and militarized culture, which has been inimical to the development of alternative discourses and practices of democracy and to economic and social development. Wars have not only cost substantial national economic resources but have destroyed human dignity and caused untold pain and suffering. Women in particular have suffered rape and abuse in conflict situations. More than one third of global armed conflict in the last decade has been located in Africa, with 6.1 million refugees fleeing their own countries and more than 20 million internally displaced persons. The wars have caused costly damage to the infrastructure, such as roads and railways, but also to hospitals, water, sewerage systems and to urban and rural buildings and homes. The use of land-mines and scorched-earth policies have also caused enormous human suffering and environmental damage. HIV/AIDS infections have multiplied in war-torn societies, particularly affecting women and children. The effect of war has been to substantially weaken societies and even to destroy functioning state systems. Yet paradoxically, conflict situations have also provided opportunities for women to transform their lives in ways that redefine their gender relations.

Women acquire new independence when men disappear into the bush to engage in combat, women may also take on new combat roles as well, and some women become new decision-makers in their families.

25. The aftermath for countries emerging from these destructive wars has been particularly difficult. The gendered nature of war and peace shape the politics and social relations of post-conflict societies. However, not all societies in conflict and post-conflict situations reflect a uniform set of gender relations – in some, both women and men were combatants, as in the Eritrean war against Ethiopia, in South Africa's African National Congress armed wing and in the Zimbabwe African National Union liberation army, while in others, women played supportive roles, feeding the fighters and protecting their families. Others fled the war-zones and became refugees or were displaced. Some women were abducted and forced into sexual slavery, as in Gulu, northern Uganda, by Joseph Kony's rebel Lord's Resistance Army. The effects of conflict have been contradictory. On the one hand losses seem self-evident, particularly when it involves loss of home and even of 'virtue' in the case of rape. Yet within the context of war, on the other hand, new unintended opportunities for women to transform themselves and their status in society opened up – to make decisions, to live independently and to shift their relations to men and to male power. Once the conflict moves into a transition to peace, however, these gains become the subject of often bitter and even violent contest.

26. Very often, women are not merely bystanders to violent conflict. As the experience of Rwanda and many other countries has shown, women may actively encourage and support violence as a means to confront political opponents. Women may also be an important force in socialising children into adopting particular ethnic, religious or racial identities, thus perpetuating sectarianism and ethnic or religious hatred. On the other hand, the agency and activism of women in wartime, particularly in managing survival, is devalued in highly patriarchal societies, and is conceived as 'accidental activism' or as an extension of their 'natural role' as purveyors of culture (Meintjes et al, 2001, 9). Women then devalue their own shifts in consciousness and often slip back into secondary roles and statuses in post-conflict situations. This happened in Eritrea, for example (Hale, 2001, 127-128). Patriarchal cultures make it difficult for women to accept their right to independence and personal autonomy, and to participate in public life after the war's end. This means that women are virtually excluded from playing a role in the peace negotiations. Instead, they are seen as peace builders in communities, rather than as national political actors.

27. An important variable in defining women's political role in the aftermath of conflict, seems to be the extent to which women organise politically to ensure that the gains that promote gender equality are not lost in the aftermath. In South Africa, for example, a Women's National Coalition emerged during the constitutional negotiations that ensured that gender equality was enshrined in a Bill of Rights (Albertyn, 1994; Cock, 1995; Meintjes, 1998; Hassim 2005) Historically, the struggle in South Africa had seen strong and independent women's organizations ally with other anti-apartheid political organizations over a long period of time. In Rwanda, women's organizations emerged out of the 1995 genocide based on the material and psychological needs of women – one of the largest was

the Association of Genocide Widows (AVEGA). A Federation of African Women's Peace Networks was established in 1998 to promote women's participation in political decision-making and in peace-building (UNIFEM). These organizational efforts translated into political gains for women in the context of enormous loss of life, particularly of men. Women in Rwanda constituted more than 70 percent of the population after the genocide. In the first democratic election held in March 2004 after the adoption of the May 2003 Rwandan constitution, women comprised almost 50 percent of representatives in parliament. It is perhaps not surprising in the context of the demographic impact of the genocide that women were acknowledged by the Rwandan President, Paul Kagame, as key agents in the reconstruction of society.

28. However, while Rwanda provides an interesting case study of a shift in the political participation of women, patriarchal cultures in general prevent women from questioning the significance of their secondary status and of gender-based violence in particular. Instead, women are constructed as socially vulnerable and victims to be protected by 'their' men from the depredations of the enemy. So in wartime, rape is a strategy to strip women of their assets of virtue and respectability, to undermine their integrity and their right to remain in their community because they symbolise the inability of men to protect them. They reflect the dishonour of the community as a whole. In the aftermath of war, survivors of gender-based violence remain tainted and are often rejected by their families. They become victims and may lose the sense of strength and empowerment gained from surviving the war experience. Healing and closure become more difficult to achieve. Yet in societies where women's autonomy was more accepted and the experience of rape was acknowledged as a form of torture, survivors were treated as heroes, as among the Dutch survivors of Japanese abuse in South East Asia after the Second World War. This made it easier for Dutch survivors to heal and transcend their experience of violation. African societies in general have not been able to transcend the shame and humiliation of the rape experience. However, in Rwanda, the Akayesu judgement by the Rwanda Tribunal into war crimes (led by a feminist judge from South Africa, Navanethem Pillay) uncovered a pattern of sexual violence that amounted to genocide and defined rape as a 'crime against humanity'. A new instrument for gender justice in post-war situations was established by this judgement. The big question is how this new instrument will be used in other post-war tribunals or truth commissions. Even in Rwanda, women have been too exhausted and fearful to pursue justice against those who have abused them.

29. Women politicians in Rwanda have attempted to give voice to women through a national network of women's committees based in every village. This is supposed to provide a link with women in government and to promote decentralization in a context of building peace in the country. Their efforts have been supported by the United Nations, and particularly UNIFEM, which has supported a range of initiatives in the country since the genocide in 1995. Gender training has been combined with peace and reconciliation processes to promote justice, democracy and gender equality in the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission and in the Constitutional Commission. In general, the United Nations structures and resources have provided the basis upon which the Rwandan state and

society could recover and rebuild its social, economic and political capital. The Rwandan constitution sets a minimum of 30 percent for women in the parliament and the executive.

30. In Sierra Leone, the experience of women during the ten-year civil war from 1991 - 2002 has been widely documented. While women were abducted and used as sex slaves by rebels, some evidence shows that they were also forced to become rebel combatants. Women comprised between 10 and 30 percent of combatants in both the government and the rebel forces. Yet only about 6.5 percent went through the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration plan process after a truce was declared. The rebel Revolutionary United Front perpetrated terrible forms of physical torture and human rights abuse (Human Rights Watch, 2003). More than 250 000 women and children were raped and tens of thousands more were mutilated, including having limbs amputated. Radhika Coomaraswamy, UN Human Rights Commission Special Rapporteur on violence against women, found in 2001 that '72% of Sierra Leonean women had experienced human rights abuses and over 50 percent had been victims of sexual violence' (UNHCR, 2003). Virgins were particularly at risk and virginity testing by rebel women was de rigueur. Both rape and other physical forms of torture were hallmarks of the pattern of rebel torture aimed at instilling fear and submission in the population. The Sierra Leone Special Court has since recognised sexual torture, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy and forced marriage as crimes against humanity. In the aftermath, however, the percentage of women to come forward to report on their experience of gross human rights abuse and to make claims to the Special Courts has been very low. This means that tens of thousands of women live with their trauma and are unable to reintegrate fully into society.

31. The United Nations Women's Conferences, particularly the 1995 Beijing conference, provided an important impetus for women's organizations to co-ordinate activities and establish networks. In 1995, a Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace was formed by women's professional and political organizations in order to prepare for the UN Beijing Women's Conference. Since then, it has continued to meet, share information and to promote peace. It organised a series of peace marches in Freetown during the ensuing years. Allied to it was the Sierra Leone Women's Forum, which focused particularly on the plight of displaced women and refugees.

32. As in Rwanda, the United Nations Mission to Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) has played a significant role in providing support for the peace process and in ensuring that women engage in the post-war development programmes. Since 2003, the period of UNAMSIL's oversight has been extended. At present its presence has been extended to December 2005. Over 17 000 peacekeepers are present in Sierra Leone, and have been the recipients of extensive gender training programmes in order to investigate the gendered nature of human rights abuse of the past. The Anglophone West African Regional Office of UNIFEM has played a significant role in supporting a range of state-society processes. It has worked with the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission to train staff and civil society about gender crimes, particularly those perpetrated against women. UNIFEM played an important facilitative role in promoting the TRC hearings on woman abuse during the civil war. Furthermore, UNIFEM has collaborated with a range of organizations, both religious and

secular, to provide literacy and numeracy classes, to promote peace building and conflict resolution skills training and to foster HIV/AIDS prevention education.

33. Although women were not involved in decisions about the peace process or in developing the terms for the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration plan, which meant that women's role in combat was often ignored, women have in fact been active in the peace-building process. They have made noteworthy efforts to promote disarmament and were vocal in the three-day hearings on the effects of the war on women and girls. Women pressurised the TRC to take up the issue of the impact of customary and common law on the civil status of women in Sierra Leone. Supported by UNIFEM, the UN agencies working in Sierra Leone developed a holistic programme to educate troops about connections between HIV/AIDS, gender inequality and sexual exploitation in conflict situations.

34. UNIFEM has also provided support for a gender expert in the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Youth. Alongside this initiative, UNIFEM has assisted in the development of the Women's Law Reform Agenda as well as in building capacity to promote gender justice in the Law Reform Commission. This has enabled a strategic partnership to develop between UNIFEM, the Commission and civil society, particularly in promoting the Bill on Domestic Violence (UNIFEM, 2003). Draft laws are monitored for their gender sensitivity. The police force has also received gender training.

35. The presence of women in politics became an issue during the post conflict reconstruction period. In 2000, the 50/50 Group of Sierra Leone was founded in order to promote women's participation in electoral politics. Their objective was to train women political leaders and encourage women to stand as candidates. They saw their role as providing support for women politicians. They held rallies, public lectures and established a national network of branches in every region of the country before the elections. They also trained a thousand women in leadership and advocacy. However, the results were disappointing. In the May 2002 elections, 109 women stood for election. Of the 124 seats in Parliament, only 18 were won by women. In other areas of government, at the local level for instance, 11 percent of representatives are women and only 8 percent hold administrative and management positions (Human Development Report, 1998). In a country where there is an extraordinarily high illiteracy rate – 80 percent of women and 60 percent of men – combined with a strong patriarchal culture, these low figures are not surprising. However, the considerable advocacy around gender during the period of reconstruction by both international agencies and civil society has enabled a more women-friendly policy process to emerge, particularly in the legal reform arena. But unless there is a more concerted challenge to the rights of men over women and a recognition that the full equality of women is the basis for a democratic society to emerge, the terrible price of the civil war will simply be to reinvent women's subordination.

36. The case studies above show that war can be a catalyst for the transformation of gender relations, in particular for women because they often assumed new leadership roles in their homes and communities. These gains need to be supported by both local and

international NGO so that women's rights are acknowledged and integrated into the peace-building that takes place after the conflict has ended. Above all, the women's organisations in civil society that emerge during and after conflict need to be given support by the international community. It is these organisations that form the backbone of the citizenship claims made by women and the potential for society to move into full democracy in the aftermath of conflict.

III. INCREASING WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT

37. Although the most visible strategy for increasing women's representation is the demand for quotas to break through ideological and institutional barriers, it is important to note that there is a multiplicity of ways in which women can gain political access. These range from internal pressure within political parties to legislated requirements for parties to include women on electoral lists. Furthermore, increased representation on its own is of limited use in advancing gender equality; representation needs to be underpinned by increased participation of women in all forms of decision-making in society and by the development of strong women's movements. Feminist research on women's increased access to political power shows the enormity of the challenges that lie ahead, firstly, in transforming institutions and, secondly, in developing the forms of political mobilization and constituency building that will enable representational politics to be successful. This research challenges us to consider the conditions under which women's access to political office can be directed toward the goal of reducing social and economic inequalities of gender.

38. Anne Marie Goetz and Shireen Hassim have argued that representational demands need to be linked to the process of building *effective participation*, where the emphasis is on more effective interest articulation and representation – i.e. to make the 'voice' of particular constituencies of women louder in processes of policymaking (Goetz and Hassim 2003). As Goetz points out, we should be careful not to assume that amplified voice 'will automatically strengthen the moral and social claims of the powerless on the powerful and produce better accountability to that group' (2003, 34). Although in many cases, the mere presence of women in parliaments shifts 'the patriarchal demeanor of political institutions' (www.gender.ac.za/50/50) and forces institutions to recognize women, institutional norms and procedures and the nature of processes of deliberation can undermine the extent and impact of women's voice in the public sphere. Women representatives face enormous difficulties in being taken seriously within institutions that are historically and culturally male. These more subtle patterns by which power hierarchies are upheld, even when new groups are included in institutions, are hard to make visible as well as hard to change. Women's participation as individuals in institutions of decision-making is generally limited – women are less likely to participate in parliamentary debates than men and are more likely

to feel intimidated by the demands of public speaking, even when the women elected are highly skilled professionals.

39. Participation should also be understood as an activity that encompasses *collective* mobilization, such as in the formation of associations around their own needs and interests over which women have control. A strong social movement has the capacity to articulate the particular interests of its constituencies, to mobilize those constituencies in defence of those interests and is able to develop independent strategies to achieve its aims while holding open the possibilities of alliance with other progressive movements. This definition suggests that a strong social movement requires a degree of political autonomy in order to retain its relative power within any alliance.

40. Women's movements are not homogeneous entities characterized by singular and coherent sets of demands. Rather, by their nature they tend to be diverse, embracing multiple organizational forms, ideologies and even at times contradictory demands. Despite these diversities, however, it is possible to name and loosely bind together organizations that mobilize women collectively on the basis of their gender identity as a 'women's movement'. One of the challenges of building strong women's movements is developing ongoing and synergistic relationships between women representatives and women in grassroots organizations. Solidarity associations often provide the arenas in which women develop collective consciousness that can be mobilized when the survival of communities is at stake. In many cases collective consciousness developed within these arenas forms the bedrock of indigenous feminist mobilization. As Temma Kaplan (1997) has pointed out, although the activities within these forms of organizations are 'unspectacular' and may seem politically insignificant, they can be important sources for the emergence of social movements (not only women's movements). Like other social movements, women's movements wax and wane in the context of particular political, economic and social crises.

41. Women's participation in national liberation struggles was very important in laying the basis for contemporary women's movements. Although women have always been politically active, especially when the definition of activism is widened to include private acts of resistance to injustice and the modes of song and story-telling through which women have articulated their political visions, nationalism enabled mass-based collective action. Women's participation in these movements resulted in relatively rapid shifts from their roles as the foot soldiers of male-dominated movements to demands for women to be recognized as full citizens. In several countries, such as Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa, women activists demanded that post-independence political platforms include commitments to gender equality. Nevertheless, gender politics was constrained by the paternalistic framework of nationalism: women relied on the movement/party as the primary vehicle for articulating their citizenship claims and rarely developed autonomous political movements of their own. Yet, as Tripp (2000) points out, without relatively autonomous women's organisations, political parties and nationalist movements may undermine the agenda of equality.

42. Contemporary strategies for institutional inclusion have a different character, however, as women are more firmly in control of their strategic aims, their ideological forms and organizational vehicles through their separate organizations. In many ways, this shift represents a growing sense of agency and the flowering of indigenous forms of feminism that emerged out of women's participation in national liberation struggles. Contemporary women's movements seek to force open political space, and have been important in enabling democratization in many countries on the continent. Among the earliest of these was the Ugandan women's movement, which used the transition to democracy in 1986 to develop associations that were independent of government and political parties (Tripp 2000). In both Uganda and South Africa, women's organisations used the openings created by the transition to democracy to galvanise an equality agenda and lobby political elites to include women in political office and to adopt a rhetoric of gender equality in state discourses (Tripp, 2000; Hassim, 2005).

43. The idea that women's interests can be successfully advanced from within the state has a chequered history in African governments, as it has been associated most closely with the idea of national machineries for women, which have treated women's interests as narrow and 'special' and as in need of patronage (Mama, 2002). Creating a set of specialized institutions for the consideration of gender shifted the issues of gender inequality out of the realm of politics and into the technical realm of policymaking. As Banaszek, Beckwith and Rucht (2003, 6) point out, this is increasingly a problem with national machineries around the world: 'women's movements have been presented with an increasingly depoliticized and remote set of policy-making agencies at the national level...The relocation of responsibility to non-elected state bodies eventually reduces social movement influence.' In the administration gender equality concerns have fallen hostage to a range of institutional hierarchies and systemic blockages that are hard to deal with from outside the bureaucracy. However, women's movements have also been concerned with developing a bottom-up politics in which different constituencies of women identify and define policy demands which can be advanced as part of a coalition of interests (for example, poor urban women linking up with housing movements) as well as through policy-focused alliances with (or where necessary pressure on) women parliamentarians. The emphasis on building a constituency-based politics recognizes that not all women have the same interests, that women's organizations might conceive of their interests differently from women politicians, and that strong organizations of women at the local level enhance democracy. In Uganda, for example, the mobilisation of women at the grassroots created opportunities for indirect political apprenticeship and enhanced the ability of women's organisations to hold the government accountable to international conventions (Ahikire, 2005).

Representation and Electoral Systems

44. Electoral systems have been shown to have a decisive effect on the numbers of women elected to political office; indeed, comparative research shows decisively that it is the most important predictive factor with regard to women's representation. There are two broad categories of electoral systems, the proportional representation model (where a

country is divided into one or more voting districts, voters vote for parties which then receive the equivalent proportion of representatives that are drawn from a party list) and the strictly majoritarian (where voters vote in as many constituencies or wards as there are seats in parliament for an individual party candidate and the ‘winner takes all’) model. Each model has inherent strengths and weaknesses in terms of their effects on representation, on the relationship between constituencies and representatives and on the ways in which political parties are institutionalized. Viewed only on the indicator of impact on women’s representation, it is apparent that the multi-member proportional representation model (that is where voters can choose between candidates and parties in a PR district, whatever its size) is the most effective in opening opportunities for women to access political office. All thirteen top-ranking countries in IDEA’s women and representation list have either a proportional representation voting system or a mixed system in which some candidates are elected through PR and some on the basis of constituencies. Of these thirteen, nine have ruling parties that used a quota for women.

Table 1: *Highest Ranking Countries in Terms of Women’s Representation, 2003*

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Percentage Women</i>
1	Rwanda	48.8
2	Sweden	45.0
3	Denmark	38.0
4	Finland	36.5
5	Norway	36.4
6	Costa Rica	35.1
7	Iceland	34.9
8	Netherlands	34.0
9	Germany	32.2
10	Argentina	30.7
11	Mozambique	30.0
12	South Africa	29.9
13	Seychelles	29.4

Source: Julie Ballington (ed.) (2004) *The Implementation of Quotas: African Experiences*, Stockholm: International IDEA.

Although Sub-Saharan Africa has seen rapid increases in the representation of women, it still lags behind many regions in the world, as Table 2 demonstrates.

Table 2: *Women in National Parliaments by Region, 2003*

<i>Region</i>	<i>Percentage Women</i>
Nordic countries	39.7
Americas	18.4
Europe (excl. Nordic)	15.5

Asia	15.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	14.9
Pacific	12.1
Arab States	6.0

Source: Drude Dahlerup (2004) “Quotas are Changing the History of Women”, in Ballington (ed.) p. 16.

Table 3: *Women’s Representation in African Countries*

<i>Country</i>	<i>Type of Quota</i>	<i>Year Quota Introduced</i>	<i>% Women in National Legislature, 2003</i>
Burkina Faso	Voluntary party	2002	11.7
Cameroon	Voluntary party	1996	8.9
Cote d’Ivoire	Voluntary party	-	8.5
Djibouti	Legislative	2002	10.8
Mali	Voluntary party	-	10.2
Mozambique	Voluntary party	1994	30.0
Namibia	Voluntary party	1997/1999	29.2
South Africa	Voluntary party	1994	29.8
Tunisia	Voluntary party	-	11.5
Djibouti	Legislative	2002	10.8
Eritrea	Legislative	1995	22.0
Kenya	Legislative	1997	7.1
Morocco	Legislative	2002	10.8
Niger	Legislative	2000	1.2
Rwanda	Constitutional	2003	48.8
Somalia	Constitutional	2001	10.0
Sudan	Legislative	2000	9.7
Tanzania	Constitutional	2000	22.3
Uganda	Constitutional	1989	24.7

Source: Adapted from Tripp, 2004 and Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2004.

45. The above table provides evidence for the unevenness of the numerical effectiveness of quotas – and that even legislated quotas do not always provide the expected outcome. In Morocco, for instance, there are two lists, one with 30 seats for women only. And with only one political party with an informal quota, the number of women only reached 35 out of 325 seats altogether. In Mozambique, on the other hand, where there is no legal quota, but a commitment by the ruling party to a balanced list and a 30% quota, women’s representation reached 34.8%. Countries without quotas also display uneven outcomes – Ghana without a quota reached 10.9% - 25 seats out of 230 are held by women; Lesotho has 11.7%. Egypt, however, has only 2.4% representation of women. A key factor is the extent to which political parties commit themselves to promoting women in politics.

46. The proportional representation system has dramatic effects because:
- It allows the use of quotas to ‘level the political playing field’ to include those who are disadvantaged culturally and economically;
 - Voters vote for parties and not individuals – so it hurdles over attitudinal and cultural blockages to women in government;
 - It facilitates the use of multi-member constituencies, which further allows parties to balance lists (so that both individuals and parties can be voted for).

47. However, a number of considerations have been identified as important in making PR systems effective from the point of view of women’s representation.

- Placement on party lists: women tend to be put lower down in ‘unelectable positions’, so gender activists advocate for the ‘zebra stripe’ – every second or third candidate a woman.
- PR systems foster dependence on political party commitment. It is therefore important to promote democratization in the party political system as well as within political parties.
- Not all PR systems use quotas, and even where quotas are used these may be voluntary rather than legislatively mandated (see Table 3).

These considerations are discussed in more detail in the next section.

Quotas as a ‘fast-track’ to increasing representation

48. Quota demands tend to emphasize the creation of collective identity; they rest on the successful articulation of women’s group-based interest in entering arenas of power. Quotas are a means of achieving recognition; indeed they are best understood as a form of symbolic politics, as there is no predictable relationship between the greater number of women in decision-making and feminist outcomes. Interest representation, by contrast, may shatter the notion of women as a homogeneous group as the resource claims of some women based on their class and/or race disadvantages may come into conflict with the interests of other women, or require the building of alliances with other social actors, sometimes at the expense of building a grassroots constituency.

49. Those arguing for remaining focused on inclusion through the use of quotas cite the need for women’s movements to gain access to political power to pursue the interests of representation effectively. Although they can gain this access through effective mobilization, they also need linkages with power brokers within political parties in order to ensure ongoing attention to the political system. Consequently there is a tendency for such politics to become increasingly elite-based. Although it is generally accepted in feminist literature that a combination of factors is responsible for women’s increased access to political office – the nature of the political system and the organization of political competition, the nature of civil society and especially of the feminist lobby within it, and

the nature and power of the state – all too often actual political strategies are collapsed into a demand for a quota. This is not surprising; it is without doubt more difficult to re-shape the nature of the political system except, as the South African case demonstrates, during periods of major transition. Quotas are seen as a fast-track mechanism to cut through more intractable institutional blockages, to at least get ‘a foot in the door’ of the political system.

50. By 2003, Tripp notes, ‘approximately 19 countries had adopted some form of legislative quotas for women; some, like Angola, had plans to adopt quotas, while others, like the Gambia, Kenya and Nigeria, were engaged in ongoing debates on quotas’ (Tripp, 2004: 73). These developments were a combined product of activism in relation to CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action. There is enormous strategic sense in pushing for quotas in Africa, as they are politically cheap (and therefore politically sale-able) in political systems where there is a single dominant party; extending a quota to women does mean that some men will not get onto party lists, but with sufficient power a dominant party can in any case exert control over the women they place on party lists. Advancing women into prominent positions is also relatively costless electorally when you have the combination of an electoral system of proportional representation (PR) with list and a dominant party. Yet *processes* of representation also matter from the perspective of effective representation. Electoral systems play a key role in determining the nature of the relationship between elected representatives, political parties and constituencies. PR systems are now commonly assumed to be the most favourable for women. But the system carries costs that are less frequently detailed. On the one hand, a PR system allows progressive parties to bypass customary and cultural objections to women’s election – no small factor in societies where conservative religious forces dominate civil society. On the other hand, they also allow parties to establish mechanisms of control over elected leaders. PR systems breed loyalty to party rather than constituency; Jennifer Disney (2005) shows how in Mozambique this can undermine the effectiveness of women members of parliament (MPs) as they simply ‘say yes’ to the party. In Uganda, one of the first countries on the continent to adopt the system of reserved seats for women (parliament was expanded to accommodate this increased representation), the effects on women’s political power have also been mixed. Tripp argues that in Uganda allegiances to the National Resistance Movement at times hamper the ability of women MPs to support legislation favoured by the women’s movement (see also Tamale, 1999). Tamale warns against ‘symbolic, top-down impositions’ of quotas that may reinforce women’s allegiance to men rather than substantive representation (see Ballington, 2004, p. 29). Similar concerns have been expressed in the South African case, where women MPs have found it difficult to establish a set of priorities for feminist intervention (Hassim, 2005).

51. These concerns raise the dilemma of party paternalism. The ability of women representatives to mobilize within their parties and their willingness to challenge party hierarchies is an important determinant of the extent to which women will be effectively represented, yet individual women MPs often find it difficult to develop the confidence and political base from which to push for gender equality platforms. In many countries parliamentary women’s caucuses have been mooted as a strategy for setting priorities and building support and confidence. However, as Disney (2005) and Hassim (2003) and

Britton (2005) show for Mozambique and South Africa, respectively, these have not been successful precisely because of the electoral system. In both countries a voluntary party quota is combined with a PR system. FRELIMO and the ANC have both adopted a 30 percent quota, thus raising women's representation in their national parliaments to 31.2 percent and 31.3 percent respectively. Yet, in both countries, women MPs have found that there are challenges in balancing the commitment to the political party against the commitment to gender equality. Women are after all elected to represent the party and not women as a constituency. The challenge is therefore whether and how women's gender interests can be articulated in a way that is distinct from their party interests and identities. Uganda is an intriguing example in this respect. There women are elected to seats reserved for women, by an electoral college made up of women and men councillors, but rather than unambiguously representing women, are required to represent the district as a whole. This means that women MPs remain beholden to the movement as the primary political force and that the election of women MPs who might challenge movement policies in parliament is as unlikely as in a multiparty PR system. As Tripp (2005) argues this has led women's movement activists to change the electoral process so that the women's seats are elected by universal adult suffrage – unsurprisingly, a move opposed by the president.

52. Senegal, with its mixed electoral system, also offers an interesting counterpoint to the conventional PR system. Although more women are elected to parliament through the PR than through the plurality system, Creevey (2005) points out that an increasing number of women are elected through the plurality system. She shows the role that political leadership and a modernizing party can play in shifting attitudes towards women – showing what possibilities there are for feminist politics even in constituency-based systems. However, Kasse (2005) points out that while there is support for the principle of using quotas to increase women in decision-making at the level of the national executive of political parties, at the level of local party structures there is resistance to quotas, even among women who may see them as demeaning. Similarly, Longman writes that in Rwanda it would be erroneous to attribute the massive gains in gender representation to quotas alone, as the number of women in non-reserved elected seats has also increased dramatically – with women winning nearly half of all the seats in the national assembly in the 2003 elections (against a guaranteed 30 percent of seats). Similarly, Longman (2005) points out, women won offices where quotas did not apply, as in the election of judges. The involvement of women in previous governments and particularly in the democracy movement appears to account for the rapid increases in the number of women in elected seats. In addition, as in Senegal, strong support for women's rights and women's political representation from the president of the leading party (the Rwandan Patriotic Front) played a key role.

53. Yet both the Senegalese and Rwandan cases show the potentially ugly side of presidentialism and single party dominance, with Creevey (2005) and Longman (2005) both warning of rising authoritarian tendencies in the ruling party. Indeed, Longman argues that the increase in women's representation in parliament 'serves more as an instrument of legitimizing and preserving RPF power.' This statement might be overly strong, yet it suggests that democratic women's movements need to move quickly to buttress the

openings allowed in transitional periods to build strong movements outside parliament that will sustain women's representational gains. These examples suggest that women cannot rely on political parties as their only vehicles for representation. They reinforce the importance of independent representative organizations in the women's movement that may have relationships with political parties but also have an independent existence. This ensures that women are not only mobilized for their votes but as electoral constituencies – that is, constituencies with clearly articulated policy interests.

54. The case studies also implicitly highlight the importance of linking representation to accountability, not least to guard against women parliamentarians becoming co-opted by male party elites. Here women can benefit from multipartyism, even though the innate democratic potential of multipartyism is often over-rated. As Disney (2005) shows for Mozambique there is a distinction between a women's organization representing all women and one representing a distinct constituency of women. In the former instance we see a reflection of the nationalist assumption that the nation is a singular homogeneous entity with one legitimate representative party. In the latter political constituencies are not pre-given but there is a socially and politically constructed relationship between citizens and political parties that needs to be constantly nurtured. Multiparty systems can also assist constituencies of women to push parties into supporting gender equality because of the threat that they can vote for other parties. In Sweden, for example, feminists successfully advanced the argument that they would switch their allegiances from the Social Democratic Party if women's views on party policies (such as nuclear weapons) were not taken into account. In South Africa, feminist gains within the African National Congress have produced a contagion effect; virtually all parties now formally support gender equality thus democratizing the party system as a whole.

55. The relationship between women parliamentarians and the women's movement is as difficult as the relationship between women activists and leaders *within* political parties. In some respects there are organic political ties within these spheres; many women parliamentarians cut their political teeth in women's organizations. As a result, the relationship between party/parliament and civil society can often be fluid as women activists can move back and forth between state and civil society. This fluidity solidifies policy influence but can also have negative impacts in countries with small political elites. Close personal and political relationships can breed a sense of loyalty to comrades that undermines criticism. Yet even if political elites were a much larger segment of the population, there are inherent tensions in this relationship. Anne Summers (1986) has characterized this as the tension between missionaries (activists in civil society) and mandarins (politicians) with each expecting relationships of support and accountability that may be hard to fulfill. In South Africa, for instance, there has been a growing gap between women in the national machinery and women in civil society (Hassim 2003; Gouws 2004). Britton suggests that the gap is recognized and that attempts are being made for closer cooperation between different sections of the national machinery and women's organizations in civil society. However, the structural tension between femocrats inside the state, accountable to bureaucratic hierarchies, and women's organizations with more radical demands is likely to persist.

Local government

56. Local government has been the Cinderella of the movement for women's representation in Africa, as most attention has focused on increasing women's access to national parliaments. Representational gains made at the level of national parliaments have not been replicated at local government level. For example, in Mozambique women's representation in the national parliament is 31.2 percent, while at the local government level it is 17 percent. This pattern is replicated in a number of African countries. In Namibia, by contrast, the legislated requirement of a 30 percent quota at local government level has had the desired effect, with over 40 percent of elected candidates being women.

57. Yet women's participation in local government has also been advanced as a vital part of building a democratic system. It is perceived as the arena in which women are most likely to participate in politics as it is 'close to home', deals with issues that are central to households for which women are responsible (delivery of essential services such as water and electricity, as well as safety and security), and is the level of politics supposedly most amenable to community-level interventions. At the local level, it is argued, women are more likely to see the value of political participation as an extension of their work in neighbourhood associations, and this might indeed be a stepping-stone to national political involvement (Evertzen, 2001).

58. Gender activists have also advanced arguments that women's participation in local government is likely to lead to more effective and efficient delivery of services, that will have a positive impact on the democratic system as a whole. Women's understanding of the needs of households can be translated into knowledge for local planners and delivery agencies, leading to a virtuous circle of gender-sensitive policies and increased and better valued participation of women. Josephine Ahikire argues that substantial numerical increases of women in local government affects 'not just the articulation and promotion of gender issues in local politics, but also the character and conduct of local politics' (Ahikire, 2003: 213).

59. Despite these arguments, there has been relatively little attempt to measure women's representation in local governments in African countries. In part this is because of the post-independence history of conflict, which resulted in relatively weakly developed state formations at the local level. In many countries, local government was effectively in the hands of kleptocratic and violent leaders, or traditional authorities reluctant to lose what little powers over revenue collection or resource allocation that they possessed. As a result, women tended to stay outside mechanisms of political power, using survival networks and community and family support structures as avenues for collective organization. In rural Angola, for example, structures of governance have been virtually non-existent at the local level for many years, as a result of the civil war (Beall, 2005: 5).

60. Local government appears to be the level at which political party commitments to the principles of gender equality and parity in decision-making are most likely to find obstacles. As Beall points out, ‘because of its closeness to society the local state can become too close to social institutions’ (Beall, 2005: iii). When social institutions are deeply patriarchal and resistant to progressive social change, they can act as a real brake on the agenda for gender equality. In some cases, national governments are reluctant to intervene too directly in local governance for fear of stimulating political backlash and increasing conflict. Thus, for example, traditional authorities in South Africa have significant powers over resource allocation at the local level because of political accommodations made with the ruling ANC. As a result, the features of good governance that are promoted at the national level are not always present in the local state. Cultural prejudices against women’s participation in decision-making can be stronger and more overtly articulated than at national level. Women may lack the access to powerful informal networks that operate at the local level, and as yet find it difficult to establish alternative networks with access to social and power.

61. In the era of democratization ushered in during the last two decades of the twentieth century, some countries have made notable attempts to build democratic and participatory local government. In Namibia, the parliament adopted an affirmative action provision in the Local Authorities Act of 1992, which required that parties had to include at least two women in local government councils with ten or fewer members, and at least three in councils with eleven or more members. As a result, 37 percent of the local councillors elected in 1992 were women. In 1997, the quota was strengthened to provide for a minimum 30 percent representation of women at local level. Parties voluntarily agreed to ensure that women candidates alternated with male candidates on the electoral lists, on the ‘zebra’ principle. The result was that over 40 percent of elected councillors in 1998 were women. Women’s organizations such as Sister Namibia have played a central role in these debates, and have provided training workshops that raise the awareness of women’s role in decision-making.

62. One of the first African countries to address the role of women in local government decision-making actively was Uganda. The 1995 Constitution established the principle that 30 percent of all positions on local councils would be reserved for women. Yet this has not necessarily translated into an appreciation of women’s role in decision-making. As Ahikire points out, the election of women councillors is an add-on to the electoral system, and voter education and voter turn-out for these elections has been poor. The poor turn-out demonstrated ‘voter ambivalence about the legitimacy of women councillors, and confusion about the constituencies they represent’ (Ahikire, 2003: 221). Women councillors’ lack of legitimacy has impacts on a number of levels within the system, with women being seen as ‘second-class’ councillors, and finding themselves perpetually placed on minor committees or in powerless positions on committees.

63. At local government level, training for women candidates is possibly even more urgent than at national level, where women have had the experience of party involvement and the backing of the party machinery behind them. Women often lack access to the funds

necessary to run campaigns at the local level. In Zambia, the National Women's Lobby has actively campaigned for women to participate in decision-making, and backs up this campaign with training in campaigning, public speaking and communication skills (Beall, 2005: 7). Yet it has been harder to achieve results at the local level. In the multiparty system instituted in 1991, women accounted for only 1 percent of the 1080 local councillors. After the second elections, the number of women rose to 5.6 percent of the total number of councillors. This increase was in part a result of a campaign by women's rights activists to support women candidates regardless of their party affiliation.

IV. The role of International Civil Society and the Media in building gender sensitive democratic societies in Africa after conflict

64. While the sustainability of the women's movement in the face of new challenges in the aftermath of civil strife and of the democratization of authoritarian societies depend largely on the internal capacity and will of both women political leaders and women in the grass roots to organise, an important factor is also the continued support of international civil society and the media, in assisting those organizations and civil movements to develop mechanisms of sustainability. No democracy can survive without a vibrant and viable civil society that both monitors and challenges states and governments.

65. Most societies emerging from war or authoritarianism face significant problems of exclusion, inequality and underdevelopment. Without both human and infrastructural resources, no society can rebuild its social fabric and its social capital. This cannot be done without considerable injections of knowledge and financial capital – much of which must come from outside sources. Thus the role of the international community, both of states and of international civil society, is vital in the reconstruction and transformation of unstable and vulnerable states. This is particularly the case for states in Africa, where civil wars have depleted resources, destroyed the infrastructure and caused harm to the psychological and spiritual state of the people. The toll on human capacity has been enormous in whichever country one turns to - whether we consider the interrelated conflicts in Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo in the Great Lakes Region, or those in West Africa, the Mano River Union countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, or in the more self-contained conflicts in Côte D'Ivoire, Senegal, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Niger and Nigeria, or in the countries of the Horn of Africa, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, or in southern Africa, in Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and South Africa. In all of these conflicts, women and children have often borne the brunt of the destruction, for they have often been used as pawns in the battle for political power and control, and have formed the bulk of refugees and internally displaced people. This is not to ignore the significant agency of women in the conflicts themselves, either as combatants or as activists in other ways.

66. While the United Nations has played an important role in providing many of the resources needed to sustain peace through different agencies, independent organizations have also played their part. In Africa, International Alert, for instance, established in 1985

by Martin Ennals, the former Secretary General of Amnesty International, was set up in order to try and broker peace between warring factions in Liberia. Based upon the expertise of peace-brokers in the North, the idea was to provide an early warning system that would enable intervention that would promote dialogue between groups that were divided by conflict. Programmes to build capacity in conflict zones to promote peace were developed with people on the ground. Situational analyses and research undertaken by such organizations was important in ensuring that the views, needs and interests of people living in situations of conflict would be reflected in the higher levels where peace was actually brokered.

67. International Alert works specifically with women's networks in order to ensure that their traditional exclusion from peace processes is countered. Thus the work conducted in the Democratic Republic of Congo among women's organizations has been important in bringing representatives from different parts of the DRC to meetings that have discussed peace. The organization also supported the process of developing a National Women's Platform for peace, security and the promotion of women's human rights. In 2002, International Alert provided support for women from the East and West to attend the Inter-Congolese Dialogue at Sun City, in South Africa. Thus, along with the initiatives of UNIFEM in promoting women's political participation, international civil society was able to ensure that among the civil society observers to the Sun City meeting were a considerable number of women leaders from all over the DRC. International Alert has continued to support the peace process in the DRC by providing training for civil society about the Peace Accord and the importance of monitoring the more formal discussions between different political parties and regional factions.

68. In West Africa, a range of initiatives have seen the growth of regional networks to provide information and support for peacebuilding efforts. The African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), for example was started by three women from different countries to support women's NGO initiatives in Africa. The West African Network for Peacebuilding which grew out of the Liberia civil war in 1990 received support from AWDF. So did WIPNET, the Women in Peacebuilding Network. None of this work would have been possible without the indigenous initiatives, but nor could they have been able to sustain the networking without the support from international civil society – particular donors such as the Global Fund for Women and the various foundations based in the United States and Europe.

69. A particularly interesting initiative is that of Internews, which was established in 1982 to help promote independent news coverage in both the print and electronic media.¹ They have trained media professionals in significant numbers about promoting open communication policies and responsible reporting. They were particularly important in Rwanda, where the national radio had been responsible for fanning the flames of hatred between Hutu and Tutsi during the terrible period of the genocide. They have promoted a programme supporting local voices for justice in Rwanda. Journalists have also received

¹ See their websites.

special training from International Alert about the impact of media reporting in conflict situations.

70. International conferences have been an important aspect of promoting understanding and providing opportunities for networking between international civil society and local activists. At these conferences, networks form that do not always survive, but they do provide opportunities for exchange of ideas and understanding about the modalities of peace, and both opportunities and the dangers that these hold for promoting women's rights. Resolution 1325 was itself the outcome of global lobbying and a growing understanding of the very significant part that women can and do play in preventing conflicts as well as during conflict, in providing food security and nurture for society through their multiple roles. But the resolution itself remains somewhat limited in its effect because it is still not widely understood or disseminated in societies in conflict. Moreover, the lack of concrete commitments in Resolution 1325 make its value to women on the ground somewhat limited. The International community, especially UNIFEM, has an important role to play in ensuring that countries are apprised of the significance of the resolution support for peace-keeping operations. The different arms of the United Nations, too, especially peace forces, need to have gender training that involves understanding resolution 1325 and broader issues of women's rights and that sexual violence is a war crime (Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, 2005).

71. International agencies, such as International Alert, have suggested that the media have an important role to play in developing appropriate analyses of conflict situations, and in assisting in the development of conditions for peace. The way in which conflict is reported is often sensationalist, and can in fact add to misunderstandings between warring factions. Reporting has to be done in such a way that it is neither partisan nor a simplistic record of events on the ground. Analysis by journalists needs also to take into account the different roles of actors, including women, in different contexts. On the whole, women are registered as 'victims', a condition that fails to acknowledge the complex position and multiple roles that women play as members of societies in conflict. Women are actors, not passive victims. This aspect is one that has been recognized by many internal and external agencies, and programmes have been developed to provide some training for journalists who enter war zones.

72. The media is part of civil society, and needs to grasp the responsible role that it must play in providing news that helps those outside the conflict to understand the different forces at play.

V. Critical issues for reflection

73. From the discussion above, a number of critical issues emerge for consideration by international civil society and for gender equality activists within nation states, particularly in Africa.

1. **How can we build recognition of the view that increasing women’s representation in decision-making is a democratic good?** There is wide – spread agreement that no process of democratization is complete until women have full and equal access to elected positions, and women’s interests are fairly and equitably represented. Yet this commitment tends to be articulated at the rhetorical level and implementation of quota targets is abysmally slow. While the 30 percent critical mass provides a benchmark, international campaigns are beginning to push for 50/50 representation and quotas are seen as an important way to measure progress towards these goals. How can these campaigns be strengthened in the context of a significant social and political backlash from anti-equality forces?
2. In the light of the observations that women’s needs and interests are likely to be promoted more by women politicians, **what strategies should international civil society adopt in driving an understanding that women’s participation in setting priorities for policy and thus for national and local government spending is one of the key criteria for good governance?** Women’s presence and participation in adequate numbers would ensure that the different priorities of women and men would be attended to – women would tend to articulate and address the needs and interests of the diversity of women in society better than men. How can gender equality activists frame these challenging questions in order to convince not only male allies, but also opponents, both men and women?
3. In societies in transition – particularly societies in conflict – women play a diversity of roles. They are both agents and victims. In both capacities, women need to be present in shaping the decisions made about the future. Alongside men, they are also agents in conflicts as well as vital participants in building, managing and sustaining peace. However, conflict resolution agencies have tended to neglect the history of women’s contributions to civil society as well as the particular qualities and interests that women may bring to political processes. **We need to find strategies for increasing women’s representation in peace-keeping forces, introducing a gender perspective in peace-keeping and integrating gender mainstreaming into all programmes.**
4. **How can we advance the development of women as political constituencies and civil society agents?** As we have shown, electoral systems have a crucial bearing on the outcomes of elections. Proportional representation systems have the quickest and most dramatic impacts on the representation of women. However, gains can also be made in mixed PR-constituency, and constituency-based systems. These examples need to be more closely considered. PR systems also have some shortcomings in the ways in which they structure the relationship between elected representatives

and constituencies, and the consolidation of the power of party elites. The key factor in using electoral systems is the extent to which women's movements are able to mobilise constituencies to ensure that substantive representation of women's diverse interests is advanced. Although it is important to democratise formal political institutions, democratization processes rely for long-term sustainability on the strengthening of women's organizations in civil society. Campaigns to increase women's representation thus need to be accompanied by support for grassroots women's organizations and the strengthening of the gender equality lobby in civil society. This is part of what we called 'constituency building' in our discussion.

5. **How do we extend the gains made in national parliaments to the local government level?** Global attention has tended to focus on the performance of national parliaments in reaching the representation targets of 30 percent and 50 percent women. Some progress, albeit slow, is evident at this level. However, the local government level tends to be neglected, and even in countries where significant gains have been made in women's representation at the national level, local government lags behind the targets. It would appear that this is the level at which some of the most pernicious obstacles of socialization and cultural sanctions against women's participation in decision-making are being experienced.
6. Political parties in Africa have not generally been friendly environments for women. Recent changes towards the greater inclusion of women are important, but too often women remain subject to the goodwill and patronage of male elites. Women need to be part of agenda-setting within political parties, and not merely tokenistic symbols of the 'progressive' character of political parties. **How can women's independent agency be promoted?** Here the role of international and national civil society has an important role to play. Much greater communication and cooperation between international and national agencies should be promoted.
7. International civil society has a key role to play in increasing women's representation and participation. Much greater weight should be given to bringing together local and national civil society organizations and international civil society in developing strategies to promote ongoing peace-building. Such initiatives should include assisting in sustaining networks that hold women political party activists and civil society organizations, from which many women politicians are drawn, accountable to each other.
8. Further research into the ways in which the gains that women make in war, conflict and transitional situations are pushed back during peace and in new democracies needs to be supported.

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