REPORT

Online discussion on
Women, political participation and decision-making in Africa

**Organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
in cooperation with the E-Network of National Gender Equality Machineries in Africa**

September 4 – October 14, 2007

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I. Background

1.   The online discussion "Women, political participation and decision-making in Africa" was organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa in cooperation with the E-Network of National Gender Equality Machineries in Africa, from 4 September to 14 October 2007. Elizabeth Powley moderated the discussion and drafted this report.

2.   The online discussion covered the following themes during a six-week period:

- Week 1: Assessing the current level of women's participation in decision-making in Africa
- Week 2: Women's participation in politics: national policies and mechanisms
- Week 3: Women's participation in politics: social and cultural pressures
- Week 4: Women's participation in other decision-making processes: education, private sector, civil society, and media
- Week 5: Building alliances with women in decision-making positions
- Week 6: Other issues, wrap up and recommendations

3.   The Division for the Advancement of Women invited interested individuals and groups to participate in the online discussion. Over 800 individuals (83 per cent women and 17 per cent men) from more than 90 countries registered for the discussion. The organizational distribution showed the greatest percentage of participants from the NGO sector (40 per cent), followed by the United Nations (17 per cent), academia (12 per cent), and governments (10 per cent). Geographically, Africa (70 per cent) had the highest representation, followed by Europe (11 per cent), and North America (10 per cent).

4.   During the discussion, a total of 216 messages were posted by 118 different participants. The discussion was conducted in both English and French. Additional statistics concerning the online discussion and the demographics of the discussion participants, their organizational backgrounds, and countries of origin can be found in Annexes 1 and 2.

5.   Over the past two decades, significant commitments to women's participation in decision-making have been made at the international level. The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) called on governments to take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making. The outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000) reiterated the need to increase the representation of women. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) affirmed the need to include women in decision-making with regard to issues of peace and security. In 2006, the 50th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women adopted agreed conclusions on the equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes.

6.   Other important commitments related to women's political participation in Africa include: Article 4 (l) of the Constitutive

7.   In 2006, the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), in collaboration with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), organized a workshop to establish the E-Network for National Gender Equality Machineries in Africa. This online discussion was designed to serve the representatives of the E-Network.

8.   The report does not aim to give comprehensive coverage of all inputs received but rather provides an overview of the discussion, with some illustrative examples of contributions. All postings can be consulted at http://esaconf.un.org/WB/?boardID=politicalparticipationafrica.

II. Theme one: Assessing the current level of women's participation in decision-making in Africa

A. Background

9.   The first topic of discussion was the level of women's participation in decision-making in Africa. The discussion centered, unless specifically noted, on women's participation in *political* decision-making, as elected and appointed officials.

10.   In recent years, women's participation in politics and decision-making in Africa has received significant attention. The 2005 election of Ellen Johnson-Si

government (national, local), as well as different types of leadership (elected and appointed, civil servants, etc.).

B. Summary of the discussion

15.   The moderator started the week with a set of questions to solicit participants' views on (i) the status of women's leadership in various countries; (ii) the involvement of women leaders in regional organizations and/or coalitions; (iii) the importance of women's participation in decision-making; (iv) whether it is more important to increase the number of women in top positions or to support people (men or women) in leadership positions who are committed to gender equality policies; and (v) the priorities in participants' countries for increasing women's participation and better representing women's concerns.

22.   Participants acknowledged that the overall trend toward increased political participation of women in Africa is good. But more needs to be done as, for example Meron Genene from Ethiopia explained, to support elected women and improve their ability to influence policy: *"Generally, I would say efforts are being made to increase women's participation in leadership ...but a lot remains to be done in building the elected women's capacity and increas[ing] the quality of their participation and voice to influence policies and actions in favor of women."* Another participant Annie Matundu-Mbambia from the Democratic Republic of the Congo cautioned that the participation of women in leadership at the national level is not enough; women at all levels must be empowered. National level participation *"must be accompanied by a comprehensive consciousness-raising campaign, and civil and political education that would allow women to know their rights."* Both of these strategies –training elected women at the national level and conducting civil and political education at the grassroots level– are an important complement to efforts to increase the number of women in national government.

(ii) The involvement of women leaders in regional organizations and/or coalitions

23.   Several regional and sub-regional organizations in Africa have made progress in terms of women's participation in decision-making, at least at the level of policy commitments. For example, fifty per cent of the African Union's Commission Leaders are women. In 2007, the African Union held a conference to discuss popularizing and implementing its "Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa," a 2004 statement that committed the African Union to gender parity. Sub-regional institutions, such as the East African Legislative Assembly, have internal regulations that mandate women's participation. There are also women's networks associated with a variety of sub-regions. Women parliamentarians from southern Africa, for example, work together as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Women's Parliamentary Network.

24.   An examination of the effectiveness or impact such regional and subregional organizations and African institutions that have created mechanisms for women's advancement would be worthwhile. Very few participants in this discussion, however, mentioned regional or sub-regional governmental organizations.

25.   Participants' comments were focused on coalitions of non-governmental actors. Networks of women's NGOs, for example, featured heavily in the online discussion. The emphasis on NGOs reflected the composition of registered discussion participants of which forty per cent represented NGOs.

26.   With regard to NGOs, Ndeye Astou Sylla from Senegal mentioned, for example, the *"Network of National Rural Women that was organized in the sub-region and adopted a strategy for rural women's participation in local elections and in decision-making positions."* A participant from the Democratic Republic of the Congo suggested that many women are active in civil society because in that sector *"there is more freedom than in the public institutions."* Yvonne Matuturu from the UNESCO office in Burundi, however, remarked that women's participation in regional organizations *"is rather timid."* Resource constraints were cited as one reason why women weren't more engaged with regional or cross-border activities.

(iii) Why women's participation in decision-making is important

27.   Women's participation in decision-making is not only advantageous for women themselves, but for development and democracy in general. The agreed conclusions on "the equal

32.   Other participants put forward the argument that, in order to be democratic, governments had to include women, who are often more than 50 per cent of the population. Grace Nambuusi from Uganda said, *"Democracy at its core is all about representation and resources. When women, who make up the majority of the population, are under-represented in decision-making they do not benefit equally from the county's economy and social pie."* Following this line of argument, any nation that does not take steps to include both men and women in its government cannot be considered fully democratic.

33.   There were also contributions about the need for women to participate in decision-making so that they can serve as role models to the next generation of girls and boys. Jocelynne Scutt's comment from Australia was representative: *"If men alone are seen to be making decisions of public importance, then girls and boys, women and men can be led into believing that women have no legitimate place in such decision-making. This then has a self-fulfilling effect, meaning that girls and women do not see themselves as 'important' decision-makers and neither do men and boys; and men and boys are legitimated in 'keeping women and girls out' of decision-making positions."*

34.   For others, women's participation is a matter of human rights. As Marie Louise Pambu from Democratic Republic of the Congo put it,

committed to gender equality policies.” Beatrice Fri Bime, writing about Cameroon from The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in Geneva, Switzerland, concurred, *“My priority is quality. As much as we want quantity, we need results to maintain credibility and sustainability.”* Wangari Muange from Kenya was emphatic: *“Numbers is not the issue, what issues are articulated is what matters.”*

39.   A minority of participants argued that quantity was more important than quality. Kwachu Justine Ngum from Cameroon, one of those, noted, *“My priority is to increase the number of women in top political positions … if the number of women in top political position is increased, [there will be] increase[d] faith in women political participation … [and passage] of legislation that favors women …”* In her view, by requiring or mandating a minimum level for women's participation, there will be positive policy outcomes for women.

40.   Others who argued for numbers did so but only as a first step. They said that quantity must come first, but only so that women would have an opportunity to demonstrate their quality, or gain experience and eventually be able to deliver in terms of quality. Amy Hanes from the United States said, *“I see it as a process of evolution … [numbers] often unfortunately must come before we see quality.”*

41.   Other participants argued that both quality and quantity are necessary at the same time, and that the question itself sets up a false dichotomy. In the words of Jocelynne Scutt from Australia: *“We need to prioritize both. It is vital that the number of women in decision-making positions increase to become equal with the number of men in those positions … At the same time we particularly need to support women who are committed to sex/gender equality policies. Otherwise getting women into positions of power defeats the [purpose].”*

42.   the number of women in decisi 0 es. Otherwise

advancement; empowering women at the local level; and reviewing policies to ensure gender-sensitivity. These were addressed over the course of the six weeks and feature below.

III. Theme two: Women's participation in politics: national policies and mechanisms

A. Background

46.   At the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, governments emphasized that "women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for justice or democracy, but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the perspective of women at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved." The Platform for Action defined two strategic objectives: (a) ensure women's equal access to and full participation in all power structures and decision- making; and (b) increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.

47.   According to the E-Network of National Gender Equality Machineries, all countries in Africa have established national mechanisms for the advancement of women. These machineries vary, however, in composition, size, mandate, and, therefore in effectiveness.

48.   A review of various national policies and mechanisms designed to increase women's participation in politics is important for peer learning, knowledge management, and the collection of good practices.

B. Summary of the discussion

49.   The moderator started the second week with a set of questions soliciting participants' views on national policies and mechanisms that can be used to increase women's participation in politics. Specifically, participants examined the role of (i) electoral systems, (ii) quotas, (iii)

there is proportional representation (as opposed to "winner-take-all"). Other types of systems include the constituency-based system, "First-Past-the-Post," and mixed systems.[3]

52.   A variety of electoral systems are employed across Africa. South Africa, for instance, has a PR system, while Tanzania has a constituency-based system. Seychelles is an example of an African country that has a mixed PR and constituency-based system.

53.   The common theme in all contributions on this topic was the need for women to remain vigilant and understand the ways in which systems can be discriminatory. Theodore Mbainaissem from Chad, for example, explained that proportional representation is not in itself beneficial to women. Women must be at the top of the lists in order to succeed: *"The electoral system adopted by the Chad for the last election is the proportional representation system. A list of the candidates by electoral district is presented to the local population to vote. Every list has a person at the top or head of the list. To be elected, a woman needs to be at the top of the list. An example: in a*

voluntary quotas (South Africa), to quotas that are legislated but not enforced (Democratic Republic of the Congo), to constitutional mandates that have been implemented (Rwanda).

58.   The moderator encouraged discussion on the following questions: What has been the impact of quotas at different levels? Do quotas provide opportunities or unintentionally set limits on women's representation? Is the commonly cited target of 30 per cent an appropriate level? What other measures have been used to increase women's political participation? How can their effectiveness be assessed? Not all of these questions were sufficiently addressed in the course of the discussion.

59.   For those countries with quotas, the biggest challenge identified by participants is implementation. The existence of quotas is not enough; quotas can be ineffectual, interpreted in unfavorable ways, and ignored altogether. Cathy Solonyo from the Democratic Republic of the Congo wrote, "*Although the principle of parity and women's representation was enshrined in the constitution and written into the election law, the will of political parties still prevails because there are no sanctions for not adhering to the law if they do not list a sufficient number of women on the electoral lists*." Uju Obiora from Nigeria said, "*The quota system is so commonly referred*

by male chauvinism. The access to training and funds is discriminatory towards women. [Women] are portrayed as wife, mistress, girlfriend or mother; [thus] illustrating how strongly the role of women is affected by the existing retrograde patriarchal mentality. For example, during the general assembly as well as the congresses of the political parties women are often relegated to protocol status (catering and cleaning duties, decoration and organization of the room, etc.). Regardless of their political knowledge or competence, few women are involved in thematic preparation, coordination, initiation or development of policies or action plans/ projects."

65.   The challenges that women face are a combination of both direct discrimination and structural barriers, such as the hours that meetings are held, which can conflict with women's other responsibilities toward their families. As Uju Obiora from Nigeria explained, *"Women have not been able to influence the platforms of political parties. [The] party nomination system in Nigeria is yet to become objective. Women are yet to be recognized and appreciated even at party levels. This is evidenced in the discrimination meted against them within political parties. Women are excluded by [the] fixing [of] caucus meetings at ungodly hours and through traditional and cultural norms."*

66.   Several participants submitted examples of strategies that have been employed in their countries to overcome these barriers. Most of these examples had to do with provisions for enforcing equitable behavior on the part of political parties. Peace Uwineza of Rwanda explained that in her country, *"the law that guides the formation of political parties also sets a condition for the representation of women in the leadership of the party before a party is registered."* Bernadette Kayirangwa, a participant from Rwanda, provided an example from Mali, where the number of women elected is used as criteria for determining funding levels for financing political parties.

67.   Rebecca Boghuma from Cameroon offered a strategy aimed at demonstrating the power of

71.   Throughout the six weeks of disc

IV. Theme three: Women's participation in politics: social and cultural pressures

A. Background

77.   Discrimination, economic dependency, gender-based violence, and other abuses prevent women from enjoying their rights and entering politics. The 50th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (2006) adopted agreed conclusions on the equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes which "expressed concern at the serious and persistent obstacles, which were many and varied in nature, that still hindered the advancement of women and further affected their participation in decision-making processes, including, inter alia, the persistent feminization of poverty, the lack of equal access to health, education, training and employment, armed conflict, the lack of security and natural disasters." (paragraph 11)

78.   African women face social and cultural barriers to their participation in public life, in the form of economic and legal limitations, traditional gender roles, family responsibilities and demands on their time, cultural and religious taboos, and lack of education and access to resources.

79.   Jacqueline Oubida from Burkina Faso expressed it this way: *"the social and economic conditions of women impact their participation in decision-making positions. The deeply rooted socio-cultural practices and beliefs, illiteracy, and the division of labor prevent women from active participation in community life ... The full realization of women's human rights [is a] pre-requisite for women's [participation in] decision-making."*

80.   Writing from Mali, Djingarey Maiga said, *"Although almost all countries in Africa have constitutional provisions which prohibit discrimination on the grounds of sex, legal discrimination remains -especially, but not only, in personal laws and laws deriving from patriarchal interpretations of custom, culture and religion."*

B. Summary of the discussion

81.   The moderator started the week with a set of questions to participants, requesting their views on the social and cultural pressures on women, as well as on measures how to create an environment that encourages women's political participation. Specifically, participants were asked to address the role of (i) culture, (ii) media, (iii) training efforts, and (iv) support for women once they are elected into office.

(i) Culture

82.   Contributions to the discussion indicated, overwhelmingly, that patriarchy is pervasive and dominates all aspects of society. Selamawit Abebe from Ethiopia said most succinctly what most participants, across the continent, expressed: *"Women are considered subordinate to men and second class members/citizens both in the family and in the society."*

83.   There was a robust discussion about the barriers to women's entry into politics; illiteracy and economic dependency were the most commonly cited challenges. Closely related to those two issues are the responsibility that women have for their households and the cultural expectations that inhibit their experience outside the private sphere. They lack the time to participate in politics.

As Meima Sirleaf-Karneh from Liberia put it, *"The burden of caring for the family makes it impossible for women to stand out in public life even though [they are] qualified and capable."* Charles Vandi from Sierra Leone explained, *"Women are highly constrained in active participation in politics and other decision-making positions in Sierra Leone ... Time is a major constraint which makes it almost impossible for them ... This is [exacerbated] by the excessive domestic chores performed by women in the household ... The patriarchal factor is another big setback for women. Sierra Leone remains a male-dominated society and politics has been regarded as male domain issue."*

84.   Many participants provided specific examples of traditional attitudes that prevent women's engagement in politics and decision-making. In many cultures, women who take on active roles in public life are suspect. Ncube Nomagugu Gwaba from Zimbabwe explained, *"In our so-called culture a woman's place is in the kitchen. A woman has to support the husband all the time. Once a woman starts to be an effective leader she will be labeled a prostitute."* The same label applies in Nigeria, according to Priscilla M Achakpa: *"Even the few [women] that are educated find it difficult to join politics due to the fact that most men will not allow their wives to join politics. Women in politics are considered to be free or loose."*

85.   Justine Uvuza from Rwanda explained how such attitudes hold women back: *"Women are still facing a lot of challenges related to social and cultural pressures. The perceived traditional roles of men and women have not changed in relation to daily practice. The working environment for women is still unfriendly at both working and societal levels due to gender stereotypes and patriarchal structures. Women leaders and professionals are still faced with traditional roles and also have to meet work/professional expectations. Neither their husbands nor their male relatives*
1   *have succumbed to the changes ushered in by the* ided TctsTJ/w   8

Congo. Some female politicians are really excellent. However, it seems the trainings are often mainly offered to leaders or candidates. The questions I am asking are the following: Are these trainings applied? How applicable are they? Can they be reproduced or are they reproduced at the grassroots level?

95.   There was a strong preference among participants for long-term programmes, as opposed to ad hoc training, and for programmes that reach out beyond capital cities and include strategies for reaching under-served populations. Angelina Mtowa from Tanzania provided an example of a multifaceted programme conducted in her country that reached women candidates and voters in an attempt to increase not only the number of women elected, but also to draw attention to gender issues in the campaign. She explained: *"activities planned by NGOs included providing support for women candidates of all parties, promoting gender-sensitive electoral laws and regulations, and lobbying political parties to adopt more gender-sensitive platforms and support women contestants for constituency seats."* A conference organized for 400 male and female participants from rural and urban areas. *"Participants shared skills, strategies and ideas pertaining to gender and elections, including the inclusion of gender issues in campaigns, ways to support women candidates, and long term processes of promoting women's involvement in decision-making."* This programme also included the creation of *"a database of women political aspirants … for the purpose of continuing capacity building and monitoring achievements."*

96.   The consensus among participants was that those organizations that design and fund training programmes must make an effort to reach the grassroots level, including by using a training-of-trainers approach to ensure that women in rural areas are reached. There was also general agreement that long-term training programmes, as well as the involvement of both men and women were needed to create a positive climate for change.

(iv) Support for Elected Women

97.   The online discussion on this topic highlighted the concern that participants have for women in elected and appointed office. Often isolated, and facing enormous social pressure, this "pioneer generation" of women leaders faces extremely high expectations for their performance by both women and m9(en 0.0009 J)-0 Tduinted Women za Tf0.000(both wom)ng women'ograci36their perRwa9.

relationships, identifying role models and possible mentors ... [and] encouraging support for newer women entering politic[s]." An analysis of women's networks is discussed in detail in Theme Five below.

V. Theme four: Women's participation in other decision-making processes - education, private sector, civil society, and media

A. Background

100.   Although this discussion focused primarily on women's participation in political decision-making, the fourth week presented an opportunity to consider other sectors. Women's inclusion or exclusion from the political sector cannot be seen independently from women's role in other areas such as education, the private sector, civil society and the media. The participation of women in decision-making processes in different sectors strengthens the status of women in a society and creates better synergies among different actors working on gender equality issues.

B. Summary of the discussion

101.   The moderator started the discussion in the fourth week by asking participants to consider women's participation in decision-making positions *outside* of the formal political sector. In particular, the following sectors were considered: (i) education, (ii) private sector, (iii) civil society, and (iv) media. Participants were asked to consider what women's experience in decision-making had been in each of the sectors, how easy or difficult it was for women to achieve senior positions, what obstacles women faced, and what the impact of women's leadership was in these areas.

102.   Participants who contributed to the discussion observed that it was important to recognize women's leadership outside the formal political sector, both because women have sometimes had more success in other sectors, and also because their influence in these sectors can be used to influence the political process.

103.   Participants reported many challenges, but also found that women had been most successful in leading civil society organizations. Participants saw positive trends in terms of women's participation in decision-making in education and the private sector, but not with regard to the media.

(i) Education

104.   According to the World Bank,[5] the education of girls contributes to decline mortality rates and fertility rates, and improves the health and education prospects of the next generation. The UN Millennium Development Goals include commitments to universal primary education and to gender equality. Africa has made some progress toward achieving this goal. Enrollment figures are improving, and the gap/ratio between girls' and boys' enrollment is narrowing. In sub-Saharan Africa in 2005, the World Bank found that 83.6 girls for every 100 boys were enrolled in primary school. Primary school enrollment figures do not tell the whole story, however. The gap in higher

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[5] Mason, A. and E.M. King (2001). *Engendering Development through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources, and Voice,* Washington: The World Bank.

levels is more dramatic. For many women, the lack of leadership capacity is due to discrimination in access to education and training.

105. Participants discussed the importance of girls' education to social and economic development, as well as political participation. There were many positive reports about increasing enrollment of girls in primary schools. Anecdotally, these support the statistical information available. For example, Raveloarisoa Noro Lalao from Madagascar reports, *"The participation of the woman in education is on the right track. The Ministry has plans for girls who lack schooling and has planned education sessions on family life for the population, particularly women."*

106. In general, however, respondents reported that at the higher levels of education (secondary and tertiary), the participation of women lags behind. In the teaching profession, women are represented as primary school teachers, but not as head of universities and very few as professors. Baudouin Schombe from the Democratic Republic of the Congo contributed this observation: *"In the primary and secondary schools, the women rival the men. But in the training colleges, women do not express themselves a lot. I have not seen female rectors of universities."* According to participants, several governments in Africa (including Benin, Rwanda, South Africa) have women Ministers of Education.

107. Given the long-term nature of social change and the relatively weak status of women in many African countries, participants called for continued efforts to sensitize women and men, provide literacy training, and promote the education of girls. Change will not come only through policies or laws, but will require a transformation in attitudes. As Grace Nambuusi from Uganda explained, *"The whole value system prevalent in politics has to be changed, which currently exists within the male dominated system … The belief that women are weak, sexual objects must be changed. These types of beliefs are deeply rooted in our society. The main task is to change the traditional beliefs of people through positive promotion of the values of women, [including] through sensitization of the women, especially in the rural areas."* According to

women get paid compared to men. [Women are also] severely constrained by the limited change in the gendered division of labor in the household."

116.   Overall, participants noted positive trends in women's economic empowerment and engagement in the private sector. Baudouin Schobe in the Democratic Republic of the Congo noted, *"Women are much more active in the informal economy. The banking system still does not give opportunities to all entrepreneurs [equally]. Women are the most affected [by this discrimination.] Nevertheless, the association of business women is getting more and more organized at the national level to address the challenges faced by women in business."* Grace Nambuusi from Uganda also noted more engagement by women: *"There are an increasing number of women in the private sector in Uganda. Women have invested in small enterprises such as small shops in town selling clothes, shoes, saloons, micro-finance and so on. Women in urban and rural areas are provided with small loans on request to start up small-scale businesses so that they can a living or even pay school fees for their children and buy food at home."*

(iii) Civil Society

117.   Women's leadership in civil society is well documented.[6] In some instances, women turn to civil society –and in particular non-governmental organizations– because they face such constraints when entering formal politics. In other cases, women choose to enter civil society because they feel they can have a bigger impact, or they feel that the sector is less corrupt.

118.   Baudouin Schombe from the Democratic Republic of the Congo emphasized that *"[civil society] is the area of society where women are the most active. Notably in the effort to combat gender-based violence, the management of post-conflict, human rights violations, reproductive health, the environment, health, and education …these women's organizations are acknowledged by the official institutions and consulted in most of the negotiations on national, regional, and international planning."*

119.   That women's civil society groups are consulted during the policy planning process is crucial. Grace Nambuusi from Uganda concurred with this assessment: *"Women through civil society are able to influence the political process since they have been collaborating with the people at the grass roots [level]."* According to participants in this discussion, many civil society activists are able to gain political leverage because of the grassroots constituencies that they represent.

120.   The discussion did not generate statistics about how many women are in *senior* leadership positions within civil society, or whether they are active in organizations other than women's organizations (for example, NGOs that work on land rights or health issues).

121.   The evidence presented in the discussion would suggest that civil society is more open to women's leadership than many sectors. However, it must be noted that civil society work is often volunteer-based, or under-paid, or non-official. This means that women in this sector remain outside power structures. The lack of funding and under- or un-paid work in the civil society sector also perpetuates the notion that women's work is less valuable, as well as women's economically disadvantaged status.

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[6] Anderlini, S.N. and J. El-Bushra (2004). "Civil Society". In

122.   Of the four sectors (education, civil society, private sector, and media) discussed during this week, participants were most positive about women's participation in decision-making in civil society. According to many, women are in the majority in this sector and can influence politics from their positions in civil society. *As example, Justine Uvuza from Rwanda pointed out that in Rwanda individual women or women in associations have tried to work closely with women in politics whether individually or through forums and vise versa. Just like other post conflict countries, the aftermath of the 1994 genocide ushered in an era of civil society organizations dominated by women's associations and associations promoting women's rights. This was followed by a strong campaign of women's participation in all areas of life but more so the political field. Women at all levels have worked together to highlight women's needs for change, and development. For example, to augment the number of women in decision-making; (legislature and local government especially), women in associations through an umbrella of women NGOs (Pro-Femmes), the National women Council, the Forum for Rwanda Women Parliamentarians, and Women in the Executive represented by the Ministry of Gender, formed an alliance to mobilize, train and campaign for an increase in the number of women at all levels of decision-making. Though Rwandan women are blessed with a political will, they realized that there is need by women themselves to articulate, highlight, and lobby for their needs and rights. Most of the gender responsive laws in Rwanda have been introduced by women in political forums and developed in close collaboration with women in civil society.*

(iv) Media

123.   Most media companies throughout the world are owned and managed by men. Men control access to information, editorial boards, decisions about what "makes" news, and journalism assignments, including decisions about how resources will be spent and what stories will be investigated.

124.   Research has shown that the images of women in the media –even women leaders– are often stereotypical and undermine their job performance. At a conference in South Africa in November 2007, for instance, African women politicians encouraged journalists not to portray women as "predominantly mothers, grandmothers, and wives," ignoring their professional lives.[7]

conducted by the Media Institut

participants to reflect on how women are performing, the networks that support them, and ways to evaluate the effectiveness of networks and alliances.

133.   This discussion allowed participants to further develop ideas that had been emerging over the course of the discussion. As the discussion evolved, three types of links or alliances emerged clearly: (i) links among elected women, (ii) links between women in government and women in civil society, and (iii) links between elected officials and voters. A discussion of each of these follows.

(i) Links among elected women

134.   One effective strategy for women in parliaments is the development of legislative caucuses on women's and gender equality issues. Elected

disempowerment, and the barriers– women are inhibited by their daily struggles from creating effective links and participating actively in political life. Jeanine Gabrielle Ngungu from the Democratic Republic of the Congo explained, *"In my country, experience shows that many women are trying to help communities with solutions to their challenges, but they need to take care of themselves and their survival. They need to get organized and become more competitive; they need a true power and community support for their approaches. But who is going to do this? Raped and victimized women are marginalized and it is difficult for them to address the vital questions of their communities ... It is important to underscore the fact that power is masculine ... Women have fewer chances to participate due to their small numbers in the political arena. The few women in decision-making positions must respond politically, and the women's social movement is almost non-existent (not powerful)."*

(iii) Links between elected officials and voters

140. This discussion allowed participants to return to an issue they had raised in the second week of discussion. Many participants had commented that women voters were not particularly engaged, that the electorate did not recognize its own power, or that not enough civic education programmes were targeted at voters. One way that women in government, particularly elected women, can combat this problem is to develop formal mechanisms for providing feedback to voters. Meetings with constituents and sensitization campaigns on legislative priorities or explanations of new government policies can engage and empower voters. Joseph Kerline from the Democratic Republic of the Congo explains the responsibility of elite women: *"Intellectuals, with a certain economic, political and cultural power, have advantages linked to their power of expression in mass media and to their capacity to be close to certain leaders of the country. By considering that they are often the persons consulted by the international organizations or even by the government, they are in a good position to raise awareness among the Congolese on the reality of the situation. These women must actively listen to the needs of those who do not have access to participation, to bring them appropriate and essential help."*

141. The burden does not however rest solely with the women in government. Voters must organize, define their priorities, and find ways to hold elected officials accountable. As Miriam Rahedi from Kenya explained, *"The irony in Kenya is that women comprise the majority of voters. What they need, therefore, is voter education..."* Some countries have organizations of women voters, or NGOs that monitor elected officials and publicize their records –strengths and weaknesses– on women's issues. Participants did not provide specific examples of this type of organizations in Africa, but did call –repeatedly– for training that would empower voters and help the electorate to understand their potential power. For example, Djingarey Maiga explained, *"The language of political and electoral systems is often ... difficult to understand, especially for people with little formal education."* She therefore called for efforts to *"build the capacity of girls and women [through] awareness, training, [and] information in political literacy. This should be long-term and continuous, and not focused around election times."* Civeicipctdidn,describ0005 0 Tdor trahas.125

161.

disproportionate effect on women, significantly limiting their freedom of movement, and their ability to engage in the political sector. *"There are several links/alliances between the women in politics … [But] land insecurity is growing in Benin. Alliances / links and their value will be effective only when the instability of the land does not impede development any more. In Benin land insecurity undermines development and the citizens sag under the weight of despair … Women have to get organized better, they must have equal power and continue their struggle and encourage each other."*

143.   One effective mechanism that can aid women leaders in the development of links and improving their communication is information technologies, particularly the Internet. Women in Africa still face significant challenges in terms of reliable access and connectivity. Marcel J. Kamba, a participant from the Democratic Republic of the Congo explained, *"Now, with the presence of information technology, especially the Internet, there is assistance in lifting people out of ignorance. Because it is easy to send a message to many people, it gives the same power to find solutions to many people, even to find financing. Women have many connections, but they are only connections, and this isn't enough, these needs to be accompanied by financing [for their activities]. Then women need to speak, the institutions based in the Democratic Republic of the Congo need publicity …This will help Congolese women recover from the challenges they face today."*

144.   For the most part, participants did not attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of the political alliances that they identified. They did, however, feel that alliances and links such as those described in this discussion can help to overcome barriers that women face, such as under-representation, lack of access to male social networks, and lack of access to the media.

VII. Theme six: Wrap-up, emerging issues, and recommendations

145.   The final week of the discussion was reserved for summarizing the discussion, highlighting emerging issues and additional concerns. The moderator also asked participants to submit policy recommendations based on the six weeks of discussion. Recommendations were directed at a range of stakeholders –governments, women parl

measure to increase popular participation in government … Women can participate in decision-making processes by being elected or by creating associations in the framework of civil society. In these ways, women gain the information that allows them to evaluate policies in their countries and propose solutions. In African countries and particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the engagement of women in the political parties and in the civil society is weak. This was the basis of the performance of women in the elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2006. Women faced huge challenges in getting information that would allow them to participate in the decision-making processes and the political activity of their country."

148.   There were a variety of opinions offered over the course of the discussion about why women's participation is important –for women, and for democratic processes. Participants pointed out that women have the fundamental right to participate in the systems that govern them; women are 50 per cent or more of the population; excluding women is undemocratic; women are more likely to represent women's concerns; women's leadership styles are more collaborative

evidence which shows that women legislators are more likely to pass legislation protecting children and families, and more likely to invest in health care and education.

(ii) Other emerging issues

152.   Several emerging issues were identified in the final week: the need to more closely examine the impact of agriculture and food insecurity on women's political participation in Africa; the responsibilities of international organizations and funders to provide positive role models; the need to form alliances with male colleagues in order to promote gender-sensitive policies; and the need to address gender-based violence, specifically around election campaigns. Each of these will require more research and investigation.

153.   With the majority of women on the African continent engaged in agricultural production, land rights and land tenure are critical areas for women and are linked to women's prospects for political leadership. The majority of women in Africa cannot afford to engage in political activity, because they cannot afford to leave the land, if they hope to feed their children and provide for their families. As Daguia Casimilia from Benin stated, *"There are a lot of women in the rural areas that tend the crops. Once the problem of land is resolved, women will show what they are capable of."* More analysis needs to be done to understand the links between women's agricultural production, lack of access to education and economic opportunities and resources, and (relative) lack of political participation.

154.   Participants also raised the role of international organizations and funders, including the United Nations and non-governmental organizations. Several participants felt these actors do not put enough resources into promoting women's participation in decision-making with their own organization. For example, while the international community calls on African countries to increase the number of women in government, the United Nations itself has very few women in highly visible leadership positions. The United Nations fails to serve as a model of women's inclusion, fails to represent the aspirations of its Member States with regard to women's equality, and undermines calls for women's participation in developing countries. Another participant also scrutinized the behavior of donors and international NGOs. Justine Uvuza from Rwanda said, *"The bilateral agencies and NGOs must demonstrate gender [equality] strategies before they are funded or permitted to work in a certain country. Sometimes you find that NGOs which claim to promote gender equality are not gender-responsive in their own institutions, plans and activities."*

155.   Another emerging issue that discussion participants raised was the issue of working with men to promote women's empowerment. There was a consensus among participants that men needed to be engaged as advocates and allies. Marie-Claire Faray of the Democratic Republic of the Congo noted, *"Changing men's mentality towards women seems to be the key."* Marcel Kamba, also from the Democratic Republic of the Congo stated, *"Another thing to do, is to sensitize men, and persuade them to accept [gender-sensitive] laws, as partners in efforts to improve the condition of all, and not to create competition between men and women."*

156.   Gender-based violence, particularly violence during election campaigns, came across in the debate as a serious obstacle for women's participation. It was raised

157.   Marie Rarieya of Kenya provided a specific example of campaign violence: *"Although violence is not limited to women candidates, the majority of women seeking civic and parliamentary electoral positions decry that violence is one of the major obstacles that hinders their participation in civic and parliamentary offices. A recent newspaper article gives some interesting perspectives on this subject. 'When a woman declares an interest in political leadership,' says Professor Jacqueline Adhiambo Oduol, a candidate for the Alego-Usonga parliamentary seat in Western Kenya, 'she must often endure violence and name-calling, often in the presence of her husband, son or brother, intended to embarrass these relatives.' See Women's ENews Correspondent, August 3, 2007. (http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm?aid=3265). Violence against women, especially during political rallies is a reflection of uneven rights and unequal power relations in our society."*

158.   Other participants alluded to the fact that even women in leadership positions can be victims of violence in their homes. A better understanding of the pervasive nature of gender-based violence, and its relationship to women's leadership is necessary. The 50th session of the Commission on the Status of Women highlighted this issues in its agreed conclusions on "equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels" in 2006: "The Commission underlined the importance of the empowerment of women and their effective participation in decision-making and policymaking processes as critical tools to prevent and eliminate gender-based violence, and recognized that eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls enabled them to participate equally in decision-making." (paragraph 12)

(iii) Recommendations

159.   The following policy recommendations emerged from participants' contributions to the six week discussion. Only those recommendations that were suggested by more than one individual for increasing the participation of women in decision-making are included here, in an attempt to illustrate the consensus that emerged from the discussion. Individual strategies proposed by single participants were included within the analysis of each theme.

160.   The broad recommendations must be considered within individual country contexts. Recommendations should be adapted accordingly. As Marie-Claire Faray from the Democratic Republic of the Congo remarked at the end of the online discussion, *"Although … a general conclusion is expected to be made, I nevertheless believe that it is very important to address this non-participation of women in the context of each African state's cultural, social, economic and political situation."*

161.   African governments should do more to actively promote women's political participation. Existing policy commitments –such as the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Security Council Resolution 1325, and the African Union's Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa– must be implemented. Governments should implement: gender responsive budgets and develop mechanisms to hold all sectors accountable for addressing gender equality issues; establish independent observers (or an office of the "ombudsperson") to monitor all departments to ensure that gender mainstreaming is implemented; establish quotas of at least 30 per cent in all decision-making positions; ensure that policies designed to promote women's participation include accountability measures; and make investments in girls' education beyond primary school.
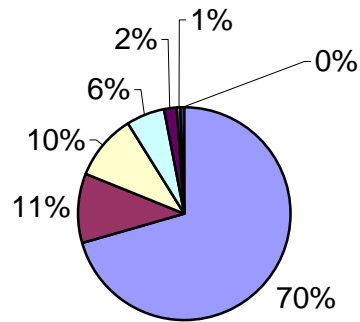
162.

Annex 1: Statistics on participation

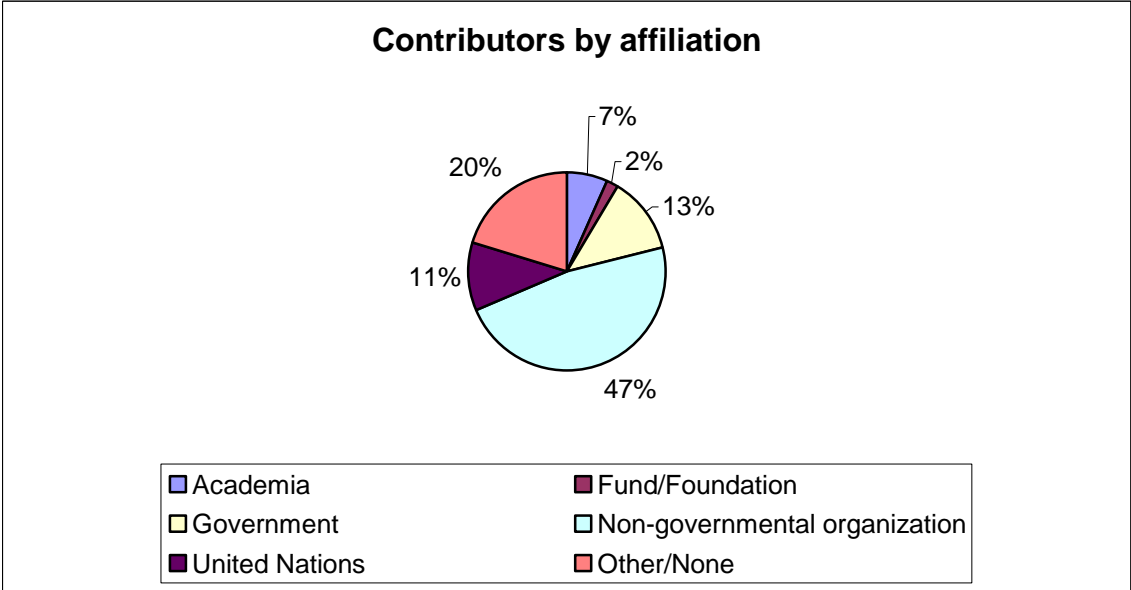## A: Registrants
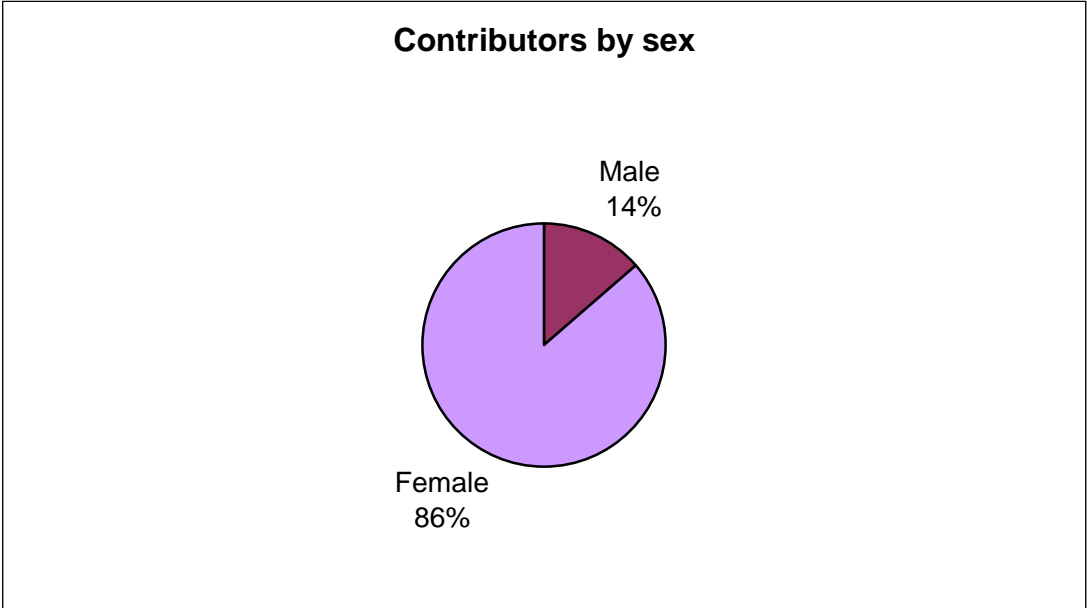
Total number of registrations: 771

Total number of participants registered: Distribution by sex

Male
17%

Female
83%
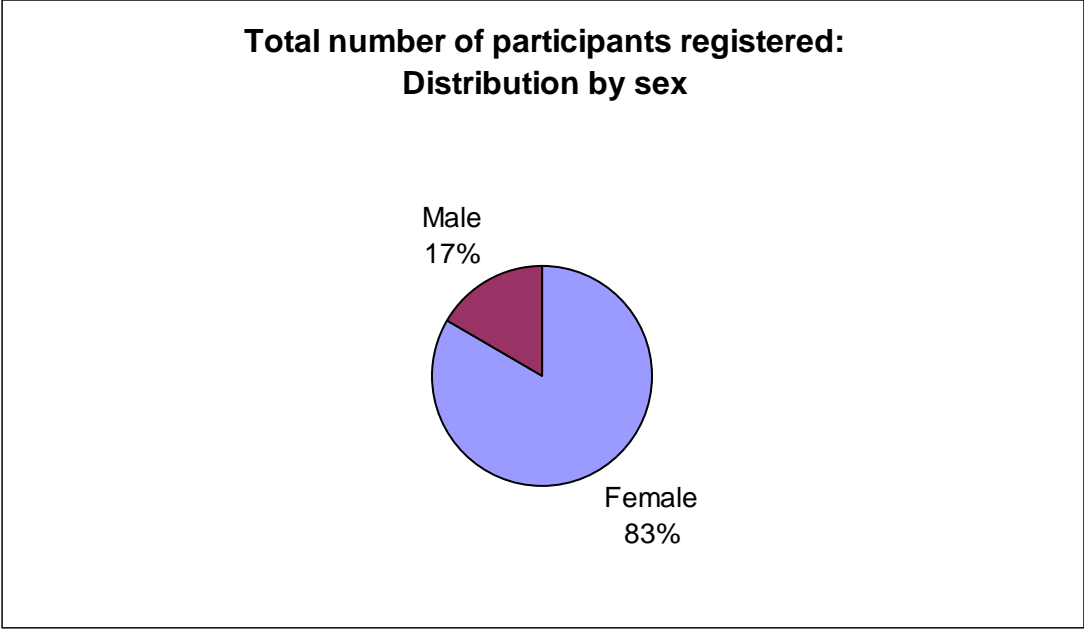
Total number of participants registered: By geographical distribution

2% ⌐ 1%

6% ⌐

10% ⌐

0%

11%

70%

| Africa | Europe |
| N. America | |

B. Contributors (i.e. registrants who posted at least one message)

Total number of contributors: 118
Total number of postings: 186

Contributors by sex

Male
14%

Female
86%

Contributors by affiliation

7%

2%

13%

20%

11%

47%

☐ Academia   ■ Fund/Foundation
☐ Government   ☐ Non-governmental organization
■ United Nations   ☐ Other/None

"Implementation off Quotas: Experiences of the SADC Parliamentary Forum"
http://www.quotaproject.org/CS/CS_SADC_Nhundu_27_7_2004.pdf

The Implementation of Quotas: African Experiences (International IDEA, 2004)

Genderlinks/South Africa
www.genderlinks.org.za

Femlink Pacific
http://www.femlinkpacific.org.fj/

"Money, Media, and Tradition Complicate Women's Political Aspirations," Inter Press Service News Agency
http://www.ipsnews.net/

Private Sector

ILO (2004). *Breaking through the glass ceiling: women in management*:
www.ilo.org/dyn/gender/docs/RES/292/f267981337

International Finance Corporation, the private sector arm of the World Bank, is committed to creating opportunities for women in business
www.ifc.org/gem

Civil society

"Civil Society" in *Inclusive Security, Sustainable Peace: A Toolkit for Advocacy and Action* (Inclusive Security and International Alert, 2004)
http://www.huntalternatives.org/download/26_civil_society.pdf

Other resources

Mentoring: International Federation of Business and Professional Women
http://www.bpw-international.org/services/bpw-services-mentoring.htm