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THEME

BLACK WOMEN'S STRUGGLE FOR EMPOWERMENT: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF AFRICAN AND AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN

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DEDICATION

This research work is dedicated to **Peace** and **Hope AGBOZO** and to all the people on earth who believe that hard work is the mother of success.

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Outline

Definition of terms and some Abbreviations Used

Empowerment is a multidimensional social process that helps people develop power to use in their lives, communities and society. (World Bank 2005)

Gender is defined as socially constructed roles, relationships and learned behaviors of male or female. (World Bank, 2005)

MDG: Millennium Development Goal

MSE: Micro and Small Enterprise

NGO: Non Governmental Organisation

UN: United Nations

SSA: Sub Saharan Africa

NACW: National Association of Colored Women

NCNW: National Council of Negro Women

INTRODUCTION

We live in an environment where women are victims of inequalities of all kind. People focus on women as inferior to men, weak and unable to do what men do. Girls and women's life has therefore been modeled accordingly. Going to school, making decisions, ruling affairs, leading political activities are basically thought to be masculine. This Indian common saying is very illustrative: "sending a girl to school is as pointless as watering a neighboring garden".

Although gender inequality exists in most societies around the world to differing extents, the combined devastating effects of poverty, discrimination and lack of opportunity affect Black women in multiple ways, from their economic standing (income levels, rights to own property, access to finance), to their social wellbeing and to their prospects for better living conditions (heavy household work burdens, ability to secure employment or be self-employed).

But the 20th century has witnessed a lot of actions favorable to women's awareness of their own situation. Such actions aimed at promoting women and working for their empowerment in the economical, social and political field as well. Today the tendency seems to have changed to some extent. In the last decades of 20th century important progress has been made towards achieving equality between women and men. Legislation that promises equal opportunities for women and respect for their human rights has been adopted, as well as national machineries to ensure mainstreaming of gender perspective in all spheres of society have been established in many countries. The number of women playing the role formerly reserved for men is growing. The example of the Liberian president Johnson SIRLEAF is quite a pride. There are many other women members of parliament, ministers ambassadors…etc. This is just a slow progress in so far as a vast majority of women continues to undergo different sorts of discrimination in their daily life. Women's equal access to resources is still restricted and their opportunities for higher education, training and

employment are concentrated in limited fields. A "glass ceiling" continues to bar women's advancement in business, government and politics. Many people still believe that women are made for household chores and children making. Girls' school education remains a problem in some parts of our countries. Some customs and traditions are still a burden for women's emancipation. In front of such a jeopardizing situation, Black African women have not folded their arms. Like African American women in the US they have decided to change the tendency. But what have they been doing for their effective empowerment?

Are there any similarities between African American women's struggle for empowerment and Black African women empowerment?

These are some of the basic questions we'll have to develop throughout this research paper.

Chapter1: Problem statement; background purpose and significance of the study

1.1 : Problem statement

Historically, leadership has carried the notion of masculinity and the belief that men make better leaders than women is still common today.

Women are perpetually stereotyped as domesticated, given to leisure, fashion and beauty interests. They are also invariably portrayed as dependent, indecisive, subservient and sport for men's pleasure. Women are persistently objectified as men's possessions. Educated working women activists are portrayed as audacious insubordinate agitators while those who opt to remain single are considered as prostitutes, social degenerates and immoral beings. Those who hold high political or administrative positions are branded as incompetent and inefficient. They are ultimately demonized and isolated as irrational snobs. Although the number of female leaders has increased, they are often named as an afterthought. The societal conventions regarding gender and leadership traditionally exclude women, and top leadership is viewed as a masculine domain. The cultural construction of leadership in itself instigates difference. 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.

This image of women can't favor development on the ground that women represent the greater part of our populations. To question this negative image imposed on them women are in permanent struggle in the U.S as well as in Africa. But are they having the same forms of struggles? What are the similarities between women' struggle for empowerment in the U.S and in Africa? Are there any differences?

The struggle for black women empowerment in the U.S has a particular history which deserves to be known for a better appreciation of the progress that has been made.

1.2: Background

1.2.1: Historical perspective of Black women struggle for empowerment in the U.S.

Some events were determining in the history of African American women struggle for empowerment in so far as they contributed directly or indirectly in strengthening their sense of activism. Among those events, the following one is particularly striking.

A Southern journalist, James Jacks wrote an article in which he referred to African-American women as “prostitutes" and claimed that they "were all thieves and liars.”(Deborah Gray White 1994)

In response to that, the National Association of Colored Women was established in July of 1896 by activist women like Harriet Tubman, Margaret Murray Washington, Frances E.W. Harper, Ida Bell Wells-Barnett, and Mary Church Terrell. Their original intention was to furnish evidence of the moral, mental and material progress made by people of color through the efforts of women. They organized to refute a letter written by James Jacks, the president of the Missouri Press Association, challenging the respectability of African-American women, and referring to them as thieves and prostitutes.

Josephine St Pierre Ruffin one of the founders of that association believed that the best way to respond to racist and sexist attacks was through social-political activism. Arguing that developing positive images of African-American womanhood was important to countering racist attacks, Ruffin said, "Too long have we been silent under unjust and unholy charges; we cannot expect to have them removed until we disprove them through ourselves."

With the help of other notable African-American women, Ruffin initiated the merger of the several African-American women’s clubs including the National League of Colored Women and the National Federation of Afro-American Women to form the first African-American national organization. The organization's name was changed in 1957 to the National Association of Colored

Women's Clubs (NACWC). The NACW's national motto, "Lifting as We Climb," embodied the goals and initiatives established by the national organization and carried out by its local and regional chapters. The NACWC Key objectives include developing the economic, moral, religious and social welfare of women and children as well as enforcing the civil and political rights for all American citizens.

1.2.1.1: Promoting race and social services

In 1902, the organization's first president, Mary Church Terrell, argued "Self-preservation demands that black women go among the lowly, illiterate, and even vicious, to whom they are bound to ties of race and sex...to reclaim them." As such one of the NACWC's main focuses was developing initiatives that would help impoverished and disenfranchised African-Americans.

In Terrell's first address as president of the NACW, she said, "The work which we hope to accomplish can be done better, we believe, by the mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters of our race than by the fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons." She charged members of the organization with the task of developing employment training and fair wages for women while establishing kindergarten programs for young children and recreational programs for older children.

1.2.1.2: NACWC's main actions

Through various national, regional and local initiatives, the NACW fought for the voting rights of all Americans. Women of the NACW supported women's right to vote through their work on the local and national level. When the 19th Amendment was ratified in 1920, the NACW supported the establishment of citizenship schools. Georgia Nugent, chair of the NACW Executive Committee, told members, "the ballot without intelligence back of it is a menace instead of a blessing and I like to believe that women are accepting their recently granted citizenship with a sense of reverent responsibility."

1.2.1.3: Fighting social injustice

The NACW vehemently opposed segregation and supported anti-lynching legislation. Using its publication, *National Notes*, the organization was able to discuss its opposition to racism and segregation in society with a wider audience. Regional and local chapters of NACW launched various fundraising efforts and participated in nonviolent protests and boycotts of segregated public facilities. The NACW was not alone in the attempt of awakening African American women activism for empowerment.

Many years later the **National Council of Negro Women** (NCNW) was created. It is a non-profit organization with the mission to advance the opportunities and the quality of life for African American women, their families and communities. NCNW fulfills this mission through research, advocacy, national and community based services and programs in the United States and Africa. With its 28 national affiliate organizations and its more than 200 community based sections, NCNW has an outreach to nearly four million women, all contributing to the peaceful solutions to the problems of human welfare and rights.

The NCNW was founded in 1935 by Mary McLeod Bethune child of slave parents, distinguished educator, and government consultant. Mary McLeod Bethune saw the need for harnessing the power and extending the leadership of African American women through a national organization.

The works of these organizations reinforced significantly African American will to question the situation of powerlessness they were object to. All the movements and associations dedicated to African American women empowerment and the progress that has been made were deeply influenced by this context created by the NACW and the NCNW.

1.3: Purpose and objectives of the study

It is known to everybody that women constitute the greater part of our populations. How can we expect to reach development goals if the greater component of the population is not fully integrated in the process?

By choosing to work on this topic, I aim at drawing people's attention in general and policy makers' attention in particular on the risk we are running if we continue to regard women as less capable.

Full and equal participation of women in political and economic life, at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex are priority objectives of this research paper.

Recognizing that the achievement of equal and full participation of women in all spheres of activity constitutes an inseparable part of political, economic, social and cultural development of all countries, taking into consideration that social progress requires active participation of women in promoting international peace and cooperation, I've decided to make a research on this topic.

I would like to propose in the course of this study what I believe can be done to really empower women in the political, and economical fields in order to increase our chance to reach the millennium goals for development.

1.4: Significance of the study

The issue of black women empowerment is being discussed with increasing frequency in recent years because of the influence it can have on the development of our societies. This study will be of considerable interest on the ground that it will greatly contribute in drawing people's attention on the harm we are creating by underestimating women's capacities in our societies.

This study is also significant with respect to its implication for women themselves particularly in the context where some of them are undertaking actions to make their voice heard and make policymakers take them into account.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1: Empowerment: What Is It?

We often use the term empowerment without understanding what it really means. A literature review resulted in no clear definition of the concept, especially one that could cross-disciplinary lines. Cheryl E.Czuba (1999) defines empowerment as a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power in people for use in their own lives, their communities and in their society, by acting on issues they define as important.

2.1.1: Understanding Power

At the core of the concept of empowerment is the idea of power. The possibility of empowerment depends on two things. First, empowerment requires that power can change. If power cannot change, if it is inherent in positions or people, then empowerment is not possible, nor is empowerment conceivable in any meaningful way. In other words, if power can change, then empowerment is possible. Second, the concept of empowerment depends upon the idea that power can expand. This second point reflects our common experiences of power rather than how we think about power. To clarify these points, we first discuss what we mean by power.

Power is often related to our ability to make others do what we want, regardless of their own wishes or interests (Weber, 1946). Traditional social science emphasizes power as influence and control, often treating power as a commodity or structure divorced from human action (Lips, 1991). Conceived in this way, power can be viewed as unchanging or unchangeable. Weber (1946) gives us a key word beyond this limitation by recognizing that power exists within the context of a relationship between people or things. Power does not exist in isolation nor is it inherent in individuals. By implication, since power is

created in relationships, power and power relationships can change. Empowerment as a process of change, then, becomes a meaningful concept.

A brief exercise makes the importance of this discussion clear. Quickly, list three words that immediately come to mind when you hear the word power. For most people, words that come to mind when we think about power often revolve around control and domination. Focusing on these aspects of power limit our ability to understand and define empowerment.

The concept of empowerment also depends upon power that can expand our second stated requirement. Understanding power as zero-sum, as something that you get at my expense, cuts most of us off from power. A zero-sum conception of power means that power will remain in the hands of the powerful unless they give it up. Although this is certainly one way that power can be experienced, it neglects the way power will remain in the hands of the powerful unless they give it up. Another brief exercise highlights the importance of a definition of power that includes expansion. Answer the question; "Have you ever felt powerful?" Was it at someone's expense? Was it with someone else?

Grounded in an understanding that power will be seen and understood differently by people who inhabit various positions in power structures (Lukes, 199 4), contemporary research on power has opened new perspectives that reflect aspects of power that are not zero-sum, but are shared. Feminists (Miller, 1976; Starhawk, 1987), members of grassroots organizations (Bookman & Morgen, 1984), racial and ethnic groups (Nicola-McLaughlin & Chandler, 1984), and even individuals in families bring into focus another aspect of power, one that is characterized by collaboration, sharing and mutuality (Kreisberg, 1992).

Researchers and practitioners call this aspect of power "relational power"(Lappe & DuBois, 1994), generative power (Korten, 1987), "integrative power," and "power with" (Kreisberg, 1992).This aspect means that gaining power actually strengthens the power of others rather than diminishing it such as occurs with domination/power. Kreisberg has suggested that power defined as

"the capacity to implement" (Kreisberg, 1992:57) is broad enough to allow power to mean domination, authority, influence, and shared power or "power with." It is this definition of power, as a process that occurs in relationships, that gives us the possibility of empowerment.

2.1.2: Understanding Empowerment

Empowerment is a construct shared by many disciplines and arenas: community development, psychology, education, economics, and studies of social movements and organizations, among others. How empowerment is understood varies among these perspectives. In recent empowerment literature, the meaning of the term empowerment is often assumed rather than explained or defined. Rappoport (1984) has noted that it is easy to define empowerment by its absence but difficult to define in action as it takes on different forms in different people and contexts. Even defining the concept is subject to debate. Zimmerman (1984) has stated that asserting a single definition of empowerment may make attempts to achieve it formulaic or prescription-like, contradicting the very concept of empowerment.

A common understanding of empowerment is necessary, however, to allow us to know empowerment when we see it in people with whom we are working, and for program evaluation. According to Bailey (1992), how we precisely define empowerment within our projects and programs will depend upon the specific people and context involved.

As a general definition, however, we suggest that empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important.

We suggest that three components of our definition are basic to any understanding of empowerment. Empowerment is multi-dimensional, social, and a process. It is multi-dimensional in that it occurs within sociological,

psychological, economic, and other dimensions. Empowerment also occurs at various levels, such as individual, group, and community. Empowerment, by definition, is a social process, since it occurs in relationship to others. Empowerment is a process that is similar to a path or journey, one that develops as we work through it. Other aspects of empowerment may vary according to the specific context and people involved, but these remain constant. In addition, one important implication of this definition of empowerment is that the individual and community are fundamentally connected.

2.1.3: Interconnection of Individuals and Community

Wilson (1996) pointed out that recently, more researchers, organizers, politicians and employers recognize that individual change is a prerequisite for community and social change and empowerment. This does not mean that we can point the finger at those with less access to power, telling them that they must change to become more like "us" in order to be powerful or successful. Rather, individual change becomes a bridge to community connectedness and social change (Wilson, 1996).

To create change we must change individually to enable us to become partners in solving the complex issues facing us. In collaborations based on mutual respect, diverse perspectives, and a developing vision, people work toward creative and realistic solutions. This synthesis of individual and collective change (Wilson, 1996; Florin & Wandersman, 1990; Speer & Hughey, 1995) is our understanding of an empowerment process.

2.2: Understanding the importance of empowering women.

Maccoby (2004) states that until very recently, the general perception of business management were a structure dominated by males whose leadership style was hierarchical, action-oriented, and even quasi-military. The ideal leader was seen as an independent, tough, individualistic hero. But according to Helgensen (1990) a new generation of women is bringing to business a style often described as more consensus-building, more open and inclusive, more

likely to encourage participation by others, and even more caring than that of many males.

In *Fast Company*, "Women and Men, Work and Power" Patrick (1998), President and COO, *Martha Stewart Living*, is quoted as saying, "We can't ignore a million years of history at the office or in the living room. Men hunt, women gather." A funny but true attribute of the modern hunter is "going for the jugular and then inviting you out for a beer afterwards." According to Joy and Kane-Benson (1994) women tend to encourage harmony and agreement, consult with experts, employees and peers before making a decision, and make personal connections with others at work. Most proponents of more women in management start by talking about the qualities women bring to the workplace that makes them better managers: Imagination, Intuition, Inventiveness, Innovation, and Involvement. The immediate response from any rational manager, whether man or woman, is: those are qualities that any manager would have to possess to succeed. Any manager would have to possess these qualities to be a good manager, and to succeed. Where is the difference then? (Caliper and Aurora, 2005)

The difference lies in the fact that women bring in a freshness of thought to the workplace. This is the kind of freshness of thought that a new and talented recruit would bring into a creative organisation. The edge that women have in their original approach is brought about by the very reason why they were referred to as the "weaker sex" till recently. Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, CEO, Biocon in Nagaraj (1999), insists that this freshness of thought is the quality that makes her prefer women candidates for any vacant position in her company. There is no other way to manage work in the home other than by exhibiting the very qualities that are touted as the difference they bring in to the workplace.

2.2.1 Negotiating Skills

Apart from skills for the workplace, women also bring with them a special quality to the negotiating table. Sangita Singh in Nagaraj (1999) says that the fact that she is a woman is an advantage in itself. For instance, she is able to get a meeting with a prospective client when a male colleague cannot wangle one. Also, she says that clients are more polite to her, and are, at the least, willing to listen to her. This is again very peculiar in our society because the reason why a woman is "the weaker sex" is also the reason why she is powerful at the negotiating table.

2.2.2: A Distinct Persuasive Style.

The strong people skills possessed by women leaders enable them to read situations accurately and take in information from all sides. This willingness to see all sides of a situation enhances their persuasive ability. They can zero in on concerns or objections expressed, weigh these, then address and incorporate them into the grander scheme of things as appropriate. These women leaders genuinely understand and care about where others are coming from, allowing them to approach a subject from others' perspective. The people they lead feel better understood, supported and valued (Neetu et al, 2007).

This engaging style of persuasion possessed by women leaders differs from that of male leaders, who tend to start from their own point of view. Because they are not as flexible or sociable, male leaders will often force their point of view, convincing through the strength of their position, rather than by actually persuading (Greenberg and Sweeney, 2006).

2.2.3: Rebounding and Learning from Setbacks

Women express a unique approach toward dealing with disappointment, rejection or situations that don't work out their way. "They will feel the sting of being set back.

They may even dwell on it, and tend to be a little self-critical. But then because of their assertiveness, they will muster their strength, shake it off, learn what they need to carry on and a voice in the back of their head will say, 'I'll show you." (Greenberg and Sweeney, 2006). Women are additionally unwilling, as well as unable to compartmentalize their lives and so draw upon personal experience to bring private sphere information and insights to their jobs (Jacobs in April and Dreyer, 2007).

2.2.4: Inclusive, Team-Oriented Approach

When it comes to decision-making and problem-solving Caliper and Aurora (2005) demonstrated an inclusive, team-building leadership style. They were genuinely

Interested in hearing all points of view, then making the best possible decision, and the final decision did not necessarily have to be their initial point of view. They were able to read situations accurately, take in information from all sides and then make the most informed decision possible. The difference in leadership styles between men and women starts with listening. Not just listening to form your answer, but really listening, learning, reflecting, and then implementing a plan that incorporates the best of everyone's ideas.

Greenberg and Sweeney (2006) explain that the top-down, hierarchical approach to leadership doesn't work very well in today's economy. With information much more easily accessible, leadership depends less upon protecting information and more upon sharing what is known. It's not about who has the most information, but who has the best perspective."

In a Harvard Business Review report on a leadership survey conducted for the International Women's Forum in Washington, Rosener in Nelton (1991) states that she found that the women respondents tended to use what she calls an "interactive" leadership style, in which they not only encouraged others' participation but also attempted "to enhance other people's sense of self-worth and to energize followers."

These women leaders, she says, "believe that people perform best when they feel good about themselves and their work." Rosener in Nelton (1991) also points out, a high proportion of young professional workers are increasingly typical in organizations. "They demand to participate and contribute," she says. "In some cases, they have knowledge or talents their bosses don't have." She sees these kinds of workers as likely to respond more to interactive leaders.

2.2.5: A Willingness to Take Risks

According to the study jointly conducted by Caliper and Aurora (2005) women leaders scored significantly lower than male leaders in external structure (adhering to established procedures) and cautiousness. They were also significantly higher in their level of urgency and risk taking. And they have very high scores in abstract reasoning. One of the most surprising findings from the study is that women leaders are more likely to push back if they are overly bound by regulations and rules, and they will engage in more risk-taking than male counterparts.

“Women leaders are venturesome, less interested in what has been than in what can be. They will run the risk of occasionally being wrong in order to get things done.

And with their fine abstract reasoning skills, they will learn from any mistakes and carry on.” (Greenberg and Sweeney, 2006).

2.2.6: Learning a thing or two from men, but not being like them

Mara Swan, Chief People Officer, Molson Coors in Greenberg and Sweeney (2006), has noticed that male and female leaders express their differences through language. “I always considered myself a fairly aggressive woman, but early in my career, I would find myself asking for permission, rather than saying, ‘Here is what I need and here is why I need it.’ So, I started to change my language, just slightly, and I was much more successful. The one

thing women leaders can learn from men is to say what we need. But so many women don't like to hear the word no."

2.2.7: Relationship and Direct Communication

Women place a high value on relationships and judged the success of their organizations based on the quality of relationships within them (Dicks in April and Dreyer, 2007).

Women prefer direct communication to communication up and down a chain of command. They are hailed for their intuitive, communicative and feminine style of leadership (Klenke in April and Dreyer, 2007).

2.2.8: Embracing Diversity and Equality

Women are comfortable with diversity, having been outsiders themselves and knowing in their bones what kind of value fresh eyes could bring. They were skeptical of hierarchies and surprisingly disdainful of the kinds of perks and privileges that distinguish hierarchical leaders and establish their place in the pecking order. They preferred leading from the center rather than the top and structured their organizations to reflect this.

2.2.9: "Soft Qualities"

Authenticity

What's becoming a thing of the past, says Ellen B. Richstone, are women "who think that the way they're going to get to the top is by being more male than the males." A member of an otherwise all-male corporate inner circle, Richstone, 39, is chief financial officer of Bull HN Information Systems Inc., a computer maker with annual revenues of $2.2 billion.

Kindness

While qualities reflective of the feminine are irrelevant to the bottom-liners, they make a profound difference to the quality of day-to-day corporate life. It is a regrettable male failing that the many acts of female generosity are so often taken for granted and so seldom acknowledged. Kindness is at the center of what women regularly bring to the workplace. For them, getting the job done is important, but no less important than how the job is done. Respect and inclusion are valued, as is the sharing of credit (Rozek, 20060. There are women who were gracious under attack, patient with boorish behavior, genuinely pleased by the success of others, and helpful to colleagues without thought of recognition (April and Dreyer, 2007).

Compassion, Co-operation, Thoughtfulness

A compassionate smile or a comforting hand on one's shoulder can make a huge difference to colleagues in the workplace. Women value cooperation over competition and focus on process as well as outcome. They are the unofficial interdepartmental liaisons and the *de facto* peacemakers. They tend to relationships as well as tasks. Women are more willing than men to ask for guidance or assistance when they were unsure of something, and less likely to shoot from the hip (Rozek, 2006).

2.2.10: Creating a New Leadership Style?

So, are women creating a new style of leadership? The answer may be "yes." The Caliper and Aurora (2005) study provides preliminary evidence that women bring distinct personality and motivational strengths to leadership. This study provides preliminary evidence that women bring clear personality and motivational strengths to leadership.

Greenberg and Patrick (2005) conclude that these personality qualities combine to create a leadership profile that is much more conducive to today's diverse workplace, where information is shared freely, collaboration is vital and

teamwork distinguishes the best companies." In addition, women can help companies be more competitive because they see business opportunities as a result of their own experience.

A survey of high-level executives by Russell Reynolds Associates, Inc., a New York based executive recruiting firm, categorized respondents as "leader-style" (that is, visionary, innovative, and strategic in their thinking) or as "manager-style" (concerned with maintaining momentum, balancing interests, stabilizing forces, and implementing tactical plans). The study found that women in both staff and line positions were more likely to be leader-style executives than their male counterparts.

Women were also more likely to use what experts call a "transformational" style, getting subordinates to transform their own self-interest into the goals of the organization. The male respondents leaned toward the traditional "command-and control" style. They were more likely to employ a "transactional" leadership, viewing job performance as a series of transactions with subordinates and offering rewards for services rendered or punishment for inadequate performance." While men have had to appear to be competitive, strong, tough, decisive, and in control, women have been allowed to be cooperative, emotional, supportive, and vulnerable," says Rosener in Nelton (1991) California in Irvine. "This may explain why women today are more likely than men to be interactive leaders."

In her book, Feminine Leadership, or How to Succeed in Business Without Being one of the Boys, Marilyn Loden (1985), a San Francisco corporate management consultant, wrote: "In some respects, it seems that women managers may be better prepared to cope with the challenges of the future than many traditional male leaders who succeeded in the past. For many of the characteristics being touted as critical for future success: concern for people, interpersonal skills, intuitive management and creative problem solving--are qualities that women as a group are encouraged to develop and rely on throughout their lives (April and Dryer, 2007)

In a position to shape a corporate culture, women business founders say the companies they create are different from most of those headed by men. The structures that women establish seem to be mechanisms to facilitate team building and fluidity, to empower the entire staff as opposed to creating fiefdoms and territories (Finch in April and Dreyer, 2007).

Because they were breaking new ground, the first female executives copied the leadership styles that had proved successful for men "Now a second wave of women is making its way into top management," Rosener says, "not by adopting the style and habits that have proved successful for men but by drawing on the skills and attitudes they developed from their shared experience as women." (Nelton, 1991)

2.3: Challenges Facing Women in Executive Positions

Beeton (2008) has identified the following challenges for women as entrepreneurs or women in business: Poor access to financial support; Substandard infrastructure; Regulations that create administrative burdens and costs; Negative socio-cultural attitudes; Gender discrimination; Lower credibility when it comes to dealing with suppliers, banking institutions and clients.

April and Dreyer (2007) state that equal opportunities in organisations suggest to women that there is room at the top and are suppose to remove those barriers that confine women to the meanest positions and prevent their vertical progress to different levels and locations in the hierarchy. However are a number of factors that have contributed to towards the delayed acceptance of women in business. These factors are also the main stumbling blocks to the advancement of women to positions of executive leadership: Education, Societal Perceptions, The Glass Ceiling, The Queen Bee Syndrome and Life-work Balance (April and Dreyer, 2007).

2.3.1. Education

Research conducted by Alexander Forbes Risk Services finds that one of the factors that have contributed towards the delayed acceptance of women in business is a limited pool of required skills (Macdonald, 2005). According to Muiruri-Mwagiry in April and Dreyer (2007) the road to equal opportunities for women begins with access to education. It provides an entry ticket to positions of leadership by raising awareness through gender reflective curriculum, building competencies, skills and acquiring qualifications. Irrespective if companies are prepared to address the issues facing executive women or not, without a tertiary education and the right skills, women who have both the desire and capacity for leadership, will never have an opportunity to make their way to the top of the corporate ladder.

2.3.2. Societal Perceptions

Women in the business environment are subjected to perceptions regarding their ability, qualification, skills and attitude. The following perceptions indicate just how wrongly women in business are perceived:

Female executives felt that barriers to advancement are a function of societal rather than individual factors. In a recent study conducted by Accenture respondents in the US and UK were confident of their own business capabilities and more likely to believe that the greatest barriers to their success came not from the culture of their organisations but from society at large (Price, 2006). However at the other end of the spectrum, women executives in Canada and the Philippines believe that societal issues are less of a barrier and that corporate cultures are more to blame for the glass ceiling.

A distinct hurdle is the pervasive stereotyping of women's capacity for leadership. "Everyone is unconsciously biased and there is strong evidence that men are biased against promoting women in companies" (Macdonald, 2005). Research shows that when a woman is assertive and takes charge, people often react negatively but if she fulfils the prescribed stereotype of being a kind and

gentle woman, she may be regarded as a poor leader (Carey, 2007). A survey conducted by Elle Magazine of some 60,000 corporates in South Africa has brought to light that women executives create their own glass ceiling (Tahmincioglu, 2007). The findings illustrate that women executives have a long way to go before they start believing that they are as good as their male counterparts. Key points of interest are the following:

- 75% of females polled would rather have a man for a boss. Men are better leaders on the job than the opposite gender

- Many women feel that they do not belong in the boardroom

- The word "catty" was used 347 times to describe women. Women are bitchy, moody, gossipy and emotional.

Smith (2008) states that when a man talks about his successes he is highly regarded, but when a woman does the same, she is perceived as boastful or arrogant. Women are either intimidated or overly aggressive to be heard. (SA Women in Corporate Leadership Census, 2004). Beautiful applicants receive lower ratings because subconsciously they are pegged as stereotypically female and are therefore not suited for a job as a boss. According to Adkins (2006) society believes that women do not have the make-up to be effective in executive positions. Macdonald (2005) confirms the perception exists that women are not capable of handling management positions. Mwangi (2007) indicated that it is believed that African women are non-assertive in business.

Assumptions are often made regarding women's availability to do a job without interference from family responsibilities (April and Dryer, 2007). A commonly shared view is that even the most talented women, if they are young, will at some point marry, follow their spouses if they relocate and have children. This means that they cannot be relied on as a solid succession pipeline for senior and top management.

While the question of family responsibilities is a key issue, it provides a useful means to detract attention from the organisation culture barriers that

woman face in many working environments. It is also perceived that women are less mobile in terms of geographical movements (Macdonald).

Locally, there is a perception that in the New South Africa women has more opportunities, therefore more economic power than their male counterparts (Booysen, 2007). In conjunction with this is the perception that women have been appointed to executive positions as part of affirmative action or empowerment initiatives rather than because the women are qualified for the positions (April and Dreyer, 2007). Women do not grow through in the organisation to be appointed in senior management positions. (SA Women in Corporate Leadership Census, 2004).

2.3.3. Glass Ceiling and Glass Walls

Hu and Yun (2008) explain that the glass ceiling is generally thought of as the transparent but real barrier which impedes qualified women and other minorities from advancing up the job ladder into high management positions April and Dreyer (2007) claims that of all the 'barriers to entry' mentioned, "The Glass Ceiling" is cited as the primary barrier to entry, and generally describes the uphill battle women face.

It is generally based on attitudinal or organizational biasness. A major indicator is the difference in compensation of women. Women executives are paid far less than their female counterparts. Empower rating agency Empowerdex recently conducted a study that shows that the gender gap across government and business in South Africa is 25%. This means that for every R1 men earn, women earn 75 cents.

According to the report, the gender pay gap is the smallest in the 'modern sectors' such as information technology (IT) and telecommunications, where women executives earn 18% less than their male counterparts. The largest gap is in the resources sector, at 36.8% (Macdonald, 2005).

For women to reach the top, individuals must manage products or services, clients or customers, or the business of the 'business' line jobs that

entail profit and loss responsibility and are critical to the finances of the organization. However, very few women in the corporate world hold roles with this responsibility and are hence not in the 'pipeline' or 'feeder group' for executive positions. Research finds that only six percent of line officer jobs in Fortune 500 companies are held by women. These barriers to women's access to line positions are commonly referred to as 'glass walls' (Corporate Leadership Council, 2008).

In many cases, glass walls are due to the persistence of unexamined beliefs concerning women's commitment and abilities such as their reluctance to take risks, or their distracting commitments to family and are artificially constraining women's capabilities. It may be that the achievements of some women at the corporate centre have dissipated many of these destructive attitudes, but in many cases, prejudices still exist within decentralised operations (Corporate Leadership Council, 2008).

2.3.4. Queen Bee Syndrome

The concept was first proposed by Staines et al in April and Dreyer (2007), who identified it as an attitude exhibited by executive women who are reluctant to risk their own careers by promoting other women. It also describes the situation where women who have attained senior positions do not use their power to assist struggling young women or change the system, because of a desire to remain unique in an organisation (April and Dreyer, 2007).

2.3.5. Work-Life Balance

In addition to breaking through the barriers to entry, one of the biggest challenges female executives face, is maintaining a balance between career and family.

Research by Accenture recently indicated that while both men and women today are struggling to balance their personal and professional lives, in most instances the burden of caring for children, while continuing to advance

professionally, and continues to fall more heavily on women (Thompson, 2007). More women than men, pursuing careers indicated that it involved more personal sacrifice than they had envisioned when they started out in their careers. Griffiths et al in April and Dryer (2007), in their research with executive women in Canada revealed critical factors that prompt these executives to leave their employers: inhospitable organisational culture, incompatibility of culture and values, and insufficient support for personal and family commitments goals. Macdonald (2005) states: “that in order for empowerment to achieve its goals, companies and corporates needs to accept that a woman in the workplace is not simply a man in a skirt.” Women have different needs and this need to be accommodated in order for integration to be successful.

Chapter:3 Methodology

The scientific credibility of a research work depends on the methodology used. The present study has taken into account an important number of subjects like obstacles to Black women's participation in decision making and their access to political leadership. It also takes into account the struggle they have been making for their empowerment.

It is in line with this objective that data have been collected through questionnaire and interview.

3.1: Participants

The people who participated in this research can be divided into three categories: women and men of different African nationalities, political and administrative authorities and women political leaders, responsible of women associations and economic enterprises. Their age ranged between eighteen and fifty five.

The rationale of including both men and women of different nationalities was twofold: first, to gain more relevant and in-depth data related to their experience and knowledge of the realities of their respective countries, second, to gain additional guidance in order to ensure that the research was being conducted appropriately.

3.2: Instruments

Considering the constraints, like limited financial resources and the fact that I can't go to all African countries, it was considered most appropriate and beneficial to administer questionnaires and interviews to people of different African nationalities that we went to meet in the embassies and some international schools in Cotonou.

3.2.1: Interviews

The rationale behind the use of interview as a data collection tool was that it can provide access to things that cannot be directly observed, such as feelings, thoughts, intentions, or beliefs. It also provides participants with opportunities to select, reconstruct, and reflect upon details of their experience within the specific context of their lives.

Two types of interview were conducted: individual and group interviews

3.2.1.1: Individual Interviews

A face-to-face interview technique was preferred as it was essential to ensure that I was in a position of being able to access the degree of the interviewee's interest and involvement. It was also appropriate because of its flexibility balanced by structure and the quality of the data so obtained.

Twenty subjects were individually interviewed within a period of two weeks.

The interview lasted approximately 15-20 minutes. Nearly all the interviews were conducted in French and were tape-recorded with the subject's permission. Initially, the subjects were asked open-ended questions to establish a rapport with the subjects. Later, a semi-structured question format was used as a guideline to ask questions and to encourage the interviewees to talk in their own way.

3.2.1.2: Focus Group Interviews

The group interview technique in the form of focus group discussion was also utilized to lend breadth and richness to the data. Its implication was that group interviews can provide different kinds of data from individual interviews.

Instead of asking questions to each person in turn, participants are encouraged to talk to one another: asking questions, exchanging anecdotes, and commenting on each others' experiences and views, and thus generating data through interaction.

The discussion was moderated by me as a co-participant and an attempt was made to ensure “an even participation” by encouraging the hesitant participants to make contribution, as well as managing those who seek to dominate the proceedings.

3.2.2: The questionnaires

The second instruments I have used are questionnaires. I have structured short and precise questions to my participants in order to get the straight forward information I needed. These short questions helped me to lead and guide my participants to what I wanted from them. This instrument has worked well since most of them were happy of the objectives I’m seeking to reach through this research work.

3.3: Data collection procedure

I addressed interviews to the authorities because most of them declared being time poor to fill questionnaires but the other participants accepted to fill them. First, I explained them the objectives of my questions. After the explanation, I distributed the questionnaires to them. They requested some time to fill in the questionnaires form. I didn’t find any objection to their request, and some weeks later I went back to collect my questionnaires sheets. Some forgot to deal with the given questionnaires; other cooperated reluctantly. But roughly, I got the majority of my answers.

I went through the same experience as far as the interviews were concerned. If some were very helpful with their spontaneous way of giving answers to the different questions some others showed hesitation but end up in giving answers with my perseverance. The questionnaire and the interview questions are annexed to this work.

Chapter 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4:1- African American women struggle for empowerment

4:1-1 The fight for self definition

The empowerment of African American women is a matter of very long struggles which involved many and various actors like black women themselves. Such struggles have been possible partly thanks to the active role played by African American intellectual women who contributed greatly in awakening African American women's consciousness on their situation by calling them to resist.

The vast majority of African-American women were brought to the United States to work as slaves in a situation of oppression. Oppression describes any unjust situation where, systematically and over a long period of time, one group denies another group access to the resources of society. Race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, and ethnicity among others constitute major forms of oppression in the United States.

This oppression has encompassed three interdependent dimensions. First, the economic dimension which has to do with the exploitation of Black women's labor essential to U.S. capitalism

Second, the political dimension of oppression has denied African-American women the rights and privileges routinely extended to White citizens. Forbidding Black women to vote, excluding African-American women from public office, and withholding equitable treatment in the criminal justice system. Finally, the ideological dimension concerned with controlling images applied to Black women that originated during the slave era. I wean Ideology refers to the body of ideas reflecting the interests of a group of people. Within U.S. culture, racist and sexist ideologies permeate the social structure to such a degree that they become hegemonic, namely, seen as natural, normal, and inevitable.

Taken together, these three dimensions of oppression function as a highly effective system of social control designed to keep African-American women in an assigned, subordinate place. It was in that very situation imposed on them

that African American women would individually or collectively protest and bring people's attention on their existence as women like the others.

4:1-2. Roles of African American intellectual women in the fight for self definition

From their subordinate place, African American women were not without reactions. The first African American intellectual women expressed their concerns on the issues through writings and other forms of intellectual work but they were denied the right to make their work known. So one of the first struggles African American women had to make was to fight for reclaiming black women thinkers' ideas.

In this attempt, the process consisted in finding unrecognized and unheralded works, scattered and unprinted. We can give the example of Maria Stewart and Zora Neale Hurston whose works came to be known thanks respectively to Marilyn Richardson in 1987 and Alice Walker in 1979. Those women have brought important contributions to U.S Black women struggle for self definition through the quality of their speeches. Here, it is important to mention that Black women intellectuals are neither all academics nor found primarily in the Black middle class. Instead, all U.S. Black women who somehow contribute to Black feminist thought as critical social theory are identified as "intellectuals."They may be highly educated. Many are not. For example, nineteenth-century Black feminist activist Sojourner Truth is not typically seen as an intellectual. Because she could neither read nor write, much of what we know about her has been recorded by other people. One of her most famous speeches, that delivered at the 1851 women's rights convention in Akron, Ohio, comes to us in a report written by a feminist abolitionist some time after the event itself (Painter 1993).We do not know what Truth actually said, only what the recorder claims that she said. Despite this limitation, in that speech Truth reportedly provides an incisive analysis of the definition of the term *woman* forwarded in the mid-1800s:

“That man over there says women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud puddles, or gives me any best place!

And ain’t I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain’t I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen them most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain’t I a woman? (Loewenberg and Bogin 1976, 235)

This passage shows that Rather than accepting the existing assumptions about what a woman is and then trying to prove that she fit the standards; Truth challenged the very standards themselves.

Like her, Maria Stewart was one of the first U.S. Black feminists to champion the utility of Black women’s relationships with one another in providing a community for Black women’s activism and self-determination. “Shall it any longer be said of the daughters of Africa, they have no ambition, they have no force?” she questioned.

These self-definitions of Black womanhood were designed to resist the negative controlling images of Black womanhood advanced by Whites as well as the discriminatory social practices that these controlling images supported.

4:1-3 Resisting the negative controlling image of black womanhood

Despite the fact that U.S. Black women face common challenges, this doesn’t mean that individual African-American women have all had the same experiences. They therefore had different responses to those challenges. But the question that comes to our mind is to know how they managed to struggle for a change?

We notice that despite differences created by historical era, age, social class, sexual orientation, skin color, or ethnicity, the legacy of struggle against the

violence that permeates U.S. social structures is a common thread binding African-American women. One of the means they used which constituted a standpoint in their struggle was the relationship with one another.

One of the most important steps in U.S Black women efforts to construct individual and collective voice is women's relationship with one another. These relationships were basically informal and were developed as friendship and family interactions during which they share private dealings among individuals. Later on, more formal organizational ties have nurtured powerful Black women's communities. As mothers, daughters, sisters, and friends to one another, many African-American women affirm one another (Myers 1980).

The mother/daughter relationship is one fundamental relationship among Black women. Many Black mothers have empowered their daughters by teaching them the everyday knowledge they need for their survival in a white and male dominated context. Black daughters are also aware of the profound influence that their mothers have upon their lives and most of the time behave like them. Mothers and mother figures emerge as central figures in autobiographies. Alice Walker attributes the trust she has in herself to her mother. In describing this relationship, Mary Helen Washington points out that Walker "never doubted her powers of judgment because her mother assumed that they were sound; she never questioned her right to follow her intellectual bent, because her mother implicitly entitled her to it" (Washington 1984, 145). By giving her daughter a library card, Walker's mother showed she knew the value of a free mind.

In the comfort of daily conversations, through serious conversation and humor, African-American women as sisters and friends affirm one another's humanity, specialness, and right to exist.

This issue of Black women being the ones who really listen to one another is significant, particularly given the importance of voice in Black women's lives. Identifying the value of Black women's friendships, Karla Holloway describes how the women in her book club supported one another: "The events we shared among ourselves all had a similar trigger—it was when someone, a child's

school principal or teacher, a store clerk, medical personnel, had treated us as if we had no sense of our own, no ability to filter through whatever nonsense they were feeding us, or no earned, adult power to make choices in our children's lives" (Holloway 1995, 31). These women described cathartic moments when, in creative ways, they responded to these assaults by "turning it out." Each knew that only another Black woman could fully understand how it felt to be treated that way and to respond in kind. For African-American women the listener most able to pierce the invisibility created by Black women's objectification is another Black woman.

When taken together, Black women's relationships with one another, and the work of Black women writers provided the context for crafting alternatives to prevailing images of Black womanhood. In them Black women intellectuals could construct ideas and experiences that infused daily life with new meaning. These new meanings offered African-American women potentially powerful tools to resist the controlling images of Black womanhood. Far from being a secondary concern in bringing about social change, challenging controlling images and replacing them with a Black women's standpoint constituted an essential component in resisting intersecting oppressions.

4:1-4 Solidarity as an instrument of empowerment

Another instrument African-American used in their struggle for empowerment is the relationships of Bloodmothers and othermothers through which they in solidarity educated their children, promoted black womanhood and taught to their daughters what it was to be a black woman in the U.S by raising their consciousness in order to resist oppressions.

U.S. Black women's experiences as othermothers provide a foundation for conceptualizing Black women's political activism. Experiences both of being nurtured as children and being held responsible for siblings can stimulate a more generalized ethic of caring and personal accountability among African-

American women. These women not only feel accountable to their own kin, they experience a bond with all of the Black community's children.

4:1-5. African American women activism for empowerment

Whether as individuals or as members of organized groups, U.S. Black women's activism has occurred in two primary dimensions. The first, struggles for group survival, consist of actions taken to create Black female spheres of influence within existing social structures. This dimension may not directly challenge oppressive structures because, in many cases, direct confrontation is neither preferred nor possible. Instead, women craft Black female spheres of influence that resist oppressive structures by undermining them. Struggles for group survival require institutions that equip Blacks to struggle. Recognizing that the path to individual and collective empowerment lies in the power of a free mind, these spheres of influence often rely on crafting independent and oppositional identities for African-American women. As such, they embrace a form of identity politics; a worldview that sees lived Black experiences as important to creating a critical Black consciousness and crafting political strategies.

The second dimension of Black women's activism consists of struggles for institutional transformation namely, those efforts to change discriminatory policies and procedures of government, schools, the workplace, the media, stores, and other social institutions. Whether expressed by individuals or via organized groups, all actions that directly challenge the legal and customary rules governing African-American women's subordination constitute part of the struggle for institutional transformation. Participating in civil rights organizations, labor unions, feminist groups, boycotts, and revolts exemplify this dimension of Black women's activism. Because struggles for institutional transformation are rarely successful without allies, this dimension of Black women's activism relies on coalition-building strategies. For example, Black feminism as a social justice project has long supported or in many cases engaged in coalitions with other movements for social justice. Whereas the identity

politics of the struggle for group survival references the distinctiveness of U.S. Black women's particular encounters with social injustice, the coalition politics associated with struggles for institutional transformation link Black women's issues with broader social agendas.

4:1-6. African American women struggle for group survival

The external constraints of racism, sexism, and poverty have been so severe that, the majority of African-American women have found it difficult to participate in organized political activities. Possessing neither the opportunity nor the resources to confront oppressive institutions directly, the majority of U.S. Black women have engaged in struggles for group survival.

This neither means that Black women eschew more visible forms of political protest, nor that community development activities constitute gender-appropriate terrain for Black women's activism. Instead, strategies of everyday resistance have largely consisted of trying to create spheres of influence, authority, and power within institutions that traditionally have allowed African-Americans and women little formal authority or real power.

As bloodmothers and othermothers in women-centered family networks, women are vital to African-derived cultural production. Many Black women confined to underpaid, demanding, menial jobs resist passing on to their children externally defined images of Black women as mules, mammies, matriarchs, and jezebels. Rather, they use their families as effective Black female spheres of influence to foster their children's self-valuation and self-reliance (Dill 1980). In some cases Black women's centrality in Black family networks leads them to exert their political power through existing family structures without appearing to do so. Anna Julia Cooper (1892) reported that even though nineteenth-century Black women were disenfranchised, they were not without political influence: "It is notorious that ignorant black women in the South have actually left their husband's homes and repudiated their support for what was understood by the

wife to be race disloyalty, or 'voting away,' as she expresses it, the privileges of herself and little ones" (p. 139).

Traditionally women's activism within Black families meshed smoothly with activism as community othermothers in the wider Black community as "family." In both meanings of family, African-American women worked to create Black female spheres of influence, authority, and power that produced a worldview markedly different from that advanced by the dominant group.

4:1-7. African American struggle for institutional transformation

Actions taken to eliminate discrimination in housing, employment, education, public accommodations, and political representation represent activism aimed at changing the rules that circumscribe African-American women's lives.

Traditionally, Black women have either been excluded from or assigned subordinate role within organizations devoted to institutional transformation. For example, the male leadership of Black civil rights organizations found it difficult to see Black women as leaders in the civil rights movement (Barnett 1993). Even radical Black organizations such as the Black Panther Party found it difficult to shake notions that women were unsuitable for leadership (Brown 1992). Patterns of U.S. Black women's activism thus reflect less about Black women's preferred political choices and more about existing opportunities.

Depending on historical time and place, African-American women employed a range of strategies in challenging the rules governing their subordination.

In many cases Black women practiced individual protest against unfair rules and practices.

Black women have also protested by working within formal organizations and groups. Many African-American women's organizations that actively engaged in the struggle for group survival were tireless lobbyists for legal reforms. Black women have also seen the need for principled coalitions with groups affected by similar issues. The contributions of countless Black female rank-and-file

activists in civil rights, feminist and labor movements reflect strategies designed to change the rules of the system by working within reformist organizations.

During the 1970s and 1980s, even though Black women remained underrepresented in elected public office relative to their proportion of the population, Black women made greater gains than White women in election to mayoral, state legislative, and congressional office (Darcy and Hadley 1988). Still other cases involve African-American women's involvement in violent resistance against slavery and other forms of political and legal oppression.

Being one of the few groups negatively affected by multiple forms of oppression, African-American women have been in a better position to see their interrelationships. Thus the diverse strategies employed in the struggle for institutional transformation have been paralleled by a similar diversity in the types of rules Black women have challenged. Black women have had an enduring interest not just in resisting racist and sexist laws and customs, but in changing a broad segment of the rules shaping American society.

Although African-American women may implicitly support a humanist vision for institutional transformation, Black women's political strategies may not explicitly address this vision. Many women begin their political activism as advocates for African-Americans, the poor, or, less frequently, women. But over time Black women activists come to see oppressions as interconnected and the need for broad-based political action. Rather than joining a range of organizations, each devoted to single-purpose issues, many Black women activists either start new organizations or work to transform the institutions in which they are situated. For example, Black women in the civil rights movement initially joined to address racial inequality but found themselves protesting gender inequality as well (Evans 1979).

4:1-8. Education as a skillful means of African American women empowerment

Education played a very important role in African American women attempt for empowerment. The community othermother role, namely, Black women's support for education, illustrates this important dimension of Black women's political activism. Education was understood by African American women to be a powerful symbol of change from a situation of powerlessness. This explains why many well-known U.S. Black women activists were either teachers or somehow involved in struggling for educational opportunities for African-Americans of both sexes. Prior to the civil rights gains of the 1960s, limited professional opportunities pushed Black women together and fostered a sense of collective vision. The power and status earned from women's roles as cultural workers served to reinforce the importance of Black women's roles as educators. Black men and women who were perceived by the community as leaders of the struggle for group survival were described as "educators."Working for race uplift and education became intertwined.

This belief in education for race uplift and in the special role of Black women in this struggle continued well into the twentieth century. In a 1938 article in the *Journal of Negro History,* Mary McLeod Bethune argued, "If our people are to fight their way up and out of bondage we must arm them with the sword and the shield . . . of pride—belief in themselves and their possibilities, based upon a sure knowledge of the achievements of the past" (Lerner 1972, 544).

4:2- African women's struggle for empowerment.

4:2-1 *Women in power and decision making*.

For very longtime, women in Africa showed less interest in power and decision making. But in the 1990s, for the first time in the post-independence period greater numbers of African women began to aspire to political leadership at the national and local levels. Although their impact was still minimal and the obstacles daunting, new female faces and voices began to be seen and heard.

The 1990s was a decade of beginnings for women in politics in Africa and all indications are that we will see even greater pressures for female political representation and participation in the decade ahead.

Until the 1990s it was unheard of for women to run for the presidency in Africa. Yet in the 1990s, Charity Ngilu and Wangari Maathai ran in the 1998 Kenyan presidential election and Ngilu has announced plans to run again in 2002. Rose Rugendo of Tanzania's party Chama Cha Mapinduzi sought her party's nomination in the 1995 presidential primaries as did Sarah Jibril in Nigeria in 1989. Although unsuccessful in these bids for power, these women set an important precedent in their respective countries.

The first head of an African state in that century was Zauditu, empress of Ethiopia, who ruled between 1917 and 1930. Other female heads of state have included Dzeliwe Shongwe, Queen-regent of Swaziland, who ruled in 1982-1983, followed by Ntombi Thwala, Queen-regent of Swaziland, 1983-1986. Elizabeth Domitien was Africa's first female prime minister, serving in the Central African Republic between 1975-1976. But it was not until the 1990s that women claimed national leadership visibility in greater numbers. Ruth Perry has been on the six member collective presidency of Liberia, chairing this Council of State since September 1996. She is the first non-monarchical head of an African state. In 1994 Uganda's Wandera Specioza Kazibwe became the first female Vice President in Africa.

Sylvie Kinigi served as prime minister of Burundi from 1993 to 1994, and during this same period, Agathe Uwilingiyimana was prime minister of Rwanda until she was assassinated in office. Senegal also claimed a woman vice president in 2001. By the end of the decade, the Ethiopian, Lesotho, and South African legislative bodies had female speakers of the house and Uganda, Zimbabwe and South Africa had female deputy speakers.

Women's movements that had once been dominated by organizations engaged in "developmental" activities involving income-generation, welfare concerns, and home making skills, were now witnessing the emergence of organizations that

lobbied for women's political leadership, pressed for legislative and constitutional changes, and conducted civic education. The Tanzania Gender Networking Programme held a conference in 1999 on Gender and Political Empowerment, bringing together women activists and members of parliament from throughout Africa. These kinds of concerns would not have been raised in similar Africa-wide conferences in the 1980s although they had been briefly a concern around the time of independence when women were being introduced to concepts of citizenship and modern electoral politics.

In the 1990s women began to form political parties on their own, partly because existing parties in the multiparty context had not adequately addressed women's concerns. In many cases women had a different political vision that was not accommodated in existing parties; and in some cases, the women wanted to build more broad-based multiethnic and multireligious constituencies than was possible with existing parties. Dr. Inonge Mbikusita-Lewanika started the National Party in Zambia in 1991; Margaret Dongo began the Zimbabwe Union of Democrats in 1999; while in Lesotho, Limakatso Ntakatsane formed the party, Kopanang Basotho. Likewise in the 1990s Charity Ngilu and Dr. Wangari Maathai headed parties in Kenya; Ruth Rolland-Jeanne-Marie led a party in Central African Republic and Amália de Vitoria Pereira led an Angolan party. In Zambia, Kenya and several other countries, the reluctance of political parties to take steps to increase women's representation has led to serious discussions of the need to form a party led by women with broad based male and female constituencies (Maria Nzomo et.al 1995).

Although rarely mentioned in studies of democratization in Africa, women's movements actively sought to participate in the political reform movements of the 1990s and in many cases found themselves the only group defying repression by the authorities. Like student, worker, human rights, and other such movements, they openly resisted corruption and repressive regimes through public demonstrations and other militant action. In Kenya, in the early 1990s women were at the forefront of protests defending imprisoned human

rights activists and found themselves in violent clashes with police. In Mali, thousands of demonstrating women and children were shot at by forces of President Moussa Traoré in a series of events that led to his downfall. Similarly, in Mauritania, police beat women protesters, injuring 40 in a human rights demonstration in August 1991. Over 150 women had staged a sitdown strike outside a paramilitary police base in Nouakchott, demanding an independent inquiry into the disappearance of hundreds of Hal-Pulaar black Mauritanians who disappeared after being arrested following an alleged coup attempt in1990. Amnesty International reported that as many as 339 political prisoners were killed by Mauritanian authorities between November 1990 and March 1991.

In Sierra Leone, women were the only group that openly defied soldiers as they demonstrated to demand that free elections be held when rumors began to circulate that the military might postpone the February 1996 elections (Bangura 1996). In Conakry, Guinea, women organized a sit-in in front of the presidential palace in a support of a 1990 general strike of workers and student demonstrations, and to protest the economic crisis which they blamed on the country's leadership (Soriba Sylla, 1991). And finally, in Niger, several thousand women demonstrated in protest of the exclusion of women representatives in the preparatory commission charged with organizing the national conference in 1991 (only one woman was included out of 68 delegates). The women marched from the national assembly to the prime minister's office, carrying banners that read: "Down with the national conference without women!" "Stop injustice!" and "Equal rights!" (*Africa Research Bulletin* May 1991). In the end, five women were added to the delegate list of the national conference that was part of an ill-fated democratization process. The Association des Femmes du Niger (AFN), formed by the Kountché regime in 1975, had seized on an opportunity presented by the regime's lost credibility to assert themselves publicly and insist on political representation at the national level (Cooper 1995, 876; Dunbar and Djibo 1992). The impact of many of these movements for democratization and human rights has been limited and some

countries like Niger experienced military coups and reversals in the process of political reform. Even countries that successfully introduced multipartyism and electoral democracy were often seriously lacking in political and civil liberties (Diamond 1996, Zakaria 1997, Huntington 1997). Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that in spite of the limitations of political liberalization, new players like women's movements were galvanized by the reform process to take advantage of political openings.

4:2-2 Reasons for Women's Increased Political Participation

What accounts for women's new visibility in the political arena as independent actors? No single factor can account for these new trends. Rather, a combination of factors needs to be considered. Some of the most important reasons include the following:

1) The move toward multipartysm in most African countries diminished the need for mass organizations linked and directed by the single ruling party. Thus, the demise of these mass women's organizations coincided with the rise of independent women's organizations that took advantage of the opening up of political space in the 1990s. These organizations had new leadership that began to push for a broader agenda, which included women's expanded political participation. This dynamic is explored in greater detail below.
2) With the increase in educational opportunities for girls and women there emerged a larger pool of capable women who were in a position to vie for political power.

3) Women in many countries frequently had longer experiences than men in creating and sustaining associations, having been involved in church related activities, savings clubs, income-generating groups, self-help associations, community improvement groups and many other informal and local organizations and networks.

Thus they often found it easier to take advantage of new political spaces afforded by liberalizing regimes. Women in Mali, for example, brought to NGOs their well developed organizational skills, drawing on a long history of maintaining social and economic networks. As a result, women have a strong presence in the NGO movement both in terms of making sure development associations include programs that address women's issues, but also in their own organizations that range from legal to health, education, credit and enterprise development associations (Kante et al. 1994, 101). Similarly, in Tanzania, it is no accident that the main NGO networking body, Tanzania Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (TANGO), was started by women's organizations and has had strong female representation in its leadership. In fact, 80 percent of the registered NGOs are women's organizations in a country like Tanzania (Meena 1997). Thus, women's long experience working collectively in a number of different arenas has often made it easier for them to seize new organizational opportunities in a liberalizing context.

4)- The new availability of donor funds, channeled through international and local NGOs, religious bodies, embassies, and international foundations has been another factor in spurring the growth of national level organizations that support women's political activities, generally on a non-partisan basis. They have supported efforts of women to participate in civic education, constitutional reform, legislative reform, leadership training, and programs for women parliamentarians.

5)- A commitment to women's increased representation on the part of the leadership of the country is another critical factor in advancing women's political representation. The enhanced political representation of women is more a question of political will than of world economic standing or any other economic factor. In fact, some of the poorest nations in the world, like Mozambique, do better than many advanced industrialized countries in female legislative representation.

Temporary measures, like party quotas and reserved seats, account in large measure for the higher female representation in Uganda, Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa, and several other African countries. In fact, most of the higher figures for female representation worldwide have been a result of a quota system of one kind or another.

Uganda set an important precedent for Africa by providing for one third female representation in local councils. In the Mozambican elections women won one quarter of the seats in the National Assembly, largely due to FRELIMO's 35 percent quota, which brought the percentage of women-held FRELIMO seats to 37 percent (Jacobson 1994, 40). These affirmative action strategies are as controversial in Africa as elsewhere, but what is indisputable is the fact that where they have been implemented, the popular political culture has gradually become more accepting of female politicians.

In South Africa, the large number of women in parliament and other key political appointments is, in part, a result of the efforts of the ruling African National

Congress (ANC), which has stood for women's political advancement and affirmative action. Thus, 89 of the 117 women in the National Assembly and the Senate are from the ANC party. Today women make up 25 percent of the legislature, which represents a dramatic break from the previous apartheid regime, in which women made up less than 3 percent of the legislature. Other top appointments followed these changes in parliament. In addition, four out of 25 ministers and eight out of 14 deputy ministers are women. While these are low figures, they are still higher than under apartheid rule.

Throughout Africa, women's organizations have increasingly been calling for the adoption of such affirmative action measures. For example, in Nigeria, leading women's NGOs have become particularly concerned about the low levels of female political representation and political appointments. Organizations like Gender and

Development Action, Women Empowerment Movement, the National Council for Women's Societies umbrella organization, Women Opinion Leaders Forum and other NGOs have sought reserved seats for women in parliament and demanded larger numbers of female appointees to public bodies (Denzer 1999, 3). Malawi women's groups petitioned the government in 1999 to ensure that women make up at least one third of all decision makers in political positions and key national institutions (Kanjaye 1999).

6) The international women's movement has played a significant role in encouraging women to seek political office and influence policy making. Although the driving forces for these changes have been internal, international pressures and norms have given added impetus to these new demands. To address the low rates of female representation, the issue was raised at the UN Beijing Conference on Women in 1995 by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the world organization of national parliaments. The IPU adopted a Plan of Action to address the reality that men dominate political and parliamentary life in all countries. One of the proposals adopted by the IPU included affirmative action measures to be advocated on a strictly interim basis. Quota systems, the IPU proposal states, should promote a situation where neither sex occupies a disproportionate number of seats relative to their percentage in the population.

7) Much of formal politics in Africa is underwritten and controlled by informal patronage politics. Most women tend to operate on the margins of clientelistic networks. This means that women have often found opportunities to advance themselves where the clientelistic networks were weakened by economic crisis as has been the case in recent years in Senegal. Economic crisis has forced many women into formal and informal economic associations and into heightened entrepreneurial activity.

Having focused on several reasons that explain women's new-found political muscle, I now shift to one of the most dramatic changes that affected women's political participation in the 1990s: the growth of independent women's organizations.

4:2-3 Growth of Independent Organizations

The opening of political space that occurred in the early 1990s allowed for the formation of new non-partisan lobbying, civic education, and leadership training organizations, which in turn encouraged women to run for office. Several changes occurred in women's mobilization during this period. The simultaneous emergence of independent women's associations meant that for the first time many women's movements could now select their own leaders, set their own agendas, and were no longer tied to participation in the patronage network of the ruling party. This meant that women's organizations were adopting new agendas that included but also went beyond the old focus on religion, welfare concerns, and income-generation. Those countries like Uganda and South Africa that had the most independent women's movements seem to have gone the furthest in this regard. By the 1990s, new non-partisan organizations emerged to support women candidates and female political leadership.

These changes represent significant new trends that are not easily reversed. They also represent a new way of conceiving women's political participation, which will have potentially major implications for women if political reforms continue without retreat to a dominant single-party system or military rule. There is no question that the broader political environment facilitates or constrains women's independent mobilization. In the past, all too often women's mobilization was channeled through a party wing, an affiliated mass organization or a coopted organization tied to the ruling party or regime. This relationship served to marginalize women's leadership and channeled women into mobilizing around a narrow set of issues, which in a country like Zambia under UNIP resulted in a focus on women's morality (Geisler 1987). As far as many women were concerned, these wings not only did little for women, often they acted *against* women and resisted women's empowerment (Geisler 1995, 553). Women's wings were often reduced to serving in celebratory

functions. Former President Banda required women of the League of Malawi Women to be present at all official functions, dressed in party uniforms, singing and dancing in praise of him (Hirschmann 1991, 1683). By remaining officially linked to older incorporated structures, such women's organizations were tied to the party's dictates and its overriding interest in securing as many women's votes as possible. Often the women running these organizations were wives, sisters, and relatives of party or government leaders. Through such controlling mechanisms, the women's organizations were unable to cater to women with other political allegiances. Moreover, they were unable to forcefully fight for women's interests that might be at odds with the priorities and goals of the ruling party. For example, Maendeleo ya Wanawake in Kenya was purposefully kept apolitical and any attempts to assert itself politically were swiftly squelched. In Zambia, one woman Member of Parliament remarked that the wings should be abolished since "they are the biggest single obstacle to women's political participation" (Ferguson et. al. 1995, 22).

The organizational structures of the women's wings paralleled those of the party and mimicked their rigid undemocratic structures and leadership, which rarely changed. As Kenyan women's rights activist Dr. Maria Nzomo (1995) explained in reference to Kenya: "The structures in the organizations are sometimes no different from government structures. They are authoritarian. You see a lot of authoritarian women leaders who started in 1963 and don't want to give up." Even though the monopoly of these women's wings was broken as new independent women's organizations appeared on the scene, most wings or leagues persisted throughout the1990s.

The proliferation of independent associations allowed women's organizations to expand their agendas to take on women's rights issues more forcefully and to fight for greater female political representation. The women's movement in Uganda, for example, has been able to publicly broach many different issues, ranging from women's representation in office, to domestic violence, rape, reproductive rights, sex education in the school curriculum,

female genital surgeries, sexual harassment, disparaging representation of women in the media, corruption, and other concerns that have rarely been addressed by women's movements in countries where a ruling political party has dominated the movement. In Ghana, Jerry Rawlings' Provisional

National Defence Council (PNDC) and his party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) poses a stark contrast to the Ugandan case with its control of the 31st December Women's Movement (31DWM), the largest women's organization in Ghana. In spite of some gains for women, the PNDC control has suffocated the women's movement and constrained the scope of demands by keeping the organization's goals directed at furthering PNDC influence (Dei 1994, 140, Mikell 1984; Tsikata 1989).

In many African countries, the women's NGOs that emergedin the 1980s and 1990s presented a growing challenge to existing women's wings by promoting agendas that were much more far reaching in addressing institutional constraints on women's advancement. In countries where party-imposed structures had crowded out much of associational life, women's associations were among the first to take advantage of the new spaces to constitute a wide array of formal and informal, local and national associations. In one of the more extreme cases of Madagascar, where there were no mass based national associations to organize women, farmers, youth and other groups, institutional development in general was exceptionally weak.

Nevertheless, public interest NGOs began to emerge in the early 1990s, including women's associations like Femmes Entrepreneurs, Femmes Juristes, Femmes Artisans (Fox and Covell 1994, 53).

In other countries where party affiliated women's organizations had predominated, the associational terrain was also dramatically transformed. In Tanzania, women's organizations of every kind mushroomed after the introduction of political reforms, tackling issues as varied as the environment, women in the media, entrepreneurial interests, reproductive rights, and land rights. One indication of the numerical increase of these associations was the

proliferation of networking organizations, which had not existed in the past in such large numbers. One of the earliest to form was the Tanzania Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (TANGO), which was formally constituted in 1988. Women attending the 1985 Nairobi conference marking the end of the UN Decade of Women returned to Tanzania inspired to create linkages between existing women's groups. Although started by women's groups, TANGO grew into an umbrella organization for all NGOs. Women's organizations have also networked through organizations like Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP), which has helped coordinate activities, develop joint strategies around legal reform, structural adjustment, and a proposed Equal Opportunities Act among other issues. The Kilimanjaro Women's Information and Education Corporation (KWIECO), is another regional networking association of professional women in Moshi that brings women's groups together to discuss women's legal rights, health issues and economic activities. Similar networking organizations emerged in other parts of the country on local, district, and regional bases. Ad hoc coalitions formed to protect citizens against unpopular government actions and to lobby for change. For example, women's organizations worked with pastoralist organizations and legal rights groups in a coalition, the National Land Forum, to express reservations about a draft land bill, forcing the government to slow down its effort to hastily push through the bill.

4:2-4: Electoral Politics

If women were going to make significant headway on economic and other fronts, they realized they needed to have a physical presence in legislatures and other political institutions. In the 1990s many countries saw an unprecedented degree of mobilization of independent women's organizations to support women electoral candidates; train women leaders; carry out civic education; press for legal changes in the status of women and in the constitution-making process;

lobby parties to endorse more women candidates; and develop strategies to get more women into leadership.

Although these activities were on the rise, women parliamentarians in many countries frequently found themselves lacking in such NGO support, making it difficult to push a women's rights agenda (Geisler 1995, 562).

In the past, male politicians were able to garner the women's vote through the women's wings or women's organizations tied to ruling parties. As those organizations faded in influence and independent women's organizations and movements emerged, women began to use these new organizations to enhance women's leadership skills and to build political support for candidates, both male and female, who represented their interests. In Uganda, organizations like Action for Development (ACFODE) are focusing on leadership training and civic education for women councilors, now that one third of local council positions are reserved for women. In other parts of Africa, many organizations are attempting to better link rural and urban women. Women leaders are also beginning to consider ways to draw younger women into politics, especially where they have been left on the sidelines, since the majority of women who are mobilized still tend to be middle aged or elderly (Nzomo 1995).

In Zambia, women from NGOs, churches and political parties formed a National Women's Lobby Group (NWLG) in 1991 as a non-partisan organization with the goal of increasing the numbers of women in decision-making positions in government, parliament and political parties. The lobby encouraged women to stand for local government elections, worked to repeal discriminatory legislation, and conducted human rights training and civic education seminars for women. By 1995 the organization had grown to 2,000 dues paying members (Liatto-Katundu 1993, 80-81; Basadi et al. 1995, 12). There were numerous other such non-partisan groups in Zambia promoting women's political participation. In 1996 the Women's Lobby financially backed 44 independent women candidates running in the parliamentary elections. Although only one of these women won a seat, its efforts no doubt encouraged

the parties to put up more women candidates and as a result, 15 party backed women win seats, bringing the number of women in parliament from 7 percent to 11 percent, i.e., 16 out of 150.

Similarly, in Kenya, the National Committee on the Status of Women, a staunchly non-partisan organization provided assistance to women of all party affiliations in running for office in 1992 and 1998. They carried out civic education among women, giving them a better sense of their rights as citizens and the need to vote for candidates who would support women's interests. Their activities have included reform of laws that served as obstacles to the advancement of women and other activities that would strengthen women's presence in political life (Nzomo 1993, Nzomo and Kibwana 1993). Charity Ngilu had the backing of several of Kenya's women's organizations when she ran for the presidency. She has indicated that she plans to draw on the strength of women's organizations to an even greater extent in 2002 to capture a greater proportion of the votes of women, who make up 65 percent of Kenya's registered voters.

4.2-5: Obstacles to Women's Political Participation

In spite of these efforts by women's organizations in many countries, women have yet to see enormous payoffs in terms of elected officials and political appointments. Women often lack the resources, political experience, education and political connections to run for office. Popular perceptions often suggest that women's "proper" place is still in the home rather than in politics. Prohibitive cultural attitudes against women's involvement persist among both men and women. These are reflected in voting patterns, media coverage of female politicians, and even in blatant attempts to suppress women's assertion of their political rights and views. In Uganda, for example, the 1996 presidential elections saw increasing incidents of intimidation and harassment of wives by husbands over differing political opinions.

Throughout the country there were reports of women who were threatened with withdrawal of family support. Some were killed, beaten, thrown out of homes, and some had their voters'cards grabbed from them or destroyed. One of the consequences of this experience was that women did not turn out to vote in the parliamentary elections in such large numbers, partly because of harassment.

But women themselves are also reticent to run for office (both national and local government positions) for many reasons. Partly the reluctance stems from cultural prohibitions on women being seen and speaking in public in front of men.

Where these prohibitions are strong, men do not listen to women who take the podium or are active in politics in other ways. Campaigning and being a leader often involves travel, spending nights away from home, going to bars to meet people, and meeting men, all of which put women politicians at risk of being thought of as "loose women" or "unfit mothers." Not only may they find themselves and their families under attack or the subject of malicious gossip, but, husbands sometimes will forbid their wives from entering into politics. Some husbands are threatened by the possibility that their wives will interact with other men, others fear the social stigma directed against their wives, or they worry that their wife's political preoccupations will divert her attention away from the home. Ferguson and Katundu found in Zambia that most women who were active in politics claimed they experienced marital problems as a result of their involvement (1994, 18).

Even in parliamentary bodies, women have difficulty being taken seriously, being listened to, and are frequently subjected to humiliating stereotypes and derogatory remarks. One excellent and detailed study of women in parliamentary politics in Uganda found sexual harassment rampant, even in a parliament where women had been active and visible for over a decade (Tamale 1999).

Many of the stereotypes of women politicians are reflected in a comment made by men and women in Tanzania's Sukumaland in a rural area near

Mwanza (Andersen 1992, 161, 260, 263). While one cannot generalize too much from these perceptions, they are heard enough in other parts of Africa to give some indication of what cultural constraints women are up against in entering into politics:

When I was elected as a village secretary some people told me that I would become a loose woman, a prostitute. I told them that I could never do such a thing and second, I asked them whether they had any proof of the misbehavior of other women leaders to which they referred. Their answer was "No, this is just what we have heard" (Young woman Chama cha Mapinduzi party leader).

There are women who are capable of being leaders and good leaders too. But it is not easy. Men very often do not trust their wives and and think that if they go for seminars, they will betray their husbands. A woman is like a child as far as the brain is concerned, she can easily be convinced by another man to give way for sex" (Young male Chama cha Mapinduzi party leader).

Normally husbands are the main causes for their wives not to be leaders. Many of the women are very eager to be leaders. But your husband can ban you and then that is the end. We ask husbands to allow their wives to contest, but many of them dislike it . . . . Here there are many women who are able to work, to lead, and who can build our nation. After all, some are properly educated, but because the husband is in a panic, his wife remains a house wife (Woman Chama cha Mapinduzi party official).

In spite of all these limitations on women's involvement in political leadership, women are not reluctant to participate in other aspects of politics. Women often vote in numbers very similar to or greater than those of men, as seen in electoral turnout figures of elections in Mozambique and Zambia in the 1990s (Jacobson 1995; Longwe and Clark 1991). As one Zambian Member of Parliament put it:

“Women do all the campaigning and organize rallies for men. But now we have to switch to do the same for ourselves. Women are still in the mold of

campaigning for men, not for women. Women are waiting to be invited to participate but no one will invite them" (Mbikusita-Lewanika 1995).

4.2-6: What Difference Have Women Made in Politics?

4.2-6.1: Women's contributions to constitution-making

In several countries, the 1990s saw women's increased involvement in the constitution making process. Women were very active in the process of drafting the new South African Constitution, which guarantees women rights to equality, freedom and security of the person, freedom from violence, the right to make decisions concerning reproduction, and the right to security and control over one's own body.

The Women's National Coalition lobbied hard to have the Women's Charter passed.

The independent Women's National Coalition (WNC) had been formed in 1991 after much deliberation to unite women of all parties and political persuasions. The Coalition brought together 81 organizational affiliates and 13 regional alliances of women's organizations including organizations affiliated with the ANC, the Inkatha Freedom Party, the National Party, Pan Africanist Congress, Azanian Peoples Organization, and the Democratic Party. WNC also brought together interests as diverse as the Rural Women's Movement, Union of Jewish Women, and the South African Domestic Workers Union (Kemp et al. 1995, 144,154). Over three million women participated in focus groups organized by WNC to voice their opinions on women's concerns. Regional and national conferences were held and a Woman's

Charter was drafted and endorsed by the national parliament and all nine regional parliaments in 1994. The charter addressed a broad range of concerns, including equality, legal rights, economic issues, education, health, politics, and violence against women (Kemp et al. 1995, 151). The constitution allows for the charter to be used a basis for reforming government policy.

In Zambia the National Women's Lobby Group (NWLG) along with six other NGOs succeeded in getting the Constitutional Commission to incorporate into the draft Constitution a section on women's rights, focusing on discrimination, affirmative action, violence against women and the implementation of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (Basadi et al. 1995, 13). In spite of fierce opposition from some women parliamentarians, MMD leaders and leaders of civic organizations, women's groups continued to press for the inclusion in the constitution of reproductive rights and equal opportunities in education. Under the law, women need spousal consent to use contraception, while men are under no obligation to do the same. Similarly, many families prefer educating their sons over their daughters with the assumption that the son, unlike the daughter, is obligated to care for the family when the parents die. Because of such disadvantages, many women's organizations argued that women's rights need explicit protection in the constitution (Nzomo 1995).

Similar measures were adopted in Malawi, where women's organizations involved in the Constitution making process had to be constantly on the alert so that women's concerns were not dropped from the agenda or reprioritized. In Malawi, a 1994 conference preparing for the upcoming multiparty elections agreed, under pressure from women delegates, to endorse particular women's concerns and to incorporate some of them into the constitution. These included promoting girls' education, equal access in politics and business, equal rights for women and HIV/AIDS prevention programs for men and women. Recommendations by the National Commission on Women in Development (NCWID) to include women's concerns in the bill of rights and equal representation of men and women in the Senate (upper house in parliament) were incorporated and withdrawn four times prior to the ratification of the constitution in May 1994. A core of women in the NCWID lobbied the National Consultative Council every time they attempted to take out the recommendations.

Almost a year later there were growing pressures to get rid of the Senate, which was the only body with significant female representation. The Society for the Advancement of Women (SAW), which was formed to influence the Constitution making process, intervened to stop the process of dismantling the Senate and proposed that it be composed of women and chiefs (two from each area) to represent the rural areas and underrepresented sectors. SAW won the support of two of the three parties and the chiefs. Over 100 Malawian women representing government, NGOs, and chiefs were attending a workshop at the same time that the Parliament was debating the fate of the Senate. The women petitioned the Parliament on the eve of the vote and were able to exert sufficient pressure to keep the Senate and make sure the Constitution upheld gender equality (Funk 1995).

In Uganda, it was widely acknowledged that no other group was as organized and cohesive as women's organizations when it came to making a concerted effort to influence the Constitution writing process. Women's organizations wrote more memoranda submitted to the Constitutional Commission than any other sector of society. They also took part in a countrywide effort to educate women about the purpose of a Constitution and to gather views into memoranda. Two women were involved in the Constitutional Commission and a total of 51 women (out of a total of 284) held seats in the Constituent Assembly, which was formed to debate the new constitution. Women delegates to the Assembly formed a non-partisan Women's Caucus that carried out workshops for women delegates on speech making, constituency building, coalition building, parliamentary procedures and other related topics. The Caucus developed strategies to make sure that women's concerns were brought to the floor in the Assembly and publicized their views in a weekly radio program dealing with ongoing debates in the Constituent Assembly. The Caucus worked with Uganda Women Lawyers (FIDA), which gave them assistance on specific Constitutional matters. They also worked closely with a leading women's rights group, Action for Development, and other NGOs to

promote civic education publications and seminars for women around constitutional issues. The fruits of all these efforts were borne out in the final draft of the constitution, which included the recognition of gender equality under the law; the provision that gender equity must be written into all laws passed by the Parliament; the prohibition of laws, customs and traditions that undermine the position of women; a provision to establish an Equal Opportunities commission to see that the Constitutional principles are enforced; and an expansion of the numbers of women representatives.

4.2.6.2: Improving women's legal status

In the late 1980s and 1990s another feature of women's increased mobilization was the push to pass or amend laws to improve women's legal status. The main issues that emerged had to do with property rights, land rights, inheritance laws, citizenship laws, domestic violence, rape and defilement (rape of girls under the age of consent).

After the 1995 Beijing conference, many countries adopted women's budgets. In South Africa this initiative was coordinated by the Department of Finance and involved collaboration among NGOs and the parliament. It involved analysis of existing budgets to determine the differential gender impact on women, men, girls and boys, with the intention of making recommendations for future budgets to improve the way in which funds are allocated. Such budget initiatives have thus far been adopted in countries like Uganda, Mozambique, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Malawi Namibia, and Tanzania (Budlender 2000).

In South Africa, women were able to put in place a Commission on Gender Equality to ensure that the laws were fully implemented. Women fought to be part of the budget process so that the budget might better reflect women's interests.

They ensured that the Labour Relations Act recognized maternity rights and women's rights against sexual harassment in the workplace. They also lobbied for an Employment Equity bill that requires employers to employ fairly

across race, gender and disability. In addition, they won the right to choose with the Termination of Pregnancy Bill.

In Malawi, the National Commission on Women and Development, along with non-partisan organizations like Women's Voices, have worked to increase the number of women representatives in parliament a well as at the local level. In addition they have sought to implement laws regarding domestic violence and educate women about their inheritance rights. In 1999 they successfully pressed for the passage of an act that makes it a criminal offense for anyone to seize the estate of someone who has died without entitlement. Grabbed property can be restored to the person who is lawfully entitled to it. This law protects widows who often find their marital properties claimed by in-laws after the death of their spouse (Kajanye 1999).

In Mali, women's NGOs worked to change property laws, marital laws and the tax code to eliminate discrimination against women. In other countries, the focus has been on conducting workshops and using the media to educate women about their rights. Both the Ghana branch of the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) and the Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF) sought to educate people about the 1985 Intestate Succession and Property Laws that require all customary marriages and family.

4.3: Black women struggle for empowerment in the U.S and in Africa: Differences and similarities

The struggle for Black women empowerment though it is concerned with both African American women in the U.S and African women in Africa has not taken the same aspect in both places.

In fact, the reality of oppression black women have been facing in the U.S is not the same women are facing in Africa and consequently the struggles for empowerment cannot be the same.

Racism, sexism and negative controlling images are the most common forms of oppression African American undergo in the U.S while customs and traditions are the heaviest burden imposed on women in Africa.

Sexism and negative controlling images seem to have their roots in the racism which is actually a problem experienced by both Black women and men. The fight engaged by Blacks for their rights as U.S citizens will have constituted a great motivation for African American women struggle for empowerment. The success brought by those fights are for women in the U.S a lesson that the fight is an essential condition for emancipation. They therefore in solidarity organized themselves to question the different forms of oppression they were subject to.

In Africa the sense of struggle for empowerment is not commonly shared by every woman. Everything happens as if nothing is being done for an effective empowerment of women.

African customs and traditions don't grant women a comfortable status in decision making spheres and in the ruling of public affairs. For a long time girls school education has not been a priority. Women and girls are thought to be made for household chores and children making. Some cultural practices like excision are still a reality. All those problems are major constraints to women empowerment in Africa.

In the U.S Black intellectual women wrote to call for a collective consciousness on women situation.

If this strategy has been possible in the U.S, the high rate of illiteracy made it quite impossible in Africa.

While the context of struggle in the U.S developed in women a strong sense of activism for empowerment, women activism in Africa remains rather slow.

Solidarity is a key instrument used by African American women in their struggle (Case of community othermother) .

This solidarity is missing among African women in their struggle. Women in Africa do not support one another in their fight for empowerment. Women are obstacles to women empowerment in Africa.

Some intellectual women continue to use girls as household servant instead of fighting for their school education. Women candidates in electoral post do not win support from other women.

The similarities between the struggles exist mainly in terms of legislations. Actually, like in the U.S the legislations which grant equal rights to both women and men have been achieved. Organizations advocating women empowerment exist in the U.S as well as in Africa. Campaigns of girl's education for political leadership are active in Africa like in the U.S even if it is at a slower rate in Africa.

The data in the table below has been drawn from the Inter-Parliamentary Union on the basis of information provided by National Parliaments by July 2012

Rank	Country	Seats	Women	Percentage	Year
1	USA	434	77	17.7	2012
2	Bénin	83	7	8.4	2011
3	Niger	113	15	13.3	2011
4	Chad	188	28	14.9	2011
5	Togo	81	9	11.1	2007
6	Burkina Faso	127	20	15.7	2012

This table shows somehow the situation of women in position of political leadership in the United States and some Sub-Saharan African countries. Although the gap is not so much important; it confirms to some extent an advance of the U.S on African countries in terms of women empowerment.

If it is true that the struggle for women empowerment in the US as well as in other parts of the world is not a total success; it is also true that African countries still have a lot of efforts to make for a greater implication of women in political businesses.

Chapter 5: Recommendations

5.1: Recommendations for political empowerment

In view of the findings of this study, a number of recommendations can be made to women as individuals, to women aspiring to be politicians, to women already in parliament, to society or the community of voters, and CSOs that want to help more women get elected, and to educators and other people involved in shaping future men and women leaders.

5.1.1: Recommendations to individual women

In some cases, the paucity of women in prominent leadership positions can be attributed to personal factors such as lack of self-esteem and confidence, limited aspirations in management, and lack of motivation and ambition to accept the challenges of leadership.

Other studies on issues of gender and management have indicated that men tend to be much more purposeful about planning their careers and lobbying, while women tend to shy from the same (Kamau, 2002; Onsongo, 2005).

Women need to be more purposeful about working on the personal factors that hinder them from taking their rightful place in society. They need to work on issues of self-esteem and confidence in relation to politics. Women, especially given their small numbers, need to work extra hard to become role models for other aspiring women politicians and to act as ambassadors of other women so that the electorate can begin to appreciate their leadership.

Women politicians need to appreciate that since they are a minority, they have a much bigger responsibility because everyone is watching how they perform.

At individual level, women need to learn to challenge the traditional gender roles, which leave most domestic responsibilities in their hands. Women with young families seem to face unique challenges, therefore discouraging

them from getting into politics. Women also need to negotiate for sharing of domestic responsibilities with other family members and especially spouses.

5.1.2: Women aspiring to be politicians

Women aspiring to be politicians need to be prepared for the various challenges that go with politics. One way they can do this is by consciously seeking mentorship from those who have made it in politics. Mentorship training would be especially useful if it covers areas such as positioning oneself in political parties, raising campaign resources, working with the media, handling issues to do with security, among others. Fortunately, the number of women who have made it to parliament and local councils is growing and, therefore, women aspiring to get there should be able to find at least one that they can seek out. Women aspirants can also benefit by networking with fellow aspirants.

Another way that individual women with political ambition can get national visibility is to learn how to work with the media. They need to link with media personnel who are friendly to women candidates, and work with them to get themselves profiled long before election time. Many women aspirants have not quite mastered this, but seem to assume that if they went about their tasks in their constituencies, then that was enough in itself.

Individual women with political ambitions also need to work towards positioning themselves in political parties in such a way as to improve their profiles and develop clout for their political aspirations. As noted earlier, while political parties are the vehicles through which political aspirants must use to get into political office, these tend to be male dominated and biased against women in a variety of ways. Women aspirants should, therefore, not shy from actively seeking and campaigning for key positions in political parties. They should hold these parties accountable to execute the gender ratios spelt out in their manifestos and constitutions as concerns leadership positions. They should also speak against marginalization of women in these parties. This will discourage the view, especially among the party leaders, that women are expendable and can be satisfied with peripheral positions at best.

Women politicians also need to form their own parties as long as they meet the requirements of the Political Parties Act. As the women in this study confirmed, parties have owners, and these owners can also be women. They then can determine the rules that can help more women and other minority groups find a voice in the political class.

5.1.3: Women already in parliament and local government

The women already in parliament or local government need to ensure that their voices are heard, and that issues of concern to women are kept at the forefront. One way they can do this is to network among them by holding regular consultations to discuss issues that affect women differentially, and to strategize on how they can make this part of the legislative agenda. This is in keeping with the fact that, as noted in the study, society at large expects women politicians to represent not just their constituents but women as a whole.

Not only will such networking help increase the visibility of women issues, it will also help keep the women leaders accountable to each other and, therefore, offset or at least diminish the likelihood of their becoming masculinized, where they get so engrossed in keeping their positions in a male-dominated parliament that they lose sight of issues that are of concern to their fellow women.

In addition to working with other elected women leaders, women MPs and Councilors need to mentor other women aspiring for political office.

It can also be done through formal and coordinated outreach programmes to schools and universities, where political awareness can be provided to young women. Recruitment into political parties should also start at an early age. Women leadership awareness forums should be encouraged right from secondary school, especially targeting young girls so that they can be mentored for political leadership from an early age. Women leaders need to do this not only as an act of service to their fellow women, but also in recognition that the more women there are in parliament, the better for the women rights agenda.

Women in parliament must make use of the media in a more purposeful and aggressive manner. Women should not assume that the good they do will speak for itself. They must let the world know what they are doing, or what their views are on issues of national importance. They must resist the temptation to be self-effacing and modest about their achievements.

However, it is important that even as they do this, women should remain true to themselves by being honest about what they have achieved and let the world know about it.

5.1.4: The society/voters

There are many ways in which society works against the aspirations of women, particularly those aspiring to political office. Society does this through the widely held expectation that a leader must bribe voters either by giving them money directly during campaigns or by giving generously to their personal needs or local projects. This view works against women because most women are not as well endowed financially as men and this expectation, therefore, places them at a disadvantage. The community of voters needs to begin to judge candidates for political office more by what they stand for and their accomplishments than on how much money they can dish out. This would make the ground more level for women candidates, and is much more likely to produce quality leadership than the money-oriented approach. However, it requires joint effort by government, NGOs, faith-based organizations, media, civil society and human rights organizations to educate people that by accepting to be bribed, they are selling away their right to vote for good leaders, be they men or women.

Society needs to make it safer for women to participate in political campaigns by standing firm against violence and intimidation, which negatively affects all candidates, but particularly women. Politicians who condone and/or use violence to silence political opponents should be disqualified; otherwise

election violence tends to scare away many potential good leaders, who find it safer to keep away.

Women must especially refuse to be part of political parties that are not serious about giving women key leadership positions in their parties.

In addition, voters must resist the attempt by politicians to impose on them unpopular candidates through rigging of political party nominations. They can do this by sticking to their candidates of choice, even when these have to move to fringe parties as a result of having been rigged out of the nominations of the big parties. This will send a message to party bosses that they should ensure fairness and transparency in party nominations, and this will in turn work well for women candidates, who are especially vulnerable to being rigged out.

5.1.5: Educators and other socializing agents

In many ways, girls are disadvantaged right from birth. They are assigned the more tedious and time consuming domestic chores at home, which works against their educational pursuits and aspirations. They bear the burden of teenage pregnancies while the boys responsible go on with their lives. They undergo harmful cultural practices such as female genital mutilation and forced marriages, among other discriminatory social practices.

Parents and teachers can help ease some of these burdens and make it easier for girls to excel in life by being sensitive on the need to be fair in the allocation of domestic chores, and on the need to encourage girls to excel in whatever field they choose, as this can have a big impact on what they become later in life. Parents and other close relatives were particularly important mentors for many of the women leaders interviewed. Such sensitization can be done by teachers who interact with the parents in forums such as parents meetings in schools. Teachers themselves need to be sensitized before they can serve as advocates for the girl child in their communities. The Ministry of Education is in the best position to do this.

Commendably, it has already taken the first step by coming up with a Gender in Education Policy. The Ministry should ensure that the provisions set out in the policy are implemented in schools to improve the learning environment for all children, and particularly girls, to ensure that they achieve their full potential.

5.1.6: The government

Governments have an obligation to legislate for quotas for women in national and local legislative bodies. This would be a sign of a renewed commitment to have more women in political positions. Allowing such quotas would be recognition of the historical injustices that women face, and which have made it more difficult for them to compete equally with men. This kind of affirmative action would help more women to get into political leadership, therefore allowing for the critical mass needed to have more women friendly laws and provide young women and girls with a large pool of role models and mentors.

5.2: Recommendations for economic empowerment

Women's lack of access to productive resources in Africa is a serious economic problem for the continent. Denying working women the opportunity to own and inherit property has serious implications on the productivity and income of households. There is a growing realization that countries are not honoring their international and regional commitments that call for gender equality in property and inheritance rights. Greater attention needs to be paid in galvanizing efforts to ensure women's ownership of land and other properties through policy formulation reform, revision of the legal systems and changing customary practices.

Ensuring access to micro-credits and training to women alone is not a panacea to women's business growth. Projects that support women's micro and small entrepreneurship need to take into account the various gender related

challenges as summarized above, including time burden, lack of intra-household decision making power, low technology, limited access to markets and resources and limited supportive environment. Efforts should be made to empower women through various leadership programs that build women's ability to progress in the businesses.

Weak infrastructure has a limiting effect on both women and men small activities. Women MSE are disproportionately affected by the lack of or high cost of energy, water and transport. Interventions in conventional and alternative energy development need to take account of household and MSE energy needs. Infrastructure projects need to be developed with equal participation of women and men. It is important that poverty reduction and income generating project take into account the infrastructure needs of women's micro and small enterprises in designing their projects.

Improving vocational and technical education and training is an effective way of generating dynamic entrepreneurs. Girls' and women's participation in technical vocational education is low in many African countries. There is the need to transform the gender segregated approach to vocational and technical training in which girls and women are trained in traditional occupations such as knitting, cooking and others. Skills training programs need to be developed in conjunction with the labor market.

Promoting the gender equality and empowerment of women benefits the economy and the society at large. In many countries of Africa gender inequalities and gender based discriminations are perpetuated by customary practices. There is the need to enhance awareness about the disadvantages of these discriminations not only to women and girls but to the community at large.

There are a number of associations of women MSE organizations in many of the African countries. With the exception of those formal organizations of formal small and medium size enterprises, the capacity of many of the informal associations is weak. Supporting women micro and small entrepreneurs to organize themselves and strengthen the existing associations can help enhancing

their capacity to express their common interests and advocate for improved policy environment and increased investment in the various subsectors in which they operate.

CONCLUSION

Despite the differences between the struggles for Black women empowerment in the U.S and in Africa, there are some common points among which the legislations which grant equal rights to women and men. Taking into account the existing legislation in the domain of gender equality and women empowerment and the reality on the ground it seems safe to say that excellent legal framework for the advancement of women, neither automatically guarantees, nor lead to the realization of non-discrimination and equality of rights and opportunities between men and women. One of the main gender concerns today is the gap between *de jure* and *de facto* equality with regard to access to employment, business and social services.

If the situation has evolved in the U.S, in Africa it still has a long way to go.

Women's rights guaranteed by the legislation in all areas of political, economic and social life can be fully realized only under the condition of steady rise in the standard of living, free access to education, health care, culture and other social services, with elimination of the main reasons, which give rise to feminization of poverty. Perhaps the most serious barrier to women's equal participation in decision making and leadership is the presence of stereotypical attitudes towards the gender roles of women and man which create a pervasive climate of discrimination and entrenched stereotypical ideas relating the role of women in public life. Our societies are bound by many stereotypes according to which the proper, traditional role of woman is at home, taking care of husband and children. The traditional working patterns of many political parties and governmental structures continue to be barriers to women's participation in public life. Women may be discouraged from seeking political office by discriminatory attitudes and practices, family and child-care responsibilities etc.

In front of such a situation African women should show solidarity towards one another, developed activism among them as it was the case with African American in the U.S. But what we rather notice is most of them are not ready for

empowerment. As we said earlier, women continue to be obstacles to women empowerment in Africa.

Although women make up at least half of the electorate in all the countries and have the right to vote and hold office, women are largely underrepresented at all levels of government, especially in ministerial and other executive bodies, and have made little progress in attaining political power in legislative bodies in Africa.

The low proportion of women among economic and political decision-makers at the local, national, regional and international levels reflects structural and attitudinal barriers that need to be addressed through positive measures.

The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women's social, economic and political status is essential for the achievement of sustainable development in all areas of life. Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning. 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. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women’s perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved.

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