

Chapter Eight

The Kenyan Women's Movement in a Changing Political Context

by

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Introduction

Women of Kenya have a long history of exercising their freedom of association and assembly within the context of their women's groups¹ and organizations. But whether or not women have used the spaces afforded by these groups as lobbying forums for expressing demands and influencing policy and institutional changes in their favour is the big question.

This long history of women organizing themselves into groups dates back from pre-colonial times. The *Ngwatio* among the Kikuyu, the *risanga* among the Gusii, the *saga* among the Luo and *Mwethya* among the Kamba are examples of women's self help movements with a long history among different ethnic communities in Kenya.

Indeed, the women's group organization is the most dominant and the most deep-rooted form of women's movement in Kenya. Other forms of organisations such as trade unionism and cooperatives are of recent origin and have not yet attracted significant women membership or activism to a comparable level as women's groups. The former movements remain a male domain, while the latter have entirely or predominantly female participation.

The first phase in the development of women's group movement in Kenya can be taken to be the pre-colonial and early colonial phase. This phase was characterised by the formation of women groups that

tended to be informal, small in membership (about 20 members), based on ethnic and family affiliation, and formed for the purpose of mutual assistance and social interaction among the members of the group. These informal women's groups functioned during stressful times such as in sickness and death, as well as for performing other activities that required collective effort, such as, birth giving, marriage ceremonies, thatching of huts, and agricultural activities. In such undertakings, every individual group member stood to benefit from this system of mutual reciprocity.

As a women's movement, this traditional type of group formation also stemmed from the realization by women that they share certain problems which can only be effectively tackled through collective effort. In other words even at this very rudimentary phase of the women's movement in Kenya, one can already observe some indication that there was some awareness among women that they had common problems which were not experienced by men, at least not to the same degree.

The second phase in the development of the women's group movement in Kenya dates from the late colonial period and has extended to the post-colonial era. This latter phase of women group movement largely borrows from the traditional women's movement in that, its orientation until recently has been primarily social welfare. However, it differs from the traditional women's movement in that, it has tended to be more formalised, structured and with a wider membership.

The beginning of the second phase of the development of the women's group movement in Kenya, was typified by the establishment in 1952 of a nationally based women's organisation that came to be called Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO).

The structure, character and purpose of MYWO back in 1952 bears striking similarity to the 1992 MYWO, especially its close alliance with the government and its support of the status quo and its social welfarism. In this connection, it is significant to note that the initiative to form this organisation came from the colonial government, through its Department of Community Development and under the leadership of white women, primarily wives of colonial administrators and settler farmers. Although MYWO was supposed

to be a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), it functioned as a division within the department of Community Development of the colonial government. It was indeed the department of Community Development that structured and organised the training programmes (in homecraft, nutrition, health, hygiene and agriculture) of African women who were to introduce and develop MYWO women's clubs in their districts. Furthermore MYWO acted in close alliance with the colonial government during the *Mau Mau* uprising of the 1950s². In return for MYWO's solidarity and support of the colonial government, it was awarded an annual grant of £12,000 for capital development and equipment. In addition the members of this organisation were exempted from forced labour which had been imposed especially in the Central Province of Kenya³. Many of the indigenous Kenyan women who joined this organisation during this period, did so primarily to escape the harsh and difficult forced labour conditions that had been imposed by the colonial government. Furthermore, those who were lucky to be appointed as the women club leaders, were paid a salary as employees of the colonial government.

On the other hand, there was a parallel women's movement in the colonial era, less formalised and sporadic but quite progressive and of significant impact in challenging colonial institutions and policies especially on issues of production and governance. In Central Province for example there are documented cases of women's resistance to colonial forced labour system, land use and commodity pricing (Kanogo 1987a). Women's political resistance and struggle against colonial rule in Kenya has also been documented: a notable example being the 1920 Harry Thuku uprising where women directly confronted the colonial government in demanding the release of Harry Thuku.

It is this same strand of the women's movement that had engaged in active resistance to colonial rule and its policies during the early part of the colonial period that again actively participated in *Mau Mau* struggle for political liberation of the country during 1950s. Up to 5% of the *Mau Mau* forest fighters were women, who engaged in guerrilla warfare and armed combat alongside men. Many more women played other supportive but strategic roles, ranging from

turning their homes into armouries and catering centres for the warriors as well as sensitizing and mobilizing support against colonial rule. Women's participation in the liberation struggle certainly contributed to the process that culminated in the granting of political independence in 1963. But once political independence was won women only marginally participated in political and other public decision-making positions. Women's subordinate status remained in place and was further enhanced by legislations that have continued to discriminate against women.

In the meantime in the post-colonial era the women's movement grew rapidly and expanded quantitatively and also acquired an elaborate formalized structure spreading from the grassroots to the national level.

But despite the post colonial growth of the women's group movement in Kenya, the impact of this movement on government policies and programmes that have a bearing on the status of women has been minimal. A combination of undemocratic political environment, state cooptation and manipulation of women's groups, class and intra-class leadership rivalries as well as the social-welfarist ideology of most women's organizations had rendered the women's movement powerless on matters of women's empowerment. Since the repeal of Section 2A of the Kenyan constitution that paved the way for popular participation, the women's movement has taken a new dimension and has become more aggressive and progressive, but still quite fragile and vulnerable to external manipulation and sabotage, as I explain later in this discussion.

The rest of the discussion then is an attempt to assess the extent to which the women's movement has succeeded in pushing for government policy changes that would enhance the status of women in the country, and the extent to which the women group movement has served to empower women in the pursuit of justice and equity.

A Muzzled Toothless Women's Movement

The one striking feature of the women's movement in Kenya in the post-colonial era is not merely its rapid expansion in terms of numbers of registered organizations but also the close control and

influence the state has exercised over that expansion as well as in shaping the structure and the type of activities the women's groups engage in. There is therefore a close correlation between the periods of rapid expansion of women's organization and the government's policy and institutional interventions in it. These interventions have in turn given the government enough space to manipulate and shape the direction of the women's movement. Those women's organizations or individuals within them that have resisted state control and/or have challenged the oppressive status quo have in the past often come under heavy censure and harassment, while the acquiescent ones have been rewarded and accorded high official status.

To concretize the argument presented above, I will briefly examine the structure and performance of the major national women's organizations, namely the **Women's Bureau**, **MYWO** and the **National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK)**. These apex organizations were expected to provide leadership and guidance to other women's organizations affiliated with them and hence should indeed have spearheaded the formation of a cohesive women's movement capable of influencing the national decision-making process and lobbying for women's representation in key public decision-making positions. These national organizations for women in Kenya have in the past largely been ineffective in empowering women and in facilitating increased participation of women in public decision-making. The male dominated political system had succeeded in coopting the conservative leaders within the women's movement while marginalising the radical ones.

The Development of the Women's Movement in the Post-Colonial Period.

The women's movement expanded relatively slowly during the first decade of independence. Women's groups engaged in social welfare activities but steered off political activities and issues of women's empowerment. Their constitutions barred them from engaging in matters deemed to be political. Thus, although there was not a single woman in parliament until 1969, and no women holding top

management or decision-making public positions,* no women voices were heard at that time protesting the subordinate status women continued to hold despite their exemplary record in the struggle for political independence. Laws discriminating against women continued to be enforced and progressive ones withdrawn, such as the 1969 repeal of the Affiliation Act by a male-dominated parliament. No significant protest has been heard from women until recently.

And yet the giant MYWO which then has now prided itself with being the oldest women's organization with links from the grassroot to the national level, continued to operate in silence. MYWO retained much of the social welfare orientation inherited from its colonial beginnings having great emphasis on the role of women as "home makers", rather than as decision makers.

The NCWK was the only other umbrella women's organization during the first decade of independence. Formed in 1964, it was charged with the responsibility of co-ordinating all other women's organizations in the country, including MYWO. Unlike MYWO, it seemed more dynamic and more progressive in its approach to women issues, though there is no evidence of any significant women's voice emerging from the Council or its affiliates during the first independence decade.

During the 1960s and early 1970s the government on its part completely ignored women's issues and acted as if the gender question did not exist in Kenya. Thus when the 1972 ILO report on *Employment, Incomes and Equality* suggested that the Kenyan state should begin to address the problem of access and equity for women of Kenya, the government retorted:

The government is not aware of overt discrimination against women in the country. Women are employed in important positions in the armed forces, in the police, in the prisons and in government as well as the private sector.⁴

The Kenyan government has remained consistent in maintaining the position that Kenyan women are not discriminated against and therefore do not need to struggle for rights they are already enjoying. As late as 1985, the government was still threatening and warning

women against making "unreasonable" demands on rights they already had (Nzomo: 1989).

The declaration of the United Nations Women's Decade in 1979 was accompanied by the requirement that all United Nations member states strengthen their existing women's organizations and create national machineries for women where they did not exist. The Kenya government's response to this international requirement was the strengthening and the revitalisation of MYWO and the creation of the government national machinery for women - the Women's Bureau. The former was given political legitimacy and some economic support to expand and increase its membership and grassroot linkage. The Women's Bureau was charged with the responsibility of registering and coordinating the activities of all women groups in the country. This new set up literally stripped the NCWK of its original mandate as a coordinating body of all women NGOs. The NCWK was further weakened when in 1981 MYWO withdrew its affiliation from the council, taking with it a number of smaller women groups that were sympathetic to MYWO.

Thus as, the NCWK national stature diminished, that of MYWO and the Women's Bureau grew as the women's decade progressed. The Women's Bureau was clearly not constituted to be a powerful institution for empowering women in that (a) it still holds the low status of a division within the Ministry of Culture and Social Services, (b) it is underfunded and (c) as a government organ, it cannot afford to criticize government policies or push for radical policy changes in favour of women. The Bureau therefore merely coordinates and implements policies and programs that have already received government approval. It has taken the Bureau more than 15 years to produce a policy guideline on Women and Development.

Here it needs to be remembered that while the Kenya government agreed to comply with the women's Decade's objectives and demands, this compliance had to be on the Kenya government's terms so that organisations thus created or strengthened were required to operate strictly according to the set Government policies. Those that failed to comply or made "unreasonable" demands for changes in the existing policies and laws, were not promoted and hence diminished in national status and influence among women as was the case for the

NCWK.

The mobilization and registration of women into groups was given priority when the Government and the international donor countries and institutions realized that women's groups and programs could be used as an inexpensive source of well organised labour for implementing local community (women) projects especially in the rural areas. The women groups were also to serve as cheap, readily available and well organised source of entertainment for local and foreign dignitaries during official Government ceremonial occasions.

Thus through official encouragement the Bureau has been fairly successful in registering new women's groups as demonstrated by the rapid expansion of women groups since 1976 from 4,300 groups with a total membership of 156,892 in 1976, to 16,500 groups with a total membership of 630,000, by 1984. By early 1988, there were about 23,000 women's groups in the country with 1.4 million members. (Nzomo, 1989 a:10)

Despite this expansion, the Government apparently never found it necessary to allocate adequate financial and technical inputs to boost the income-generating and social welfare activities of these groups. In this context, it is significant to note that between 1978 and 1982, the Government allocated to women's programs the equivalent of 0.1% of total Government expenditure. In the meantime, the Government's grants to women's groups continued to drop significantly from 3.3 million Kenya shillings in 1986, to 2.6 million shillings in 1987 and to 1.7 million shillings in 1989. (Nzomo 1989: 15 and **Economic Survey 1990:181**).

While the Women's Bureau was registering the women's groups MYWO was doing the mobilization. Thus by 1985, MYWO had attained its (original) position of being the leading NGO for mobilizing women, especially in the rural areas, with a countrywide membership of 300,000 members belonging to 8,000 groups. (Nzomo,1989 a:11). The government clearly indicated its preference for MYWO with its conservative leadership as opposed to the NCWK with its radical leadership, epitomized at the time by Wangari Mathaai's crusade for human (and women's) rights.

Government preference for MYWO was particularly evident during the preparation of the 1985 Women's Decade conference. In

this connection, it was MYWO that assumed the leadership position over women of Kenya, both at the NGO forum and at the governmental conference. Indeed, in his book, *Kenya Africa Nationalism*, President Moi depicts the various achievements by Kenyan women during the Women's Decade through the role of MYWO. (D.T.A. Moi, 1988:108-111)

But despite its marginalisation and lack of support from the Government, the NCWK at least during Mathaai's tenure as chairperson, spearheaded the women's movement by taking a position on national issues where women's rights were adversely affected. For example in early 1986, NCWK was the only women's organisation in Kenya which made its critical position known to the national ruling party chairman on the then newly introduced queuing method of political elections. Again, in the same year, it was only the NCWK that actively lobbied to have a new law on burials introduced to protect the surviving next of kin, especially women, who often were deprived of any right over the property of a dead spouse under the existing customary laws in Kenya. Furthermore, the Green Belt Movement under the leadership of Wangari Mathaai has not only helped to empower poor women, through the tree planting programme, but it has also served as an effective platform from which Mathaai successfully challenged state decisions on matters of the environment and human rights. The most celebrated case is her lone battle trying to stop the Government from erecting a skyscraper in the middle of one of the largest recreational parks in Nairobi's City Centre. The weakness of the Kenya Women's movement was well demonstrated in this case by the fact that no women came out openly in support of Mathaai's crusade, even as the entire male-dominated parliament, descended upon her, hurling personalized attacks and insults. Indeed, some women groups affiliated to KANU-MYWO held a demonstration to condemn and to disassociate themselves from her action (**Daily Nation** December 15, 1989). This disassociation coming from fellow women, gave legitimacy to the punitive measures that were then meted out on Mathaai and her *Green Belt Movement* (**Daily Nation** December 15, 1989 and January 9, 1990). The only solid show of support for Mathaai came from international environmentalists and the external donors of the project who

vindicated her by refusing to fund it (African Business, March 1990).

On the other hand, the price MYWO has had to pay for the big elevation to a supreme position over other women's organization, was the loss of autonomy and complete derailment from the women's movement, and becoming by 1989 yet another women's wing of the ruling party - KANU.

A clear demonstration of this disempowerment and hijacking of this women's organization's autonomy by the male dominated KANU hierarchy was during the October 1989 KANU MYWO national elections. The powerlessness of the majority of women in this organisation during those elections was succinctly summarised in the **Weekly Review**:

From the very beginning, whether we were dealing with simple problems of an election time-table or the eligibility of those who should vote, the plain fact has been that Kenya women have little or no say in what the election process was all about. Infact, the original ideal of merging MYWO with the ruling party was not taken by women but men leaders in the ruling party. Since then, women have become mere pawns in a political game that is aimed at benefiting the male player ... Women in Kenya are in danger of becoming appendages of men, with their fate determined by men with little or no reference to women".(The Weekly Review Nov. 3, 1989, p.1)

Despite the blatant interference by male politicians in these elections, the Government praised the women of KANU-MYWO for successfully conducting their own elections and assured them of a hegemonic position vis-a-vis other women's organizations. The then KANU national chairman, Peter Oloo Aringo, assured the women leaders that: "KANU-MYWO would remain supreme on matters relating to women's development to avoid conflicts and duplication of duties among women leaders and KANU-MYWO officials" (The Standard February 9, 1990 pg. 2). He further promised them that KANU would appoint two KANU-MYWO representatives to serve at the governing council and National Executive of the party, a

promise that was never honoured.

As I have noted in an earlier paper (Nzomo: 1991b,) the strategy of focusing support on one or two women's organisations and denying this to others, is likely to weaken and further fragment an already divided and fragile women's movement in Kenya. The conflicts and rivalries that have been so common among the leadership of the national women's organizations are likely to increase, thus postponing indefinitely the development of a relatively cohesive women's movement that could form the basis of effective women's participation in public decision-making.

The Impact of the Women's Decade on the Women's movement in Kenya.

The 1985 Women's Decade Conference held in Nairobi to close the United Nations Decade for women found many Kenyan women unaware that there had been an entire decade dedicated to them and committed to the achievement of among other things, gender equity. Basic discriminations against women embedded in the legal and other institutional structures had remained unchanged before and after the women's decade, without any audible voices of protest from within or outside the women's movement. As already noted, the 1969 repeal of the *Affiliation Act* remained in place. In addition, the *Law of Marriage and Divorce Bill* had already twice come up for debate in parliament and was defeated by the male-dominated parliament, without any significant protest from women. The same can be said of the continued retention of the law that denies housing allowance to married women in public service and lack of provision for paid maternity leave for women. (Ghutto, April 1976:54). Other gender issues that Kenyan women have failed to respond to include: (i) the 1986 Government directive that women teacher trainees who got pregnant refund Government money spent on their education, (ii) the 1987 Wambui Otieno's protracted legal battle, seeking to be granted the right to bury her dead husband (**Daily Nation**, May, 1987 and **VIVA** 1987 16-17 & 36). The latter case presented a good opportunity that Kenyan women could have seized to insist on the harmonization of Kenyan Laws, into one set of laws, to avoid future

manipulation of the now often contradictory customary and common laws that are conveniently used to victimize women. Significantly, it was only Wangari Mathaai who came out forthrightly in support of Otieno's case. Wambui however did not reciprocate on the environmental case cited earlier. Another issue that the women of Kenya, especially, the women M.P.s., could have proposed improvement upon is the Government's meager financial allocation to women's programs, many of which have failed to take off due to lack of adequate financial and technical inputs.

The powerlessness of the women's group movement has been most evident at the political level and predates the women's decade. Despite the fact that women constitute the majority of voters in national and local government elections in Kenya, they have been unable to constitute themselves into an interest or pressure group capable of promoting progressive women candidates into the corridors of power and decision making. It is also significant that the few women who have attained important decision-making positions in Kenya have done so in spite of or without the support of other women. More often than not, such women have been presidential appointees or have struggled single-handedly to those positions. Consequently, such women who find their way to the top in this manner often do not promote feminist policies, as their first loyalty is to themselves and/or those who put them in positions of power. Such appointments may also pre-empt the development of a radical women's movement.

Despite the failure, until 1991, of the women's movement to engage the state and lobby for changes in existing discriminatory laws and practices against women, it is also important to recognise that the Women's Decade especially the siting of the 1985 Women's Decade Conference in Kenya, had some positive impact in the Kenya Women's empowerment, especially at the level of raising women's awareness on gender issues. However, much of the awareness and the conscientizing of women about their legal right owes as much to the momentum generated by the 1985 Women's Decade conference and its resolutions, as to the continuing efforts of some committed individual Kenyan women in the professions, especially the law, the media and academia, who have been organizing workshops, seminars,

educational tours and public poster campaigns to publicize the situation of women and to educate women about their rights. In particular, efforts of the Public Law Institute brought into public focus the issue of violence against women.

Besides the issue of violence, some women in the legal profession especially FIDA, have been teaching other women how to get legal redress on issues, including child custody and maintenance, as well as employment benefits. Some women in the media have also contributed to the public visibility that the situation of Kenya women has acquired since Nairobi Conference. These are some indications that women in Kenya are now taking greater advantage of the existing legal statutes to fight for their rights, especially on marital issues and domestic violence. Women are now coming out aggressively to challenge the institution of polygamy. Married women are increasingly challenging their spouses when they attempt to marry second wives. For example, between July and September 1988, there were four publicized incidents in various parts of Kenya whereby women sought and/or obtained court orders to restrain their spouses from solemnizing marriages to second wives. Women are also increasingly refusing to enter forced marriages, which in the past were common in some Kenyan communities and often meant that young girls abandon their academic studies prematurely. Women in some parts of Kenya have also begun to assert their right to determine the birth control method most suitable to themselves.

But until the repeal of Section 2A of the Kenya constitution in December 1991, women's voices from within and outside the women movement remained few and highly scattered. Kenya women had clearly failed to form a cohesive women's movement that could act as a pressure group or lobbying forum for influencing change in the policies and structures that perpetuate women's subordinate status. The repeal of section 2A opened the flood gates for popular participation in the much needed democratization process in Kenya. Women have expressed their desire and determination to fully participate in this process and are insisting on their issues being mainstreamed in the new democratic agenda. But are they really making any impact?

The women's movement in the Multi-party Era: 1992 and Beyond⁵

The women of Kenya, at least those well informed about the significance of the repeal of section 2A of the constitution, opened the New Year with hope, determination and renewed energy to change and to do what they had failed to do for themselves since 1963. They resolved at a New Year tea party, that they would not miss the liberation boat this second time around; that they would no longer accept a marginalised status; that they would scrutinise all policy documents and ensure that all the fundamental issues that affect women are mainstreamed in the new development policy programmes being developed by the various political parties; that they would lobby and pressurise for the repeal of all the existing laws that discriminate against women. They also committed themselves to sensitize and conscientize their fellow women especially those at the grassroots, to understand their rights as citizens and the political choices available to them in a multi-party democratic set up. It was agreed that women voters would be sensitized about the power of their vote and the need to vote for committed women rather than gender insensitive men. Linked to the latter agenda, it was also felt that there was need to sensitize and encourage a lot of capable women to stand as 'candidates' for political office in the forthcoming civic and parliamentary elections. Confidence and capacity building of prospective women candidates was seen to be of paramount short term importance, due to the realization that there would be no point sensitizing women voters to vote for other women, if a large number of women did not present themselves as candidates. A major objective then became to increase women's power and influence by working towards the attainment of a *critical mass*⁶ of at least 30-35% women's representation in parliament and other political and public decision-making positions.

By mid January, several meetings were held mainly by professional women and representatives of women organizations to discuss what role women should play in the democratization process. A number of non-partisan pressure groups were formed to identify and work out strategies that would guide the women's movement in

implementing the women's agenda in the current democratization process. The pressure groups formed included the *Women Voter's and League and Mothers In Action*. The *National Committee on the Status of Women (NCSW)* was also formed mainly to coordinate other pressure groups and women's organizations working for the empowerment of women during the democratisation process.

A number of seminars and workshops have since been held with the goal of raising public awareness about the gender dimension of the democratization process which include: women's legal rights, political rights, reproductive rights and human rights relating to various forms of violence against women.

The crowning moment of two months of activism and persistent awareness raising and sensitization campaign was the National Women's Convention, held on 22nd February 1992. This was the first meeting of its kind in post-colonial Kenya, that brought together Kenya women from the grassroot level to the national level to discuss and dialogue with each other on the women's agenda in the democratization process. This convention once again demonstrated women's mobilizing abilities and the ease with which they can overcome their class and social economic barriers in order to address their commonly shared gender problem. That the convention was held with government's consent, was an indication that women's voices were being heard. It is also significant that the controversial wall around Uhuru Park which had been erected when the government was planning to build the skyscraper mentioned earlier, was brought down on the same day as the convention. The now famous **Freedom Corner** was baptised that day by the convention participants led by Mathaai.

After the convention, the momentum levelled off and some of women's attention was shifted to other issues of national concern, the most important being the hunger strike that was staged shortly after the convention by mothers of political prisoners demanding the immediate release of their sons. Although the issue in question is basically a human rights one that cuts across gender, women have treated it as a gender question and have acted in solidarity with the mothers of the political prisoners.

The other national issue that has also diverted some of women's attention from their specific agenda has been the so called "tribal clashes", that have brought death and misery to large numbers of Kenyans living in Western Kenya. Since the major victims as in any violent situation are the women and the children, many women have shown their solidarity with the victims.

In the meantime, however, many of the pressure groups formed on or about January, 1992 are doing less talking now and concentrating more on setting up programmes and activities for implementing the women's agenda identified and agreed upon at the Women's convention. For example Women Voters League in conjunction with FIDA, is preparing Voters handbooks for women and setting up civic education programmes for women voters at the grass-roots level. FIDA has also set up a free women's Legal Aid Clinic that provides legal counsel to women who fall victim to various forms of violence against them. The NCWK is also preparing to launch a similar but complementary programme to that of Women Voters League. The NCSW, which played a major role in coordinating the Women's Convention, continues to play that coordinating role. In addition the NCSW is implementing in the short term a candidate, support programme aimed at enhancing women candidate's capacity and skills in order to win the forthcoming civic and parliamentary elections.

After only four months of mobilising and strategising it is still too early to assess fully the performance of the new wave of the women's movement in the current multi-party era. However, some tentative observations can still be made. Firstly, going by the number of activities, the amount of freedom of expression, association and assembly, that women have exercised in these past four months of 1992, one could argue that the women's movement is finally addressing the pertinent issues for women's empowerment.

But the movement is still fragile and vulnerable to external manipulations and divisive tactics of the male dominated political establishment. In this connection, it is important to note that the major strength of this new woman's movement has been its non-partisan character and its refusal to be dragged into partisan political agendas that do not have direct relevance to women's concerns. Within a non-partisan movement, women can negotiate with all the political power

contestants from a point of strength, being as women are, 52% of the population and the majority of voters. But if the women's movement gets entangled in partisan politics at this early stage, as some recent developments indicate, it risks losing the few gains so far made since the beginning of 1992.

Women must therefore keep their agenda in perspective and concentrate on nurturing and strengthening the lobbying forums and pressure groups that have been created, bearing in mind that all we have achieved so far, is merely voicing and highlighting women's issues. There is still a lot of work and lobbying necessary to ensure that discriminatory laws are repealed, women's issues are mainstreamed and socio-cultural attitudes changed. This is a huge and challenging agenda, that cannot all be achieved in the short term.

Earlier in this , it was underscored that the undemocratic political environment especially Government interference in women's organizations had in the past hampered the effectiveness of the women's movement in Kenya. Another factor, that was not highlighted in the main discussion but which remains a major threat to the development of a cohesive women's movement with a common vision, is the leadership and power rivalries among women leaders. Unless such power rivalries are kept in check, the budding women's movement may become, yet again, an easy prey for external male manipulation and hijacking of the women's agenda. Women must learn to develop a sense of unity in diversity. Otherwise, the women's movement will have failed once again to make an impact on the institutions and policies that sustain women's subordinate status.

Footnotes

1. The term, **women group**, generally refers to a relatively small, local community-oriented female group formed for the purpose of working collectively and socializing a regular and somewhat formalized basis. The groups tend to be self-help in nature and social-welfare oriented. Many groups are also linked to international women organizations or umbrella national or international women organizations which offer a channel for technical and financial assistance to the group. Many women groups are grassroots based and carry out projects at the community level.
2. The **Mau Mau** uprising was a guerilla-type liberation struggle that broke out in 1952, as the culmination of a long period of African resistance to

colonial rule in Kenya. It is significant to note that MYWO was established in the same year that the Mau Mau Liberation war broke out.

3. For more details on MYWO alliance with the colonial government against Mau Mau, see Mette Monsted, "Women's Groups in Rural Kenya and their Role in Development" **Center for Development Research (VFT) Paper A. 78.2**, (Copenhagen, June 1978) p.2 and Audrey Wipper, "The Maendeleo Ya Wanawake movement in the colonial period: the Canadian Connection, Mau Mau, Embroidery and Agriculture", **Rural Africana** No. 29, Winter 1975-76.
4. Republic of Kenya, **Sessional Paper No.10 of 1973 on Employment**. Government Printer, Nairobi, 1973) p.64.
5. Most of the information contained in this section consists of a reconstruction of the events surrounding Kenya women's movement since December 1991, as observed by the author who is an activist in the movement. Some of the materials have also been pieced together from various reports from the local magazines and journals.
6. A **critical mass** should here be understood to mean the **minimum number** of women M.P.s required in parliament for them to make a difference, in regard to influencing national policies and legislation, in a manner that advances the status of women.

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