

The Power to Change: Women's Participation and Representation in Africa

Background Discussion Paper Prepared for HBS Engendering Leadership Project

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1. Introduction

Movements for democracy in the last quarter of the twentieth century opened numerous opportunities for equality advocates to advance their claims for full representation of women in political systems. An important global shift during this period was the widespread conviction that political systems do not necessarily evolve incrementally in a democratic direction; rather, direct interventions are needed in institutional design and in political cultures to ensure inclusion and participation of all citizens. The re-design of electoral rules and procedures, the greater awareness of strong constitutions, and the opening of political systems to new actors opened spaces in the state and in the political system for women and other socially and politically marginalized groups. As a consequence in several parts of the world, electoral quotas became part of women's movements' agendas for political change and the number of women participating in national legislatures has undoubtedly increased. However, experiences of women's participation in parliaments have shown that merely relying on getting women into government through election processes is not enough to change conditions of gender inequality, especially when gender inequality is deeply rooted in the private sphere. To foster governance that actively promotes gender equality, what is needed is a far more conscious attempt by women in the state to set an agenda for change and to follow through with policy impacts, as well as for the development of stronger accountability mechanisms and processes between state and civil society.

To be sure, the state can be an extremely hostile environment for women, particularly in conditions of violent political conflict. In these conditions, women may exit the political arena altogether and 'leave the dirty game of politics for men to fight out' (Nason'o and Ayot, 2007: 189). However, our starting point is that it is not useful for feminists to think of the state as a homogenous, unified, patriarchal entity that pursues patriarchal interests. This approach ignores the enormous gains made by African women through the state, and obscures the possibility that there may be areas in the state that are easier for women to penetrate and to influence with a feminist agenda. We argue that the state is a conglomeration of spaces through which power is dispersed unevenly, with some spaces being more permeable to the influence of women's movements and women's agendas than others. Policies (however technocratic they may appear) are not simply responses to women's pre-existing interests. Women's interests are themselves constituted through policies. If we think of the state in this way we move away from thinking that women always have to be in opposition to the state. As Pringle and Watson (1996: 66) have argued "What feminists have been confronted with is not a state that represents men's interests over women's but government conducted in the context of dominant discourses which assume that men's interests are the only ones that exist". Some states are more

'women friendly' than others. When states are "women friendly" or develop "gender responsive" legislation it means that policy makers are open to the influence of women's voices in policy-making, and consider the impact of gender roles on men and women's lives (such as women's primary role as caregivers), as well as gender disaggregated data (statistics that show how men and women are differently influenced by certain conditions or issues,, e.g. violence). Consideration of this data determines how legislation will impact women as well as its impact on gendered responsibilities and the promotion of gender equality. For example, the Scandinavian states are considered more women friendly because their welfare benefits acknowledge women's greater contribution to care work as well as encourage fathers to be as involved in raising children through extended paternity benefits. The Scandinavian states also provide multiple levels of governance where women can engage the state (Kantola and Dahl, 2005: 54).

States are always products of their histories. In transitional societies that move away from authoritarianism to more democratic governance women will have to engage the authoritarian tendencies in the state (i.e. the urge to repress issues that conflict with mainstream agendas). Women leaders will also have to be able to identify spaces in the state that are more women friendly or open to changes of discourse.

In this paper we seek to explore some of the complexities associated with the efforts of feminist political actors to foster gender responsive governance in African democracies. We do so in reference to Goetz and Hassim (2003), who provide a framework for assessing women's political efficacy by considering their levels of access, presence and influence across different political arenas - the state, the political system and civil society. We have developed this framework by referring to three political processes which are outlined in section two: access, agenda setting and accountability. Our central contention in this section is that these three processes are inter-related processes rather than sequential or episodic events. By this we mean that the ways in which access is secured is tied to the kinds of agendas that are set and the nature of the accountability relationship between representatives and constituencies (Hassim, 2009). In section three we explore how these political processes have played out in relation to specific but widespread governance features and trends in the African context. On the basis of this, we draw out some implications and questions that should be posed when considering women's engagement with democratic states on the continent, or the strategies relied on for their empowerment.

It is important to reiterate that while for the purposes of analysis we attempt to separate these processes out from one another, in practice they are closely intertwined and often co-exist. We seek to demonstrate that while it is often assumed that women's access to the state leads to feminist agenda setting and accountability to women as a constituency, this is not necessarily the case. More accurately, the nature and levels of access, presence and influence of feminists in the state, civil society and the political system determine the extent to which gender responsive governance is possible. A final introductory comment is that, as a Background Discussion Paper meant to frame the Engendering Leadership project, this paper is neither exhaustive in its review of the literature on women and the state, nor does it comprehensively reflect experiences from the multitudes of countries on the continent.

2. Outlining conceptual underpinnings

Access

Access refers to the ability of women to enter the state, both in the electoral arena as well as the policy arena. Access can be attained through a variety of means. In the electoral arena, strategies include the use of quotas, reserved seats, party influence and global norm-setting through multinational agreements (such as the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development). In the policy arena, governments may invite women's participation, women's movements may challenge policies that discriminate against women in consultative processes and most commonly in Africa, special mechanisms collectively known as national gender machineries can offer institutionalized access to policy making processes. In the parliamentary arena, access can range from the ability to make submissions to government on upcoming legislation, attending public hearings on legislation, to one on one discussions with members of parliament. Access is also the beginning of a process of keeping government accountable for its actions toward a constituency of women.

The extent to which women can obtain political access is largely influenced by a society's political culture, cultural attitudes, identity politics as well as the economic barriers that accompany gender roles. The nature of the political system (whether it is democratic, authoritarian or a dictatorship) impacts the number of and contestation between parties. The electoral system will determine how, and how many, women get into parliament. Formal commitments to equal participation may not translate into more seats in parliament. In situations of nation building, contestations between the interests of including women and acknowledging ethnic particularities play a role in the outcomes of representation (Agbalajobi, 2010: 77). For these reasons, quotas have been proposed as a mechanism for breaking through entrenched barriers to women's participation. In the policy arena, National Gender Machineries are important structures that can support women in government and provide access to the structures in which the key priorities of governments are set. However, their effectiveness in terms of access depends on the extent to which they allowed to participate in Cabinet (for example) as full members.

Agenda setting/ Influence

One of the ways to determine whether women leaders make a difference is to observe whether they are able to set a feminist agenda, or an agenda that will advance gender equality. Agenda setting

can be viewed as the process through which government priorities are set, and needs or problems are given attention from the government.

Flammang (1997: 253) distinguishes between a systemic agenda (issues that fall within the legitimate concern of governments, meriting its attention) and a legislative agenda (the institutional agenda of law makers) (See also Kenney, 2003: 180). The legislative agenda always lags behind the systemic agenda and it is therefore important that issues identified in the systemic agenda are kept alive until they reach lawmakers. This process is aided by what Flammang (1997: 254) calls issue publics in four different categories: (1) identification group (those who identify the issue), (2) attention group (those who pay attention to the issue), (3) attentive public (those who have a stake in it), and (4) general public (those who are less informed and less involved). Women political leaders can bring gender equality issues to the legislative and systemic agendas by acting in the first two publics when they identify issues and mobilise those who pay attention to the issue. For this reason, it has been demonstrated that agenda setting processes are more effective when women in government are part of women's policy networks outside government. This is linked to the different roles political and civil society actors play in different publics. Kenney (2003: 179) emphasizes the importance of networks of "insiders" and "outsiders" in the agenda setting process, which she views as carrying greater weight than when political elites alone are responsible for change. An influential agenda setting process therefore requires that women in the state work with women in civil society.

Applying this framework to the African context, it is evident that different political cultures and unevenness in the role of parliaments can affect the relationship between systemic and legislative agendas. For example, legislation to end formal discrimination may be more easily achieved in contexts where demonstrating commitment to gender equality is part of the government's official stance, but there may be far less support for integrating these concerns into actual policies.

When it comes to gender equality, Walby (2005: 323) argues that we should distinguish between approaches that are "agenda setting" and those that are "integrationist". As she explains:

Agenda setting implies the transformation and reorientation of existing policy paradigms, changing decision making processes, prioritizing gender equality objectives and rethinking policy ends. In this approach it is the mainstream that changes. Integrationist approaches are those that introduce a gender perspective without challenging the existing policy paradigm ...

It is clear that an agenda setting process will have a transformative effect on policy making.

Agenda setting approaches offer the opportunity to put women's issues at the core of the agenda. But this type of agenda setting implies leadership that will be able to pay attention to the goals of women's movements, gender equality and women's empowerment as articulated by the women's movement (Jahan, 1996: 829). Jahan also points out that an agenda setting approach will have to give priority to the strengthening of women's agency, women's groups and organizations. Nkoyo (2002) refers to this as an 'impacting agenda' as distinct from one that is rhetorical and pays 'lip service' without attempting social transformation.

The integrationist approach that Walby (2005) refers to involves gender mainstreaming, an approach that is now widely used by governments and National Gender Machineries to insert gender concerns into all legislative and policy processes. As a large body of literature shows, the successes of gender mainstreaming has been uneven; it is an approach that demands a high level of gender expertise and ability to access decision making and policy implementation at multiple levels of government. Nevertheless, women politicians can use National Gender Machineries as useful allies, on condition that these structures are functional and can be accessed by women leaders.

Because the agenda setting process requires the involvement of different interest publics and the cultivation of political support inside and outside the state, multi-pronged strategies have to be developed to advance feminist agendas. One of the crucial arguments made in relation to increasing women's representation is that a 'critical mass' is needed – this is the threshold after which women's numerical presence accumulates to influence. National machineries offer institutionalized influence and under particular circumstances they can indeed effectively set agendas. Other approaches include internal party strategizing by women sections of parties, women's caucuses in state structures, alliances between women from different political parties, coalitions between women politicians and the women's movement, as well as between social movements.

Because an agenda for equality should reflect the needs and demands of women, agenda-setting processes should also involve consultation in the form of research and public opinion surveys. The aim would be to get information that could inform government of women's grievances and demands that subsequently can be rectified through well-targeted government action. Optimally, this is also an avenue through which strategies that empower women in communities can be presented as alternatives to top-down delivery of goods and services.

Agenda-setting can be thought of as the culmination of women's engagement with civil society, politics and the state, a process which integrates the voices of women into policy making and impacts the operation of the legal system and service delivery. It should, optimally, lead to accountability toward a constituency of women (Goetz, 2003: 38-41). Setting the equality agenda therefore should be a co-operative effort between women in the state and women outside the state.

Accountability

Accountability refers to a number of interlocking processes to ensure that political commitments made in election campaigning are carried through into policy formulation and implementation. Accountability operates at two levels. At the vertical level, accountability relationships between state and citizens are crucial, as well as between elected officials and the constituencies they purport to represent. At the horizontal level, accountability involves formal checks on executive authority through the separation of powers and adequately capacitated, independent and strong institutions such as constitutional courts. Outside of the formal political system, and independent media and civil society are crucial avenues through which state institutions and elected officials can be called to account for their actions. It follows then, that the overall strength of the democratic institutions is crucial for women's agendas, and that advancing women's agendas can also be seen as part of democratizing the system as a whole. High levels of maladministration and corruption and even state disintegration compromise a gender equality culture.

Civil society – the sphere between the family and the state – is very important for the articulation of women's needs and interests. Women's groups, non-governmental organizations and trade unions can play an important role in articulating needs but also in shaping public discourse. Without significant shifts in public attitudes and a widening of the support for gender equality, attempts to hold government accountable for its actions will be seen as women pleading for their 'special interests' and accountability to women will be posed as competitive to accountability to traditionalist groupings. This means, of course, that the strength and autonomy of the women's movement is central in enforcing accountability. To be sure, women's movements are not automatically representative of women's interests; much depends on the way in which movements are organized, the extent of elitist control over agendas and the extent of rural-urban linkages within the movement.

Finally accountability cannot be delinked from the state's capacity to deliver. A state with weak infrastructure and poor delivery systems is likely to be increasingly unaccountable – not so much

because of unwillingness to deliver as incapacity to meet its stated goals. From this perspective the ability of electoral constituencies to hold their representatives accountable for failure to build infrastructural capabilities in their areas or to deliver services at the local level is crucial.

As previously noted, in the section below we explore how the processes outlined above have played out in relation to select but widespread governance features and trends in the African context. In doing so, we aim to draw out some implications and questions that should be posed when considering women's engagement with democratic states on the continent, or the strategies relied on for their empowerment.

3. Access, Agenda-Setting and Accountability: debates and questions to consider when assessing African experiences

Quotas in context

Feminists have responded to the unfavourable political environment for women's representation by demanding a radical shortcut to institutional access through the use of quotas. The global demand for quotas came at a moment when the strategies of gender and development and gender mainstreaming seemed to be losing momentum. The demand for between 30% and 50% of representation (30% supposedly constituting a 'critical mass') reasserted the importance of formal politics (Rai, 2008). A common lesson from various development approaches adopted by feminists was the importance of addressing structural obstacles inside the state to redistributive agendas. In this context, the strategy of quotas has come to dominate global feminist discourses on how institutional and political blockages may be tackled. Quotas have important symbolic effects that should not be under-estimated (Bauer, 2009). Especially in contexts where there are massive prejudices against women's presence as political actors in the public sphere, external pressures may produce precisely the breakthrough effect that is necessary to legitimise women's participation in decision-making. As forms of affirmative action, they provide an entry point into many legislatures for women. It may well be that quotas matter most because of their symbolic impact on the political order rather than because of their impact on policy formation in any direct way. That is, that they demonstrate in dramatic fashion that women are citizens regardless of the claims they might make on the state.

Yet, the bulk of the arguments in favour (or against) quotas rest on a far stronger claim that representation matters *because* it is an avenue through which constituencies of women can pursue policy and legislative demands that advance gender equality. The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action argues that 'women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account' (Goetz, 2006, p.88). Beaman et al (2006) point to research that shows that women and men have different policy preferences, particularly when it comes to support for social sector expenditures. They argue that improving women's representation will improve wellbeing in society as a whole. Other arguments centre on women's apparently more participatory and inclusive style, and the assumption that women are less likely to be corrupt and thus will improve the overall quality of governance; however, this assumption is difficult to test while others argue that political choices are not only about gender, but also about ideology and background. Sampson (2009), for example, argues that the only way to break through and diminish the impact of patronage networks in Nigeria's government is to have

a quota of women who are not connected to existing patronage networks. However, it is difficult to present a case for direct causality between representation and policy outcomes (see Beaman et al, 2006); causal generalizations across a wide range of very different countries are bound to ignore the specificities of politics in individual countries and to underplay path dependence.

In other words, women's political participation is crucial, if not sufficient, for gender and development. The weakly tested aspect of the expectations discussed above is not that participation is necessary but rather that *representation through quotas* will kick start *participation*, and that participation will lead to better (more precise and better targeted) articulation of the different interests of constituencies of women. In order for the hypothesis to be tested we need much more careful research on how quotas operate *after* elections. We will return to this point below. We are indeed seeing a shift in research on quotas to address this key question, with much more nuanced analysis of the impact of different *kinds* of quotas and different ways in which they are applied. Still, there is a tendency to focus too narrowly on quotas, and pay less attention to the overall political and institutional context in which they operate.

One overarching question relating to the use of quotas is the paradox of *why* men would allow women to take seats in legislatures when they may themselves be displaced? One reason is that in these new democracies, elections conducted under new rules and with new demarcations of voting districts allowed women to enter the political process without directly displacing male incumbents (although competition for a limited number of seats does imply that the use of quotas will reduce the opportunities for aspiring male politicians). Where the political landscape is dominated by a single party, quotas can be a relatively costless strategy that has little impact on election outcomes. Reserved seats, which add new opportunities for women to get elected but do not interfere with the underlying architecture of seats and constituencies, are similarly relatively costless politically. By way of contrast, in one of Africa's oldest and most stable multiparty democracies, Botswana, quotas are resisted by political parties, partly because they would alter the gender composition in a 'winner takes all system', i.e. some men would lose their seats. Similarly, stable Mauritius has not adopted quotas – in the absence of violent political conflict, it has retained the first past the post electoral system with no foreseeable plan to change the electoral system. Designing the appropriate electoral system is therefore key to the acceptance of quotas, as these determine the nature of the relationship between elected representatives, political parties and constituencies. Whatever the system used, however, political parties are central as gatekeepers to political office.

What this discussion begins to show is that when considering the use of quotas in African contexts, activists and political actors should reflect on *how quotas will play out within specific political circumstances*. Variables that will impact the performance women placed in quota seats include the assessment of whether the seats will provide access to power and decision making, and if so what kind; whom quota candidates will be accountable to; the extent to which the establishment of quotas may weaken the local women's movement; and whether the political culture and system as a whole supports the practice of meaningful representation of constituencies by state actors; What steps will be required to ensure that quota seats will be utilised to advance a gender equality agenda; and whether they will have a negative costs . This discussion is continued below.

Electoral systems, political parties and quotas

Studies of transitions from authoritarian systems show that political liberalization on its own does not change the distribution of political power; women may continue to be under-represented in legislatures. The experiences of Central and Eastern Europe are instructive in this regard; there, democratization resulted in the exit of women from formal politics in the immediate aftermath of the fall of communist governments (Matynia, 1995). The reasons for this are varied, but the crucial determinants of women's access to legislatures are the nature of electoral competition (particularly the extent of violence accompanying elections) and how the electoral system is organized. The impact of political violence in driving women out of political competition is a factor that deserves a special study of its own. In Kenya, for example post election violence in 2007 included sexual violence (Wanyeki 2008: 94), and in some cases direct targeting of women politicians.

Over the longer term, assuming that violence is reduced or absent, it is the nature and rules of electoral competition that play the key role in determining the nature of the relationship between elected representatives, political parties and constituencies. The nature of political parties, their openness to influence from constituencies other than deeply entrenched party elites, and the degree to which electoral manifestoes bear any relationship to policies parties pursue when in office are central questions that tend to be neglected in feminist literature on representation. Electoral rules and systems do not only determine the outcomes of elections, but also shape processes of representation. In feminist literature on representation, however, far more attention has been placed on analyzing the outcomes of different systems than on the processes; as a result, the consensus view among quota activists is that Proportional Representation (PR) systems are the most favourable, and Closed List PR is particularly effective in increasing women's representation. Little attention is paid to how the PR system

works in practice, and the democratic costs of the system are less frequently detailed in discussions of quotas. Yet, if we are concerned not only with increasing the numbers of women in legislatures but also (and more so) in ensuring that constituencies of poor women are able to advance their demands on public resources, then attention to political process is vital.

In practice, PR systems are a double-edged sword for feminists. 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, PR also allows parties to establish mechanisms of control over elected leaders and exacerbate party paternalism. PR systems breed loyalty to party rather than constituency, and this tendency is exacerbated in political systems where the conditions for full and free contestation among different interest groups are limited. Tripp (2006) argues that in Uganda, for example, 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). 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. A strong dominant party with centralist political culture results in women MPs being more likely to believe that policy-making is legitimately the responsibility of party elites.

To be sure, the control of party elites over elected representatives is not unique to the proportional representation system; similar processes may operate in constituency-based systems although they are less overt. For example, Basu (2006, p. 31) notes that in India, 'the power of women MPs is generally very limited. Because they are expected to support the party line rather than formulate their own agenda, they have accorded low priority to issues concerning women'.

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. As noted before, the argument for a critical mass suggests that at the tipping point of 30% women MPs can begin to develop significant mechanisms of support. However, this assumes that all women comprising a 'critical mass' have the same agendas and enter politics with the same convictions. In many countries parliamentary women's caucuses have been mooted as alternative mechanisms for setting priorities and building support and confidence among women MPs. However, even these depend on how the electoral system structures the relationship between representatives and constituencies.

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. Unlike other special groups (soldiers, youth, workers and people with disabilities), women are not elected members of their group, arguably because the relative strength of the women's movement might result in women MPs who are hostile to the National Resistance Movement (NRM) leadership (Tamale, 1999; Tripp, 2006). (Independent women's organizations have been key opponents of Museveni's attempts to lift term limits on the president, for example). 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 argues, this has led women's movement activists to argue for a change in the electoral process so that the women's seats are elected by universal adult suffrage – unsurprisingly, a move opposed by the president.

These tendencies suggest that in order to be successful, democratic women's movements would have to move quickly to buttress the access to legislatures won in transitional periods or through the use of quotas to build strong movements outside parliament that will sustain women's representational gains. A central finding from analyses of transition and democratization is that women cannot rely on political parties as their only vehicles for representation (Goetz and Hassim, 2003; Waylen, 2007). These studies reinforce the importance of 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.

African experiences of quotas implicitly reinforce the importance of linking representation to accountability. Formally, this accountability operates both internally (within political parties) as well as externally (accountability to constituencies). In most African democracies, however, political parties are poorly institutionalized and operate in highly centralized fashion, and formal institutions of accountability (parliaments, for example) are weak. Opposition parties tend to be weak and political contestation seldom revolves around debating the content of political manifestoes. Rather, histories of struggle against colonialism and accusations and counter-accusations of corruption – fiscal or electoral – are the stuff of party contestation. In conditions where the basic principles of free and fair elections are

constantly violated by the party in government, quotas can achieve very little unless they are backed up by strong campaigns to change the rules of the game. In some cases, they can even harm struggles for procedural democracy. For example, Ugandan feminists have argued that Museveni's acceptance of reserved seats for women might have helped give women seats in parliament but were based on an attempt to create a solid and reliable block of women supporters of NRM in government. At crucial moments, this dependent bloc of women MPs observed silently as Museveni repressed opposition to the National Resistance Movement.

Of course, women can benefit from multipartyism, even if women's organizations have to affiliate to a party in order to have political voice. In mass parties that have emerged from nationalist movements, for example South Africa's African National Congress or Zimbabwe's ZANU (PF), national women's organizations operate as the women's wing of the party. The valid mode for political voice is through the nationalist party, based on the assumption that the nation is a singular homogeneous entity with one legitimate representative party. Support for gender quotas in many African countries was won by the women's movement aligned with the dominant party and has reinforced the hegemony of the dominant party. More recently, opposition parties have begun establishing their own internal women's wings, a move that could change the landscape. This shift would entail an acceptance that political constituencies are not pre-given, or the moral preserve of one particular movement/party, but that there is a socially and politically constructed relationship between citizens and political parties that needs to be constantly nurtured. Representation works best in multiparty systems where several parties are well-institutionalised, have clear relationships of accountability for their political actions and represent a diversity of interests. In these cases, we see evidence of the contagion effect, where constituencies of women can push parties into supporting gender equality because of the threat that they can vote for other parties (Welch and Studlar, 1988). 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. Without the threat of electoral retaliation, strategies that focus exclusively on descriptive representation make limited contributions to democratization.

The diversity of political parties, and not just their multiplicity, also matters. Demands for gender equality are most likely to win favour where there are left parties competing for power, and especially when left parties win government office. The dominance of ethnically-based and religious parties in many new democracies acts as a barrier to the gender equality agenda. As Amrita Basu (2006,

p.5) shows, 'they generally do not provide women greater access to institutional power within the party.'

One central factor in new democracies, often ignored in feminist literature that focuses primarily on increasing women's access to the state, is that political parties and state institutions are not always legitimate in the eyes of voters. Indeed, in many postcolonial situations there is disbelief among citizens that political parties can *represent* the interests of anyone other than a small band of elites. Sampson (2009) shows how the violent aspects of elections and the patronage networks that provide large sums of money for candidates in Nigeria makes it nearly impossible for women to contest elections. Even where women make it into government in Nigeria they often become caught up in the corruption. This legacy of authoritarian or dysfunctional states has a direct bearing on the extent to which women (along with other marginal groups) advance their claims through political parties, or make collective claims on the state rather than falling back on social networks of reciprocity. In Nigeria, for example, the long history of military rule has led to underdeveloped institutions and a lack of electoral credibility. The lack of trust of ordinary women and men in the possibility of effective representation by elites in political parties is not easily resolved by greater access of women to elected office (Akiyode-Afolabi, 2010: 1). Indeed, where newly elected women are beholden to political elites, it can exacerbate the view that poor people are being manipulated into supporting a sham of democracy. For example, in South Africa recent struggles for power within the ANC have revealed a cleavage between feminists in the party who have benefited from the affirmative action of policies of President Thabo Mbeki, and grassroots-level poor women who support the populist vision of his rival Jacob Zuma. For the latter, gender equality is a project of elites – especially one that puts a few well-connected women into political office – that has done little to change the lives of poor women.

Comparing new democracies with older ones, where women have benefited from the alignment of the equality agenda of the women's movement and the social democratic agenda of left parties and social movement, suggests that factors other than the assertion of 'progressive' interests by political parties is needed. In highly unequal societies, in particular, to be effective in representing the interests of poor women parties themselves need to be democratized (Basu, 2006). That process involves looking beyond party lists to the internal processes by which parties make decisions, the ways in which parties recruit candidates, and the relationships between party leaders and party members.

Importantly, the ability to democratize political parties, enforce accountability and 'clean up' the electoral game is dependent on the strength of women's organizations in civil society, and particularly

on their ability to name and frame the demands of the different groups of women they represent, and the development of strong relationships between women legislators and their supporters. Demands for greater representation of women have historically emerged from social movements that pressurize political parties to place women on candidate lists and to take up the concerns of women citizens. As Basu (2006) notes, party-movement alliances have been extremely effective in organizing women. Social movements, including and at times especially women's movements, push at the boundaries of what is 'political' and hence are able to draw new issue areas into public deliberation processes. However, on their own, they also have a tendency to diffuse political agendas, either by making programmatic demands that are so far outside the boundaries of accepted political discourse as to marginalize themselves (for example, demands by the Landless People's Movement in South Africa for mass occupation of property) or because, on the other end of the spectrum, they can only agree on a minimal agenda.

Yet, 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 may enhance 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 fulfil. Accountability relationships depend on strategies to increase women's access to political office working in tandem with strategies to strengthen women's organisations outside the state; in other words, on strengthening civil society and particularly social movements in civil society that are advocating democratisation.

In none of the modernist approaches to gender equality is there sufficient attention to what the relationship is between political equality and economic equality, and specifically how to use political representation to advance social and economic equality between women and men and across the category women (i.e. between classes). This raises the question of when representation can be used effectively to leverage economic and social demands. It is important to note that conflict (or political

competition?) has been central to the achievement of progressive social and economic policies (Piven and Cloward, 1980). If electoral strategies are to be used then, it is important to hold on to the notion of electoral conflict as central to representation struggles, and to ensure that there are relationships of accountability between political representatives and constituencies of women.

In summary, women's political efficacy in Africa cannot be assessed outside a consideration of the nature of political parties. What implications do poorly institutionalized and centralized political parties hold for widespread women's empowerment mechanisms such as quotas? What does it mean when women are fast tracked through parties with poor internal democratic practices and vaguely defined policy objectives. In addition, feminists struggling to get women into the state also need to grapple with the implications of the widespread and general distrust of political leaders and institutions in Africa.

Patriarchal Institutional Cultures and Women's Leadership

The culture of formal political institutions – legislatures and bureaucracies for example – is often seen as the cause for women's lack of political influence. Indeed, while formal political institutions provide actors with the opportunities to change and challenge norms, they also constitute a force that ensures continuity in social and political life by giving weight to established values and maintaining boundaries of inclusion and exclusion (Pierre 1999:p.390). The biases present in formal institutions – towards particular values, actors and processes – often entail that some groups and ideas are privileged over others, resulting in unequal access to resources (Lowndes, 2002:p.91). In expanding on this issue below, we will refer specifically to parliaments.

Parliaments tend to be hierarchical structures in the way that they are set up, differentiating between the ranks of politicians. For the ruling party the President or Prime Minister is the most important office bearer, followed by a Deputy-President, or Deputy-Prime Minister, Ministers and Deputy-Ministers, senior politicians (or 'front benchers') and 'back benchers' at the bottom. Office bearers within parliament such as the Speaker derive formal authority from their mandate to sanction inappropriate behaviour and govern norms such as speaking orders. In 2010, across 269 countries, women held 35 presiding officer positions, and have showed that they can raise consciousness about gender inequality in these positions by changing parliamentary rules for e.g. meeting times of parliaments [www.IPU.org/pdf/publications]

Parliamentary systems also have party caucuses (each party has a caucus to which all the members of a party in parliament belongs). Binding decisions on issues and legislation in front of parliament are taken in the caucus. Where party discipline is strong it will be expected of members of a party to stick to the decisions taken in caucus, or otherwise resign. This may often cause a tension for women MPs who may feel strongly about gender issues that may receive limited support by conservative male or female MPs in the caucus.

A study done by Hannah Britton (2005) on women in the South African parliament found the following major challenges: double workload, male resistance, back sliding of party or institutional support, indirect sexism and domestic obligations (P71).

Until the recent rise of quotas, most African legislatures were male dominated and as such likely to comprise a 'modus operandi' uncritical of traditional gender roles and the inequality they reproduce. When women enter into legislatures they are confronted with an institutional culture that shows limited concern with women's values such as a lack of hierarchy (flat structures), co-operation and deliberation or negotiation as opposed to adversarial politics (See Karam and Lovenduski, 2005: 187-188 and *Redefining Politics*, 1999).

Women may also find themselves at the receiving end of sexual harassment and gender stereotyping, such as being viewed as important for catering purposes but not for making inputs into legislation. Women may experience that their reproductive roles come into conflict with their work as politicians, such as a lack of child care facilities or maternity leave to enable them to have children and be members of parliament. Men are rarely confronted with having to choose between a career and children. Underpinning this is a widespread belief that women are and should be subordinate to men, and that a sexual division of labour is legitimate (Agbalajobi, 2010: 75). Similarly, Nzomo points out that in Kenya 'the view of women as the sexual objects of men is still very strong in the psyche of many men' (Nzomo 1994: 18).

Very often women exit parliament and other political institutions because of the pressure they are under once they have been elected. Where women feel isolated they may want to exit. It is therefore important for women who have been in parliament for a longer period of time to pay attention to women who feel isolated and unable to voice their concerns. Men have "old boys" networks, but women often feel that they are alone in a hostile institutional culture.

Research has shown that one of the important ways of changing institutional cultures is to get a critical mass of women (more or less 30%) into legislatures. The theory of critical mass is important because it points out not only that there is power in numbers, but also that women may practice politics differently to men. A comparative study of women in legislatures in Southern Africa has shown that where there is a significant presence of women, combined with a range of enabling factors including a background and history of struggle, a democratic dispensation, dynamic links with women's organizations in civil society and support for the personal agency of decision-makers, there is a marked impact on institutional culture, attitudes, laws, policies, and service delivery (Lowe Morna, 2004).

Recently the idea of critical mass has come under scrutiny and new research (Childs and Krook, 2007) has shown that it is not really numbers that matter but rather, women's commitment to a consciousness of gender injustice. We can also refer to this as a "feminist consciousness". This means that women will be prepared to put women's issues, specifically as they relate to the gendered concerns of the women in their constituencies, on the agenda. There has been a shift of emphasis from "critical mass" to "critical acts". This implies that if politics is to be transformed in the legislative arena, women in parliaments have to understand the difference between practical and strategic gender issues, where practical issues refer to concerns that can be dealt with in the short term (e.g. providing electricity to households), while strategic issues refer to those conditions of unequal power relations and access to economic resources that will have to be changed over time (Molyneux, 1998). While a numerical critical mass is necessary to change institutional culture, critical actors are necessary to get strategic women's issues onto the agenda.

Linked to the understanding of "critical acts" is the notion of a "feminist praxis", or acting on one's feminist beliefs. Feminism in Africa is very often understood as a Western import that does not relate to the lives of African women. Feminism may take on different meanings for different people but as discussed here it means a concern for women's or gender issues and equality.

Feminist praxis refers to the internalization of feminist theoretical principles to the extent that these principles are used to turn spaces into feminist spaces. It also means that a feminist will locate herself in the legislature *as* a feminist, by speaking out about gender injustice and discrimination regardless whether it will be harmful to herself or her career. Feminist activism in parliament implies that women MPs will raise awareness about the concerns of women, about how women are treated in institutional spaces and how gender stereotyping serves to dis-empower women MPs. They also raise awareness of how women may oppress other women. It involves empathy with the conditions of other

women, self-reflexivity about your own location as a feminist and also giving other women, regardless whether they are feminists or not, a space to express themselves and to help them reflect on their realities. A feminist praxis means that a feminist will *live* as a feminist and her beliefs will be expressed as feminist beliefs. (See Gouws, 2010).

Taking feminist stances and negotiating patriarchal institutional cultures is not easy as it may lead to political marginalisation or alienate potential allies. It is therefore important for women to form alliances with like-minded women and men across party lines. This may be quite difficult where party discipline is strong. Forming a Gender Caucus in which women of all parties can address gender equality should help women find a voice around discrimination, and alleviate the tension between representing a party as well as representing gender issues.

Changing Rules, Procedures, Customs and Practices

The extent to which women MPs will be able to effect substantive representation (as opposed to merely descriptive (numerical¹) representation), set agendas and be accountable to constituencies who demand gender equality will not only depend on women's commitment to gender equality, but also to the extent to which the institutional setting of parliament allows women to engage as equal partners in the legislative and policy making process and to put women's issues on the parliamentary agenda. There are many possible obstacles to women's equal participation – some of which include the parliamentary codes of conduct and more.

The greater presence of women in parliaments assumes an impact on rules, procedures and customs of parliament. As Karam and Lovenduski (2005) argue it is important that women learn the rules, use the rules and change the rules (to their benefit). Four types of change will make a difference for women: institutional/procedural (this include gender awareness to make parliament more friendly to women; presentational change (encouraging women candidates, encouraging gender equality legislation and acting as role models); impact on output (producing 'women friendly' legislation); and discourse change (changing sexist language and normalizing a women's perspective). Here insisting on, e.g. using the term "chairperson" instead of "chairman" or "madam chair" is important.

¹ Numerical or descriptive representation refers to the number of women in government (e.g. women is 50% of the population and should therefore have 50% representation – hence the 50/50 campaign). Substantive equality means that women's presence leads to greater gender equality.

Institutional rules and practices may often be so entrenched as to be unspoken and invisible, and therefore difficult to identify and change. In a study of women in parliament Karen Ross (2002: 198) points out how women's presence in parliament changes rules. In an example of the South African parliament, she cites Val Viljoen (African National Congress MP) who recalls how women in the first democratic South African parliament (1994 – 1999) were responsible for stopping smoking in committee meetings by throwing out the ashtrays. Smoking in committee meetings ceased because there was a consensus among women that smoking could not be tolerated. Women in the first democratic South African parliament also made it clear that taking votes on important issues late at night was not acceptable, because they needed to attend to their families; established a 'Women's Empowerment Unit' and established childcare facilities.

However, it is important to note that while women's presence in the South African parliament grew (28% in 1994; 30 % in 1999; 32.8% in 2004, and 43% in 2009) many of these gains have not been maintained. While sitting hours remain by and large 'family friendly', the Women's Empowerment Unit has been disbanded, the childcare facilities were closed down due to safety regulations that were not addressed and therefore has not reopened (Gouws 2010) , and a women's caucus struggles for human and financial resources as well as an official slot in the schedule.

The reasons that can be attributed to this role-back are multi-fold and probably linked to the juniorisation and weakening of South Africa's parliament between 1999 to 2009 (reference). Britton (2005), however, further argues that the 'second generation' of women who entered South Africa's parliament in 1999 were less likely to come from an activism background, more steeped in party ideology and less likely to be independent in their views. She speculated that this 'professionalisation' of MPs would lead to party loyalty trumping women's coalitions, slowing down many of the early moves towards greater equality. The point made here is that while critical mass is important, it can be trumped by issues of path dependence and the nature of both political institutions and political parties.

In parliaments based on First Past The Post systems, the challenges and opportunities are obviously different. MPs in these parliaments tend to consider constituency service as their most important task, and patronage politics can override notions of national interest. In such cases, challenging the way constituencies understand gender roles may be more important, as MPs are beholden to their constituents.

Questions to be considered when evaluating interventions to foster gender responsive governance at institutional level include asking what are the nature of the institutional culture is, and which customs can be changed and how? Which changes have already been brought about and how have they influenced the lives of women MPs? Why have gains been rolled back?

National Gender Machineries as Allies?

Another important vehicle to fast track gender responsive governance in Africa has been the institutionalisation of national gender machineries (NGMs).

Women political leaders are not only those who are chosen during elections but also those who are in the state as members of National Gender Machineries (NGM) (also called national policy machineries), or structures created in the state to promote gender equality. These can be individual structures like Ministries of Women's Affairs or other structures placed in different institutional sites, such as gender focal points in different state department that work to ensure gender perspectives in policy and legislation. Women members of the legislative and executive spheres can have potential allies in these structures. Women in the state who actively support women's issues and who are agenda setters are called "femocrats" and the practice is called "state feminism", or femocracy.

The successes or failures of National Gender Machineries rest on a few important factors: that of state capacity or the extent to which women in the state and the machineries lead to policy making that benefit women and, the extent to which women in the state gives access to the women's movement to contribute to agenda setting and policy making (the nature of the relationship between the state and civil society that will be dependent on the political history and autonomy of civil societies in Africa) (Stetson and Mazur, 1995).

McBride and Mazur (2011) have singled out certain factors that need to be taken into account when we assess National Gender Machineries. These include their location in the governance hierarchy (e.g. do they have persons at Director General levels in state departments?), clarity of mission and mandate, how meaningful their links with civil society are, whether their resources are adequate, whether they maintain relationships of accountability with women's constituencies over political leaders, political will, state capacity and political stability as well as cultural norms about gender equality.

As a consequence of the UN Decade of Women Conferences (Mexico, 1975, Nairobi, 1985 and Beijing, 1995) the acceptance of structures in the state to promote gender equality, also called National Gender Machineries have been implemented globally. Most countries in Africa have a structure or a set of structures.

Yet, these structures are not very successful and are very often dysfunctional. This situation is directly related to their conditions of emergence (Mama, 2000: 2). Unlike countries in the West where the NMG might have emerged out of activism and struggle, the NGM in Africa was introduced during periods of nation building and was co-opted through discourses of nationalism. Rather than challenging the state's gender agenda it accepted whatever agenda the state had, most often an agenda that did not really benefit women (see also Gouws 2008).

The structures therefore merely mirrored the low status of women in society and had to function in isolation to deal with all gender related issues other state institutions and political actors did want to deal with. Often, they became captured by First Ladies who used the structures to their own benefit (Mama, 2000: 9). The machineries were used to integrate women into development plans, rather than organize around women's productive and reproductive roles (p13).

In the majority of countries the national machineries function in isolation and reflect the low status of women in the societies. They are under resourced and understaffed with little influence on mainstream policies while women's issues are allocated to them in a haphazard way (Mama, 2000: 9-10). Mama concludes that the ineffectiveness of national machineries in Africa can be linked to the failure to challenge the prevailing gender division of labour, and the disregard of the reproductive and productive role that African women play in being farmers, traders, producers of commodities, as well as primary caregivers and heads of households.

In analyzing different gender machineries in Africa the results have shown that they exhibit varying degrees of success and as Mama (2000: 15) notes the preliminary evidence suggests that the machineries have only achieved the modest, liberal goal of giving women more space in the state, but made very little difference to the conditions of ordinary women outside the state and co-optation by the state is always a possibility.

In Uganda the National Machinery (NM) was very important in drawing up a National Gender Policy but research showed that the line managers in government, the NGOs and women's organizations

were not fully aware of the content of the policy, neither did the NM spearhead the implementation of programs around national priorities. The continued restructuring of the machinery from a Ministry of Women and Development to one that was merged with the Departments of Culture and Youth, to a Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development showed that it was not really taken very seriously by the Ugandan government (Wangusa, 2000).

In Ghana a study of the National Council on Women and Development (NCWD) showed it did not achieve much in relation to women's advancement and gender equality but women still felt that some kind of structure was needed to address gender imbalances that continued to hinder women's socio-economic development (Mensah-Kutin, et al, 2000: 41).

Namibia's Gender Desk was established in the Office of the President, defining its main task as mainly co-ordinating efforts related to women and liaising with relevant ministries in order to include women's concerns in the different ministers' mandate. The desk was later elevated to a Department of Women's Affairs (DWA) that established nine committees, headed by members of relevant ministries in charge of programmes. Different concerns arose about the DWA. NGOs were worried about government interference while the lack of a national women's organization made it difficult to mobilize women (Geisler, 2004: 131). The DWA pushed National a Gender Policy and Plan of Action through parliament in 1999 regardless of women activists' criticism because of a lack of consultation.

In the South African case a very comprehensive and integrated national machinery was developed on the basis of demands by feminist activists and academics who believed that all levels of government needed oversight and monitoring of gender policies and strategies. Yet, seventeen years after the democratic transition most of these structures are dysfunctional or have been restructured. Some of the most important reasons for dysfunctionality are overlapping mandates, a lack of autonomy of the femocrats in these structures, personal conflicts and a lack of commitment to feminist goals within the structures themselves (see Gouws, 2005).

This dysfunctionality has led to the disbandment of some of the structures and the creation of a Ministry of Women, Youth and the Disabled shadowed by a parliamentary portfolio committee and a select committee for Women, Youth and the Disabled in the National Council of Provinces. The combination of vulnerable groups in one ministry has contributed to the perception that it will become dumping ground for all issues relating to women, youth and the disabled. Successes of the South African National Gender Machinery can be directly related to women with a feminist consciousness in

government who were committed to gender equality (e.g. Pregs Govender, who as the Chair of the Joint Monitoring Committee on the Quality of Life and the Status of Women, fast tracked legislation and was vigilant in monitoring legislation for its gendered impact).

The one big problem with National Gender Machineries in Africa is exactly the “missing link” or lack of a substantive relationship with women’s organizations in civil society that can serve to keep the machinery accountable. Too often accountability is toward the political leaders and not to a constituency of women. The state may also co-opt women’s organizations to prevent them from making too many demands on the state.

In studies done on the National Gender Machineries in Africa it has been shown that the machineries are often a way of co-opting women where states are weak and do very little to develop policies that have gender difference at their core. Rather, they pursue mainstream policies which do not conflict with government’s rhetoric on gender equality.

Where relatively strong women’s movements exist they have both tried to engage national machineries or opposed them. Often they indicated their dissatisfaction with gender policies and strategies of the machineries and have questioned why certain constituencies like poor women have been neglected. In some cases there were claims that machineries work actively against women’s organizations (Tripp et al, 2008: 180).

In many countries the authority and capacity of women’s machineries to develop policy has been questioned. Often non-governmental organizations felt that they were better positioned to develop policy to advance women’s empowerment, but could not do so because they had no institutional standing. These dynamics and perceptions have led to mutual mistrust between gender machineries and women’s organizations (Tripp et al, 2008: 178).

The Link with Civil Society: The Role of the Women’s Movement

As the above arguments make clear, women’s movements outside the state are key to ensuring women’s interests are represented, in setting a gendered agenda and in keeping leaders accountable to a women’s ‘constituency’.

Social movement formation is a form of collective action that depends on political opportunities. The political opportunity structure refers to resources external to the group. Social movements form in relation to certain opportunities that lower the cost of collective action and make it possible to engage

the political elite (Tarrow, 1996: 18). Social movements usually have certain routines of action or “repertoires of contention” and need to frame their issues in a way that the state would take note or that fits with state discourse. Women’s movements often capitalize on the shifts in political opportunity structures that come with political change. This can be opportunities that open up during political transitions, or when governments change policies.

Women’s movements refer to alliances among women’s organizations around issues of gender equality, while women’s organizations refer to individual organizations. There exists heterogeneity of organizations such as professional associations, networks and service providers (Tripp et al, 2008: 13) on the African continent. According to Tripp et al, African women’s organizations increased exponentially during the 1990s in order to assert new and varied concerns. African activists organize in both the local and international arenas, as well as networking across the continent.

In the South African case Hassim (2005) distinguishes between “inclusionary” politics and “transformatory” politics (using Maxine Molyneux’s division between practical and strategic gender interests). Inclusionary politics deal with the more immediate needs of women’s inclusion, while transformatory politics look at the long term transformation of socio-economic conditions. She distinguishes between non-governmental organizations which do policy and advocacy work, national and regional networks and coalitions and community based organizations.

Non-governmental organizations are important to make the link with allies in the state to influence policy formation. Given their relationship with the state these organizations will use tactics, rhetoric and demands that may be moderated to fit with the discourse in the state, rather than direct action or confrontation (Tripp et al, 2008: 16). Networks form around contemporary gender issues such as gender based violence and they will also attempt to influence policy but they have more identifiable constituencies than non-governmental organizations. They may compete with non-governmental organizations for similar resources. Community based organizations are numerous but less visible on a national level and are weakly tied to other organizations or networks (p 18). All the different categories of organizations function at the same time and fill important needs for different constituencies of women. This assumes that there is a space in civil society for them to exist autonomously.

Vibrant civil societies are not always the case in African countries as ruling parties seek to bring organizations including women’s organizations into state related clientilism. The aim is to control women’s organizations through various strategies, such as banning or co-opting them, turning them in

to women's auxiliaries of parties, undermining organizations through patronage networks, or demanding registration of autonomous organizations (Tripp et al, 2008: 45). Control of civil society organizations is a characteristic strategy of states that are threatened by the autonomy and criticism of organizations.

In Kenya the ruling party Kenya African National Union (KANU) co-opted the large women's organization Maendeleo ya Wanawake (MYW), in order to extend its support to the grassroots level and to access MYW funds. Likewise, the Harambee self-help movement in Kenya is subject to all kinds of clientilistic manipulations. This movement is important in community led initiatives such as building schools, wells and clinics. For KANU it is an important source of voter support, so it exchanges resources with the Harambee Movement for political backing (Tripp et al, 2008: 46).

The impact of political co-optation should not be underestimated because it effectively marginalises women's leadership, leads to mobilization around a narrow set of issues, and also divides women (Tripp et al, 2008: 47). Most often it is the rural poor who suffer when state strategies co-opt urban elite women, leading to a lack of support by rural women. Once organizations become affiliated to parties they become gatekeepers of women's admission into politics and align their agendas with that of the parties that provide them with funding (Tripp et al, 2008: 50).

The National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) in Nigeria lobbied the government to amend its discriminatory population control policies that targeted only women and not men, but in the process, it became co-opted to which party and lost its ability to challenge discriminatory laws. What it did manage was to get women to attend rallies and meetings and to sing, dance and cook for visiting politicians (Tripp et al, 2008: 51). Very often parties keep women's organizations narrowly focused on development goals such as improving child care, domestic care, literacy and handicrafts.

Key state sponsored non-governmental women's institutions in Nigeria such as a Better Life for Rural Women, The National Commission for Women and the National Council for Women's Societies in Nigeria aimed at keeping women in their roles as mothers (Tripp et al, 2008:52). In the era of nationalism these women's organizations were able to organize across ethnic boundaries but their links to ruling parties prevented them from having autonomous agendas.

In the 1990s, with the third wave of democracy, women's organizations have proliferated (Tripp et al, 2008; Geisler, 2004: 143). Non-governmental organizations emerged in response to economic crisis and structural adjustment programs, and with donor aid often became the new service providers.

The “ngoization” of women’s organizations often tie them to the agendas of donor organizations. Without donor support many of the national level women’s organizations working around gender issues and legislative change as well as social transformation would have been unable to lobby governments. Women’s organizations are often put in a difficult situation where they must choose between sticking to their agendas or altering these to receive donor funding.

A further complication of transition to democracy is linked to institutional politics. In many transitional societies women’s organizations and movements have become demobilized or have fragmented after transition because of a reliance on women in the state. This has weakened the relationship between women’s movements and women in the state. South Africa is a good case in point where the Women’s National Coalition was able to draw up a Charter of Women’s Rights through a wide consultation with about a million grassroots women prior to the transition, but became demobilized after the transition.

As Tripp et al (2008: 61) point out that women’s organizations now have uncertain mandates and lack coherent ideological clarity and stable constituencies. They often have to rely on patriarchal media for agenda setting in a situation where they want to avoid co-option. The case of Women In Nigeria (WIN) has shown the importance of associational autonomy – when the Nigerian elections were annulled in 1993, WIN together with human rights and pro-democracy activists launched a campaign against human rights abuses (p84). WIN contributed to the restoration of civil rule while NCWS could not do it because of its close links with government. As Nzomo points out, however, it is often difficult to build movement coherence, particularly when personality and power conflicts take over organisations (Nzomo, 1989: 13).

Yet, women have also learned from transnational organizing. There is Africa- wide sub-regional networking, and the largest numbers of Africa wide advocacy organizations are based in Kenya, South Africa, Senegal and Uganda (Tripp et al, 2008: 65). Many of these networks have been made possible by the Internet and ICTs.

The new women’s organizations in Africa have a different foci – that of improving leadership skills, promoting women’s leadership, demanding legislative changes and political involvement. Advocacy groups organize around violence, rape, reproductive rights, sexual harassment and taboo issues such as FGM (Tripp et al, 2008: 88). Where women’s groups form networks and alliances they form more stable interest clusters. They also redefine “the political” like Wangari Maathai and the

Greenbelt Movement who put the environment in Kenya on the agenda and won the Nobel Peace Prize.
Women's organizations now are now driven by social reform (Geisler, 2004: 143).

Concluding Remarks

What the above analysis shows is that the actions of women political leaders do not take place in a vacuum but are related to the manner in which they were elected to positions of power.

Accountability to political leaders vs accountability to a constituency of women depends on electoral systems. Furthermore, the nature of the state determines whether there are arenas in the state that women can access with a feminist agenda. The agenda needs to be set in cooperation with a women's movement or women's organizations in civil society and this often comes about during a time that the political opportunity structure changes for social movements. Women in the state cannot set the agenda on their own and can only pressure government when they have the backing of women's organizations. In this regard the issue of what Beckwith (2000) calls "double militancy" becomes very important. Double militancy occurs when women political leaders are involved in the state as well as in women's organizations.

What has been identified is that each country's historical trajectory is different and while transnational learning is important women political leaders need to understand how political transitions have shaped institutions and how political culture makes action and engagement possible through free speech and democratic practice.

In Africa where the National Gender Machineries are mostly dysfunctional, the probability that they will be allies for women political leaders is low. Women political leaders will have to find other ways to change patriarchal institutional cultures. This will depend on critical mass but more so on critical acts delivered by critical actors – those who have a feminist consciousness and are prepared to put women's practical and strategic needs on the agenda.

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