Chapter 1

Women and Leadership Positions: Social and Cultural Barriers to Success

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Abstract

Women continue to aspire for leadership positions in all spheres of governance in both the public and private sector. However it has not been easy. The paper will examine the many challenges women still face in taking leadership positions with specific reference to African women. Included in the paper are the barriers related to culture and cultural expectations, the choice and/or balance between work and family, and women's own fear of success.

Women continue to aspire to leadership positions in all spheres of governance both in the public and private sectors. Great strides have been made in the political realm, and women's participation in both the freedom struggles and democratic processes of many African countries have been notable. However, this participation has not always translated into equal representation in political leadership positions. Once elections are conducted, and positions are assigned, one realizes that women are no longer visible.

Some countries like South Africa have made much progress within a short space of time in their efforts toward a gender-neutral society, but for others the pace has been much slower. It should also be noted that attaining positions of power and leadership is one thing, but could it be that women pay a higher price than men? Gwendolyn Mikell (1997) captured the dilemma for women in her statement that "Contemporary African women sometimes think of themselves as walking a political/gender tightrope" (p.1), in that African women are concerned about the large number of economic and political problems facing their communities, but at the same time they are "grappling with how to affirm their own identities while transforming societal notions of gender and familial roles" (Mikell, 1997, p.1). The paper examines the many challenges women still face in taking leadership positions, including the barriers related to culture and cultural expectations; the choice and/or balance between work and family; and the stress that accompanies positions of leadership as experienced differently by men and women. However, there is no doubt that there are success stories. Of interest are the efforts women have made to rise above such circumstances and fight for recognition, despite the risks of being "labeled" and of breaking family ties. A section of the paper is specifically devoted to political activism as one

notable area of success in the women's movement. Successes in educational and academic leadership are also highlighted and the strategies taken by various agencies in both government and private sectors to develop and promote women leaders are explored. While women gain certain freedoms by facing social and cultural challenges, other freedoms may be lost. These situations should be investigated.

The Concept of Leadership

Historically, leadership has carried the notion of masculinity and the belief that men make better leaders than women is still common today. Although the number of female leaders has increased, they are often named as an afterthought. According to Højgaard (2002), the societal conventions regarding gender and leadership traditionally exclude women, and top leadership is viewed as a masculine domain. The same author further argues that the cultural construction of leadership in itself instigates difference and this is only now being transformed or contested as women gain access to leadership positions. In African societies, it is believed that men lead and women follow (Ngcongo, 1993, in Grant, 2005). It is not uncommon in rural villages in Africa to find the man literally walking ahead of the woman. Different reasons may be advanced for this but ultimately it illustrates the deeply held notion of leadership as masculine.

There was a time that it was believed that leaders were born with certain leadership traits. However, current thinking on leadership assumes that leadership can be taught and learned, hence the many leadership-training programs (de la Rey, 2005). Cheryl de la Rey (2005) lists the traits commonly associated with leadership as effective communication skills, task completion, responsibility, problem solving, originality, decision making, action taking, vision, self awareness, confidence, experience and power. While it is possible to develop these traits in any individual, regardless of gender, in male dominated societies (as is often the case in African societies) male leadership and leadership styles predominate and are regarded as the more acceptable forms of leadership.

Growe and Montgomery (2000) defined leaders as people "who provide vision and meaning for an institution and embod[y] the ideals toward which the organization strives" (p. 1). From that perspective, leaders are alike and genderless. However there is still skepticism when women lead and in many situations, gender, more than age, experience or competence determines the role (position) one is assigned. There is research to show that such fears or doubts about women are baseless. Growe and Montgomery (2000), in studies on school administration, found that schools with female administrators are better managed (the quality of pupil learning and professional performance of teachers is higher), and on average perform better than those managed by men. Similar findings have been reported by Aladejana (2005) in her study regarding female representation in leadership positions in education administration in South West

Nigeria. The difference may be in the leadership styles of women versus those of men.

There seems to be enough evidence to suggest that women lead differently from men (Eagly and Johnson, 1990, as cited in de la Rey, 2005). For instance, women portray a more participatory approach, are more democratic, allow for power and information sharing, are more sensitive, more nurturing than men, focus on relationships and enable others to make contributions through delegation (de la Rey, 2005; Growe & Montgomery, 2000; Tedrow, 1999). Tedrow (1999) also noted characteristics such as building coalitions and advancing individual and community development are constructs that women display in their relational styles. Women are also better at conflict management, have better listening skills and show more tolerance and empathy. While men and women do have different leadership styles, that should not mean that one is dominant over the other. It has been observed that the differences we see in leadership style are partly due to the way men view leadership as leading, while women see leadership as facilitating (Growe & Montgomery, 2000). In contrast to the characteristics of women given above, men lead from the front and attempt to have all the answers while stressing task accomplishment, the achieving of goals, the hoarding of information and winning (Growe & Montgomery, 2000). Contemporary work environments could definitely benefit from leaders who portray more of the traits associated with women.

Sadly, in a situation where accepting women as leaders is problematic, it is possible to overlook their positive leadership traits and view them as weaknesses. In fact, stereotypes of how women lead have made it difficult for women to access or even stay in leadership positions. Tedrow (1999) argued that women who display more relational styles of leading are likely to be marginalized within their organizations and viewed as 'outsiders'. Even more disconcerting is the fact that women who seem to 'make it' as leaders often end up conforming to the strong male culture in the work place, and adopt male leadership styles. As indicated by Growe & Montgomery (2000), since female leaders see gender as a hindrance, they are compelled to lead the way men do as it is considered the norm. In their view, utilizing men's methods of leadership is not only the easiest way for a woman to be hired for any position of leadership, but is the most successful method of attracting promotion and recognition.

Gender (in)equity in leadership positions: A situation analysis

Despite efforts made to ensure that female representation is achieved at all levels of governance, women are still underrepresented in many government and non-government organizations particularly in positions of power and leadership (de la Rey, 2005). From statistics presented by Sadie (2005) on the Southern African Development Community (SADC) parliamentary structures, it is evident that the target of 30% representation by women in political and decision-making structures of member states (set by Heads of State and Government in adopting the 1997 Declaration on Gender and Development, and to be achieved by 2005)

was not met, except in South Africa and Mozambique. For instance, by 2004 the proportion of women in parliament was 15.4% in Angola, 15.9% in Botswana, 12% in Lesotho, 14.4% in Malawi, 17.14% in Mauritius, 25% in Namibia, 22.3% in Tanzania, and 16% in Zimbabwe while South Africa and Mozambique had 32.8% and 37.2% respectively. There were not always concomitant proportions of women in the cabinets of the respective countries. Sometimes the proportion in cabinets was higher as in the case of Botswana (28.7%), Lesotho (41.6%) and Malawi (20.7%), while in other countries this number went down. There is thus a wide range in the level of achievement (in meeting set targets), but at least something has been and is being done to correct the situation.

Another discrepancy in the SADC region is evident in party structures. Although women constitute the majority of voters, Sadie (2005) observed that they are severely underrepresented in party structures and on party lists to the extent that while gender equality is enshrined in the party constitutions and manifestos, it is not integrated in party structures. In some cases where women serve as party executives, it is because they move in as ex officio members by virtue of their role as chairpersons of the women's leagues.

In Kenya, the progress towards women's involvement in politics was initially very slow and noticeable changes have only been observed within the last 10 years. According to Nzomo (1997), although the post-independence government brought new possibilities for political involvement, Kenyan women were not granted the same political access as men. For this reason, equitable democratic participation at the level of gender has yet to be attained. A recent Kenyan newspaper report showed that although women make up 52% of the Kenyan population, only 18 out of 222 parliamentary members are women (8 of whom are nominated), and only 377 out of 2837 seats in local government are held by women (*Daily Nation*, July 2007). This reflects a serious under representation of women in governance and decision making structures. The build up to the 2007 elections in Kenya still showed imbalances in the fielding of female candidates as the electorate showed a lack of confidence toward them.

In politics, women have been marginalized because men monopolize the decision making structures and are in the majority. One underlying problem for women has been the difficulty in dealing with the inherent patriarchal structures that pervade the lives of people, the processes of state and the party (Nzomo, 1997). In many societies, women are still assigned a secondary place by the prevailing customs and culture. Examples abound of efforts that have been made to include and involve women but for the most part, these are superficial changes (such as minimum quotas of 30% women are introduced by certain parties, or the constitution is changed to allow for representation by women, as in Tanzania). However, on careful examination of the situation one finds that implementation is lacking. As indicated earlier, in many African countries there is no relationship between the number of women voters and the representation by women in party structures. To what extent women themselves actively strive to fulfill these mandates is worth investigating. It has been said of women in Kenya that not only are societal customs and attitudes to blame for their small

part in politics, but their education and training tend to make women accept their secondary status as the natural order of things (Duverger, 1975 as cited in Nzomo, 1997). It would seem there are other barriers (explicit and implicit) that make it difficult to attain equity even after policy and legal interventions.

In education and academic circles, the picture is more distressing especially if one looks at higher education. One would expect that things would change faster in this environment. After all, as Carleene Dei (2006) observed, universities are traditionally viewed as centers of free thought, change and human development (Foreword). But literature on leadership in higher education generally reveals that women are less likely than men to participate in upper levels of administration. Leadership in higher education is still a man's world and universities are male dominated institutions (Gumbi, 2006). In South Africa, the government and its leadership have been committed to gender equality and the empowerment of women, but institutions of higher education have not been quick to emulate the government's example. Survey data on South Africa, reported by Gumbi (2006), showed that in 2003, the average number of women in senior management was approximately 24% across 17 institutions of higher learning. At that point in time there were only 3 female Vice Chancellors, while 82% of professors were male and only 18% were female. A 2005 study carried out in 8 higher education institutions as part of a USAID funded United Negro College Fund Tertiary Education Linkages Project (TELP), found that gender representation of staff was almost equitable (46% women versus 54% male), but that the majority of the women (69%) were employed in lower level administrative, technical or service positions, against 57% of the men falling into this category (UNCFSP-TELP, 2006). Representation of women at Council level (the highest governance structure at higher education institutions) across the 8 institutions was 20% women and 80% men, and only 15% of senior management were women. Representation of women at middle management was slightly better at 27% (UNCFSP-TELP, 2006). Men also dominated positions at professorial and senior lecturer positions.

This gender imbalance is repeated in other countries in the world. According to Universities UK (2004) as cited in Gumbi (2006), out of 40,000 professors in higher education in the UK in 2003, 13% were female and 87% male, while 73% of senior lecturers and researchers (total of 24,630) were male and 27% female. In Australia, women in executive leadership in 2000 were 34.6% compared to 65.4% men (Gumbi, 2006). The USA, admittedly an advanced economy and emulated in many other ways, has not achieved gender equity in higher education. Gumbi (2006) reported that women held 18.7% of full professorships, and only 19.3% of presidents (Vice Chancellors) of colleges and universities.

It is therefore quite evident that men dominate the governance and management levels of higher education institutions. Consequently, men have the decision-making power and authority regarding strategic direction, and allocation of resources. More disconcerting is the likelihood that women's interests in the institutions may not be adequately taken care of, and that women

have few or no role models and mentors, something that may have far reaching consequences in terms of developing future female leaders. It is certainly important to acknowledge Cole's (2006) observation that "women professors in higher education do not just appear out of nowhere. They have to be nurtured and developed throughout society" (p. 23).

Barriers To Women In Leadership

Various factors are at work in limiting women's potential to aspire to positions of leadership. Sadie (2005) advanced the argument that at the bottom of the constraints that women face is the patriarchal system where decision making powers are in the hands of males. In the African context, traditional beliefs and cultural attitudes regarding the role and status of women in society are still prevalent and many women are part of this system finding it difficult to dislocate from this culture and tradition lest they be ostracized. Despite women's education and entry into the job market, the woman's role is typically one of homemaker. The man, on the other hand, is bread winner, head of household and has a right to public life (Sadie, 2005). Confining women's identity to the domestic sphere is one of the barriers to women's entry into politics and politics by its nature catapults one into public life. Generally, cultural attitudes are hostile to women's involvement in politics.

Some women were able to transcend cultural barriers and rise to positions of leadership (whether in politics or elsewhere), but more often than not, it meant having to juggle cultural expectations with their leadership roles. Perhaps one of the most notable examples in literature is Grace Onyango (extensively covered elsewhere in this journal[2]) who in 1969, was the first female elected Member of Parliament in Kenya, but had previously held several leadership positions including that of mayor of the third largest City in Kenya. Grace Onyango was well versed with the Luo traditions, respected and even adhered to them, while at the same time playing into the political/official role of mayor, then parliamentarian. It must be realized that the Luo, like many ethnic groups in Kenya, is traditionally patriarchal. When Onyango came to power in the 1960s, Africa, according to Tripp (2001), had the lowest rate of female legislative participation in the world (p. 142), and politics was a male affair. Ascending to leadership/power positions was not easy for Onyango. She often faced opposition with people (men in particular) arguing that these positions were only suitable for men. Musandu's (2008) chronicle of Onyango's political career shows a woman who was bold, knew what she wanted, and had specific skills that appealed to men and women. Onyango seems to have been cautious not to offend her people by opposing respected (male) elders, and Musandu (2008:14) reckons that at one point Grace Onyango was "at an ethnic and national political crossroads and her survival as a politician depended on the successful balancing of the two important interests".

It has been argued that women themselves are often reluctant to run for public positions and this is partly attributed to cultural prohibitions on women

speaking in public or going to public places. Political campaigning requires that one travel extensively, spend nights away from home, go into bars, and for women it means meeting men. All of these things are not easily accepted for women in many African societies (Tripp, 2001). Women who vie for public office have to consider the risk of being labeled "loose" or "unfit" as mothers and wives, and being socially stigmatized. Such considerations make many women shy away from politics, and positions that put them in the public eye.

Another factor which has played a role in influencing women's political support is the media (Sadie, 2005). For instance, in Botswana and Mozambique, the media often fails to give coverage to the campaigns of female candidates or to interview them. Men have also been known to treat women with hostility during political campaigns. Aili Mari Tripp (2003) reports that in the 1996 presidential elections in Uganda, there were many incidents of intimidation and harassment of women by men (even husbands), who had differing political opinions. Politically active women in that country were threatened with withdrawal of family support, some were thrown out of their homes, and others killed.

The socialization of the girl child in many societies is also to blame for perceived inabilities on the part of women. To quote Melody Emmett (2001:67), "The life passages of women are not sacramentalised, celebrated or even acknowledged". This is illustrative of the position ascribed to women, right from the birth of the girl child, in comparison to the boy child and the subsequent position of men in society. In many African cultures, the rituals and rites of passage pertaining to the boy child nurture them for leadership positions, whether at local or national levels of governance, in business, politics or public administration. Religion tends to cement these cultural norms. As observed by Emmet (2001), all mainstream religions have stereotypical roles for men and women where women are perceived as less equal than men, often being kept separate in the way roles are assigned. In her discussion of women's experience of religion, Emmet (2001) analyzed the rituals performed for and by men in various religions (including Hinduism, Islam and Christianity), finding that men are generally valued and empowered by religion in many ways. Women do not enjoy such privilege, being disempowered by religious structures and practices.

In other public arenas, women's access to leadership positions has been hindered by discrimination and stereotyping. Women are more or less persecuted for seeking an executive position. This is largely due to society's attitude toward appropriate male and female roles. In their discussion on barriers women face in leadership positions, Growe and Montgomery (2000) say that compared to men, women receive little or no encouragement to seek leadership positions. There are also few social networks (formal and informal) for women such as membership in clubs, resulting in a lack of recognition that leads to advancement.

Administrative/leadership positions require hard work, long hours and are stressful. For women, this burden is added on to their child-care, home, and family responsibilities, a phenomenon referred to as the "double shift" in Sader,

et al. (2005). These observations are also true of women in higher education. In addition to issues of family responsibility that make it difficult for women to advance, cultural beliefs about the roles of men and women inhibit women's advancement to top leadership as much as it does in politics (Pandor, 2006). Pandor (2006) also pointed out the all too common statement (often not taken seriously) that women at senior level positions are not always supportive of other women and tend to want to maintain the status quo. Of course, institutional culture and micro politics do act as barriers for women implicitly or explicitly influencing the research environment that ultimately breeds professors and executive leaders. For many women, the time demands of such positions conflict with the demands of the family, and this in itself is a barrier.

There are also other structural barriers beyond culture and religion. Data from the Danish sample of the Comparative Leadership Study found that certain access conditions and conditions of gender positioning seem to predetermine access to top leadership positions, in business, political and public administration. Højgaard (2002) found that the social background of male and female leaders (an access condition) played a particular role in political leadership. The sample of politicians showed that both parents of female leaders had better education and more highly placed jobs than the parents of male politicians. The main conclusion was that in order for women to get top jobs in politics they have to come from a more privileged social background than men. In addition, there were differences in career paths between male and female leaders, with men being recruited from a wider spectrum of jobs than women. Men also achieve top leadership jobs faster than women.

With regard to conditions of gender positioning, Hojgaard (2002) looked at marital status, presence of children and distribution of work at home. The male leaders were more likely to be married, while a higher proportion of women leaders were divorced or independently living together. Furthermore, a higher proportion of women had no children. The partners of female leaders were also more likely to be working full time, while among the partners of male leaders (especially business leaders) there was a high proportion of part time work and full time housewives. Two thirds of male leaders did little or no housework, indicating that most male leaders (unlike female leaders) are relieved of the burdens associated with family life and can devote all their energy to their jobs.

These findings are very illustrative of the social cost of leadership for women, and the gender positioning conditions illustrated in the Danish study could be applied to African women. As such, it is little wonder that many women are hesitant to take up positions of leadership because of the stress involved. For women who do seek leadership positions, some factors that contribute to this stress include balancing work and family, domestic violence and discrimination (Cole, 2006, Gardiner & Tiggermann, 1999). In the African context, the work and family dichotomy is filled with many contradictions for women that provoke stress.

African women have certain expected roles to play. They are expected to bear and nurture children, as well as manage the home. At the same time,

today's African woman is expected to earn a living and contribute to the running of society (BBC News, 2005). In short, Gwendolyn Mikell (1997) referred to contemporary African women as walking a political/gender tightrope, but it is also a leadership and gender tightrope.

Tsitsi Dangarembga from Zimbabwe, in her interview with BBC News (BBC News, 2005) said that one of the reasons there are few women in positions of power is a lack of unity among women themselves. The explanation she gave was that since women were vying for scarce resources, they tend to see other women as a threat and are jealous of one another. She further went on to say that women have the potential to bring about change, but they lack organization due to lack of time, given their multiple roles as bread winners, wives and mothers. African women also fear to raise their voices and speak out for fear of victimization (supposedly by fellow women but also by men, given the cultural expectations of what a woman should or should not do). In this interview, Dangarembga also pointed out that women fear to excel because it makes them seem threatening. Women who want to get married have to present themselves as good marriage material by being meek and submissive.

Another reason for the difficulty African women have in attaining national and international recognition is their daily struggle for survival. It is difficult in the African environment with its extreme deprivation to emphasize women's issues when there are so many pressing national issues (BBC News, 2005). Tripp (2001) also found that despite the political progress made by women in the 1990's, their efforts did not pay off in terms of women being appointed to public office. Women lack the necessary financial support or resources (often mobilized individually and publicly) and this is another tactical measure applied to discourage women from politics. In addition, they are said to lack political experience, confidence, education and connections to run for office (Tripp, 2001: BBC News, 2005). The lack of time due to women's reproductive roles is also mentioned as a limitation to women's participation in leadership (Shayo, 2005).

These barriers are not unique to African women. Similar issues have been raised regarding educated Chinese women. Qin (2000), in examining the development of female college students in China, found that several factors combine to restrict their desire to become successful career women. These include traditional prejudice, social pressures, women's sensitivity to people's misconception of successful women, and the tendency of men to choose 'family-oriented' wives. These women even fear being more capable than men and as a result shy away from demanding jobs. Women are torn between work and family as, on the one hand they do not want to be housewives but at the same time they are challenged to be super women. They wish for and fear the opportunities and challenges of the external world.

Professional women in managerial positions face many challenges and those in institutions of higher learning are no exception. Moutlana (2001) noted that the socialization of women at the work place occurs within a system of power and inequality and that such systems tend to reproduce various forms of

inequality. In South Africa, traditional universities have had corporate cultures whose norms and values were those of the dominant white male society (Moutlana, 2001). When women join such institutions as leaders, they soon realize that they are expected to conform or assimilate to the established culture. After all, how can one be admitted to an exclusive club, and then contradict the club's core values? Moutlana argues that women (Black women particularly) in management are more visible, experience more hardship and feel isolated. Women have to work extra hard as they do not seem to be given the latitude to make mistakes.

In many institutions women's attainment of leadership positions has been facilitated by the implementation of employment equity policies and affirmative action. However, because of this there is the perception that one was "let in," and even the most capable women are viewed with suspicion. Leadership for women is not an easy task, and, as observed by Moutlana (2001), moving up and staying at the top is not necessarily filled with joy.

Other literature on women's leadership in higher education reveals that women are less likely than men to participate in upper levels of administration (Tedrow, 1999). This author advances the theory that there is some kind of "success-avoidance" by women that influences their leadership ability or interest in leadership positions. Advocacy in the higher education arena has tended to rely upon and respond to government legislation on equity rather than being something that women in the sector actively struggle for.

Clearly, many women do make sacrifices in the effort to succeed, whether professionally or personally. For example, women still expect and are expected to take responsibility for bringing up their children, but less parental responsibility is expected of men. As observed by Polly (1988), "If women don't care enough for their children, they know their children risk neglect. If men don't care enough, they know their wives will" (Washington Monthly, May 5, 1988). This observation is true for many working African women today. The issue of children, or family for that matter, is one that disturbs many women as they make the decision to take up a leadership position. Therefore, it is not surprising that some women are perceived as avoiding success in order to care for their families.

Strategies Used To Ensure Equitable Representation In Leadership Positions.

Despite women's efforts (collectively and individually) to fight for recognition and inclusion in all structures of governance, including leadership, it has been very difficult to achieve equity without direct intervention from the government, even where, as in the case of South Africa, the constitution and other regulations make provision for women to be given equal rights to job opportunities and positions of power. For instance there has been a breakthrough in politics for female parliamentarians due to party regulations and electoral laws which have been changed to ensure that women are elected. Changing the rules provides an

opportunity for women to participate in politics, since, "women's increased participation in decision-making seldom happens by some evolutionary miracle" (Lowe Morna, 2004, as cited in Sadie, 2005).

Worldwide, there are three policies that are applied to ensure women's representation in various structures, and Norris (2000) outlined these as rhetorical strategies, affirmative action programs, and positive discrimination strategies. Rhetorical strategies are an informal means of getting women to participate in decision-making structures articulated through political and other public speeches. Rhetorical strategies are often viewed as merely symbolic gestures made in order to appear politically correct and thus gain political mileage. However, rhetorical strategies may also represent the first step toward more substantive reforms if they encourage more women to be selected as parliamentary candidates (Norris, 2000). For instance, in Kenya a target of 30% representation of women in public service positions was set only through a presidential decree but has never been legalized. But this decree has resulted in many more women being nominated to parliament.

Unfortunately, rhetorical statements are made that may not always result in implementation and there are usually no mechanisms to ensure or enforce compliance. In the words of the chairperson to the Kenya Women Parliamentarians Association, "unless the 30 percent target is legalized, women will always remain short-changed" (*Daily Nation*, July 6, 2007). Rhetorical statements have to be followed up with concrete measures and women themselves should take up this challenge.

Affirmative action has been used in many countries to correct gender imbalances. According to Norris (2000), affirmative action programs are meritocratic policies that aim to achieve fairness in recruitment by removing practical barriers that disadvantage women. Affirmative action programs provide training (on public speaking for example), advisory group goals, financial assistance, and monitoring of outcomes. Gender quotas may fall into this category if they are advisory in nature.

Positive discrimination strategies on the other hand set mandatory quotas for the selection of candidates from certain social or political groups (Norris, 2000). Quotas can be set at different levels (to indicate proportion of representation) or at different stages of the selection process. Quotas can also be binding and implemented by law or other internal party rules. Obviously when quotas are legally specified as part of the constitution, they are more likely to be implemented, and guarantee women (or other minority groups) inclusion in leadership. Some people view this process as unfair as some people are automatically included or excluded from recruitment processes exclusively on the basis of their gender or race. It has been argued that such strategies violate the principles of fairness and competence and contribute to a culture of laxity in women (Sadie, 2005).

The SADC countries are committed to fair gender politics and policies and set a minimum target of 30% representation by women in decision making structures of member states, with the SADC parliamentary Forum Constitution

having been amended to ensure 50% representation of women (Sadie, 2005). The quota system has been applied in the SADC region, although in many cases the application has been voluntary. Yolanda Sadie (2005) indicates that there has been pressure to have constitutionally mandated quotas for women in politics in order to safe guard the commitment to gender equality. However, it is only in Tanzania that legislative quotas at the national level exist. Sadie (2005) defends the quota system by saying that the uneven playing field on which men and women compete is such that it requires measures to ensure that women are included.

The system of presidential appointments has been a key strategy used to ensure female representation in political governance. In Swaziland, women have gained access to parliament mainly through appointment by the King, and in many other African countries (including Botswana and Zimbabwe) it is often direct intervention by the presidents that redeems the situation for women in the parliaments (Sadie, 2005). South Africa is a special case where the President appointed a woman as deputy president, appointed a substantial number of female cabinet members, and increased the number of female provincial premiers from one to four.

It has been suggested that the only means to overcome existing man-made barriers to women's political participation is to develop a strong women's movement that could offer support in overcoming systemic gender discrimination (Nzomo, 1997). It is evident that even with gender equity policies in place, women need to monitor implementation themselves. As observed by Nzomo (1997), an over reliance on policy makers and/or state bureaucrats will only bring limited, sometimes superficial, reforms. Also, voluntary quotas are at the mercy of the government of the day for enforcement and may be abandoned at any time. In any case, women should not lose sight of the fact that the policy makers, state bureaucrats and political parties that implement present reforms are still male dominated. To what extent are present reforms genuinely implemented for women? Could there be another reason for these reforms? Until women take full charge and responsibility for issues that concern them changes will remain superficial and slow. There is need for continued lobbying by women for women's issues.

Women's Activism

Activism by its definition "implies acting upon, acting against, acting for causes and issues of social concern and not only personal concern" (Nair, 2004, p. 30). Activism is about social change and is a movement, or a struggle for a particular cause. As indicated by Nair (2004, p. 30), there is a desire to change systems that do not work, and a desire to create systems that do. To what extent have women's movements challenged barriers to women's access to leadership positions?

Women's activism, the world over, has been successful in creating the legal framework and constitutional changes that have enabled women to attain

positions of power/leadership. There is no doubt that women have come a long way in challenging the status quo. African women in particular have made great achievements, especially in political activism given their cultural and social backgrounds. The growth in women's organizations in Africa since the 1990's, and their ability to organize locally and nationally to voice their concerns has been phenomenal (Tripp, 2003). The 1985 and 1995 UN Women's conferences in Nairobi and Beijing respectively, were key milestones for the women's movement internationally. When women's organizations started in Africa they centered on religious, cultural or welfare concerns. Popular activities were handicrafts, savings clubs, farming, and income generating activities. These organizations were tied to the single party states at the time, as women did not want to be at odds with government authorities and there was little or no advocacy to change the laws and policies that discriminated against women (Tripp, 2003). Maendeleo Ya Wanawake, a large women's organization in Kenya, was one such organization concentrating on domestic activities that confined women to their prescribed role of mothers and home makers.

After the UN resolution in 1975 to end the discrimination against women on grounds of their sex, many countries set up organizations (such as special ministries, commissions, committees or councils) for women. However, these organizations were dependent on the government of the day for support, or were organized by the ruling party. Leaders and nominees for elections had to be approved by the ruling party, and no serious attention was given to women's issues. Finally, in the 1990s, there was increased activism for women's rights.

According to Tripp (2003), many autonomous and heterogeneous organizations emerged after the 1985 UN women's conference, while the 1995 Beijing conference incited new energy in advocating women's issues to governments. There were professional associations for women, and women's rights groups tackling specific issues, such as reproductive rights, violence on women, rape, and the development of organizations to address women's fiscal needs, such as credit and finance. Women began to claim leadership of organizations that had predominantly male membership, such as the first woman to head the mineworkers union in Namibia in 2001, and the first woman to head the National Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Uganda in 2002.

There are also examples of African women who had the courage to delve into politics when few women did and were instrumental in championing political reforms as well as forming new political parties in their countries. Notable are Wangari Maathai and Charity Ngilu who headed parties in Kenya during the 1990s. Wangari Maathai, the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize laureate (the first African woman to be awarded this prize since its inception in 1901), has transcended many barriers, (social, cultural, and family) to be where she is. Maathai's political activities, such as the Green Belt Movement, were often suppressed by the government as she was viewed as a threat to the state (Tripp, 2001, 2003). Charity Ngilu, on the other hand, dared to run for the presidency of Kenya in 1997, despite the fact that she came from a very conservative ethnic group in terms of cultural expectations of women. However, Ngilu had the

support of several women's organizations (Tripp, 2001). Other countries, including Zambia, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Angola and the Central African Republic, had women in the leadership positions as well (Tripp, 2001 and 2003).

Women's organizations were also instrumental in opposing corrupt and repressive regimes through public demonstrations (Tripp (2001). In the early 1990s, women in Kenya were involved in violent protests against imprisoned human rights activists, while in Mali, women and children openly demonstrated against the oppressive regime of President Moussa Traoré and suffered for it. On the whole, women have challenged laws and constitutions that do not advance gender equality and they have moved into a variety of leadership positions in governmental, and non-governmental organizations. Women have even fought for leadership positions in religious institutions (Tripp, 2003). The autonomous organizations of today are financially independent of any political party and have made significant contributions to developing the constitutions, as in South Africa, Uganda and Zambia (Tripp, 2001). Despite their low numbers in some parliaments, female representatives have been able to present women's issues, such as maternity leave (Tanzania), or the domestic violence Act (1997), and the Sex Discrimination Act (2002) in Mauritius (Sadie, 2005). Sadie (2005) also found that there have been gender justice reforms in countries in the SADC region but these have been most effective where there are a significant number of women in parliament.

The increase in political activism and subsequently in the number of women in positions of political power, changed the institutional cultures of political bodies, such as parliament, to better accommodate women. Sadie (2005) found that parliaments of SADC countries that had inadequate female representation, were hostile to women and debates tended to be sexist. However, where you have a female Speaker in parliament, as in Lesotho, or many women in parliament, like South Africa, the situation is more controlled. In such cases, there is little or no sexist language and the style of debate has changed. Many women parliamentarians feel strongly about women's rights, and have been able to table issues in parliament that would have otherwise gone unrecognized (Sadie, 2005).

Not surprisingly, there have been exceptions, instances where women in politics have not gone out of their way to politically support women and women's issues. Notable among these women is Margaret Thatcher who was elected prime minister of the United Kingdom in 1979, and who for two decades was the only woman to lead a major Western Democracy (Kunin, 2008). Toynbee Polly (1988), in an article in the Washington Monthly (5 January, 1988), stated that Margaret Thatcher did not appoint a woman to her cabinet, and gave few government jobs to women.

When the current president of Liberia, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, was campaigning for office, people had mixed feelings about her. This was due to her prior association with former President Charles Taylor and the years of failed leadership. According to Paye-Layleh (*Africa News*, 15 September 2005) Taylor, Johnson-Sirleaf and others are known to have encouraged war and

destruction. Sirleaf was once considered an enemy of the state and charged with treason (*The Globalist*, July 2005). Whether President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf will handle power similarly to Margaret Thatcher, or advance women's position in society during her term remains to be seen. According to Polly (1988), "successful Mrs. Thatchers who make it on men's terms change little for most women," (*Washington Monthly*, 1 May 1988). Johnson-Sirleaf came to power at a time when there was an international move towards promoting female participation at all levels of governance. As the first woman president of an African nation, it may be hoped that she will bring more women into leadership positions within her government.

The slow progress in attaining equity in institutions of higher learning has been mentioned. Activism in these institutions has been lacking but progress has been made due to legislation on employment equity or because it is politically correct. There have also been individual women willing to vie for executive positions despite the strong male culture in institutions of higher learning. Of note is the recent appointment of a female Vice Chancellor at Kenyatta University in Kenya, the first in a public university. In South Africa, there have been several female Vice Chancellors at various institutions, and all have taken positions within these dominantly male cultures. Such women deserve recognition for making the move that would pave the way for other women in academia.

What next in Women's Activism?

The struggle for gender equity has not been an easy one. The foregoing sections have highlighted areas where gains have been made with regard to equity in leadership positions, particularly in politics. As indicated above, there have been facilitating mechanisms to ensure that women are given a chance at attaining leadership positions such as gender quotas and affirmative action policies. Even with this enabling climate there are still shortcomings in the women's movement.

In her critique of the South African women's movement, Moola (2004) argued that women's organizations have traditionally operated as political resistance movements because of their understanding that the reforms desired are dependent on the restructuring of the State. As such, more than 10 years down the line, women have come to expect government (with its patriarchal system and paternalistic attitude) to address women's issues, but the mobilization of women themselves around pertinent issues is limited.

In the future, it may be expected that a higher proportion of women would get to parliament through elections and not through appointments, as is the case in many African countries. To achieve this, political leaders should look beyond the merely numerical representation of women. Gender specific interventions are important in achieving equity, but need to be coupled with other long-term interventions. For instance, Shayo (2005) recommends reviewing the design of

electoral systems within political party structures to ensure that they are gender sensitive (p. 12).

In higher education for instance, representation can be a very superficial measure of equity. An emphasis on numbers masks the real problem that needs to be challenged, which is changing the male-centric institutional cultures of micro-politics (Sader, Odendaal & Searle, 2005; Pandor, 2006). Women need to learn how to negotiate with the micro-politics of higher education, and challenge the power dynamics (Pandor, 2006). It should be recognized that negotiations might not always work where the playing field is uneven. However, as advised by Hannah Rosenthal in Santovec (2006), women need to be creative and look at the larger context to get what they need. This may require the building of coalitions with other stakeholders.

A different approach is needed to mobilize more women to become involved and take charge of their own issues. This requires forming coalitions because individualism will not work. For example, women in higher education could borrow from political activism. Women's political movements have succeeded partly because of many women's organizations and Non-government organizations coming together in coalitions (Tripp, 2001). It is evident that political struggles cannot be won by a few lone individuals and that women are more likely to make a difference in organizational cultures if there are enough women in senior positions. This makes it possible to create an institutional capacity for women to empower other women (Sader, et al. 2005). Leadership is expressed by Sader, et al (2005) as "a cooperative and collaborative endeavor, bringing together the energy and passions of a range of people" (p. 65) to deal with issues that they themselves see as important. For instance, this paper has shown that reforming the culture of parliaments requires a significant number of female parliamentarians.

There is also a need to change the mindset of women themselves. This requires further work in developing strategies to empower women so that they have the capabilities and confidence to attain leadership positions without waiting for those positions to be given to them. It is important to develop self worth and dignity among African women. On the other hand, the socialization of the girl child and perceptions of gender roles are issues to be addressed in a more systemic manner. Such a cultural shift does not happen overnight, but until men and women share domestic and childcare responsibilities more equitably women will continue to shy away from accepting leadership positions. This inequity counteracts the efforts of women's activism.

One explanation given for the under representation of women in educational administration is that women themselves are the cause. It has been said that women are sometimes reluctant to run for public office, are not assertive, do not want power, or are unwilling to play the game (Growe & Montgomery, 2000). Women also tend to see other women as threats, leaving successful women unsupported in confronting discrimination (sexism, racism), and the "old boys' network" (de la Rey, 2005, Sader, et al. 2005). For women to develop the confidence to take up leadership there is need for support from other women.

Having role models and mentors is a useful support structure for women. Mentors can have a critical effect on the career paths of women who aspire to advance in higher education administration. It helps women to deal with the barriers and obstacles at the work place. Mentoring also helps to develop self-esteem, aggressive managerial personalities, and overall nurtures future leaders (Growe & Montgomery, 2000) but then women must avail themselves for mentorship. Networking is also important, and can take the place of the "old boys club." According to Growe & Montgomery (2000), networking, role models, and mentors allow women to get advice, moral support and contacts for information.

Irene Moutlana (2001) also contends that women in leadership positions should not be shy to project feminine traits such as being caring, empathetic, trusting, sharing, and empowering. Women should acknowledge these traits as strengths and not weaknesses. It is possible that a persistent display of such values can make them "core values" that will be embraced in future organizations as the normal culture. Women have to learn to be comfortable in leadership, and "just run with it" (Sader, et al, 2005).

Conclusion

There has been a concerted effort to ensure female representation at all levels of governance as such representation is now recognized as a fundamental human right in many countries, and adheres to the principle of fair democratic representation. So far the main strategies used to address the gender imbalances in the various structures of the private and public sectors are affirmative action, the quota system (where a certain number of positions are allocated to women), and through presidential appointments (in the case of parliament and cabinet). It is assumed that once the situation of gender equality has normalized, the attainment of such positions will be through a competitive process. However, it appears that it will take time to get to that stage due to the various challenges that confront women in public spaces.

As indicated by Nair (2004), it is the search and constant yearning for something that has not yet materialized that keeps one on the path of activism. For women and the leadership agenda, the ultimate position would be one where affirmative action, positive discrimination or presidential appointments are no longer necessary. Similarly, Women themselves have to create an alternative culture that will challenge the embedded traditions that dictate what women should or should not do or be, especially in the African setting. This will make people uncomfortable, but as Hannah Rosenthal in her speech at the Wisconsin Women in Higher Education Leadership Conference in 2005, as quoted by Santovec (2006) said:

> We have to be a little more comfortable with making others a little more uncomfortable, so we can look back in 30 years and say, "We did make a difference" (p. 2).

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