

NEPAD Reluctance to Address Gender Issues¹

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1 Introduction

This paper assesses whether NEPAD (*The New Partnership for African Development*) can provide the basis for action on issues of gender inequality, and therefore whether the newly formed African Union provides a new opportunity and mechanism for progress towards equal rights for women in Africa.

The assessment of NEPAD's intention to address gender issues is analysed by looking at NEPAD as a planning sequence, from expression of principles and goals, through to the identification of the specific actions proposed to achieve these goals. The interest is to examine the attention to gender through the sequence of planning steps, looking specifically at the consistency of the logic in the treatment of gender issues as the planning sequence unfolds.

From this analysis it is found that NEPAD begins with some fairly strong statements of principle on the need for gender equality. But this initial commitment fades away as the planning sequence proceeds, leading to no adequate identification of specific gender issues to be addressed, and no strategies and or proposed actions to address gender issues. This is despite the many very serious gender issues that are generally known to be important in the NEPAD priority areas of democracy, good governance and human rights.

This lack of intention to act on women's rights is seen in the context of the African Union, which is seen as a collection of patriarchal states with a record in this area of high level commitments and low level action. For action on gender issues, the NEPAD document is not seen as a new turning point, but rather as a continuation of the previous miserable record.

Given this evidence of lack of political will within the African Union for action on women's rights, the paper concludes with some strategic considerations on how feminists and other human rights activists can better push the African Union in the direction of their own formally declared principles and commitments, or otherwise embark on their own independent strategies.

2 Gender Issues Which NEPAD Needs to Address

Before we begin our analysis of how NEPAD treats gender issues, we should first consider the necessary importance of these issues to the overall programme. This importance arises first and foremost in NEPAD's own declared central interest in issues of good governance, democracy and human rights, which are seen as the *preconditions* for development. Gender issues are also important, although perhaps secondarily, in the

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area of economic development. For the sake of brevity, we shall here confine ourselves mainly to the first area, of gender issues in democracy, good governance and human rights.

For good governance, it is axiomatic that all citizens should have equal rights in law and before the law. All publicly available opportunities and resources must be equally available to all, without discrimination. As far as women's rights are concerned, this means that there must be no discrimination against women. Specifically, this means women should not be subjected to different treatment on the basis of sex. And yet, contrary to such principles of democracy and good governance, women throughout the continent of Africa live in extremely patriarchal societies, where men control the decision making process in the government and in the home. Male domination of the decision making process serves to ensure that women get most of the work, and men collect most of the rewards arising from this work.

The huge gender gaps in literacy, education, wealth and access to power are the result of discriminatory practices. These practices do not exist only at the social and traditional level. To different degrees, in all African countries, these discriminatory practices are entrenched in law, in the administration of the law, and in the general regulations governing government and corporate bureaucratic practice. It is governments who are the principle *perpetrators* of discrimination against women, and the *enforcers* of their continued oppression.

In my own country of Zambia, an article in the Constitution purports to protect women from discrimination in any law or public provision², and yet one of the qualifying clauses in this same article *excludes* women from this protection in the areas of personal law, marriage law and customary law. These, of course, are precisely the areas of law where women are most discriminated against, and the areas which, by extension, legitimise discrimination in other areas. In other words the article which purports to protect women from discrimination in effect does the opposite, and legalises it.

This example illustrates a pattern which is common all over Africa, where statutory law apparently gives equality of status, but where customary law (or the local version of Sharia law) maintains and enforces women's subordination. Typically the overall pattern is that women are treated as legal minors, cannot inherit property, and cannot own land. Rather than own property, they are *part of the property which is owned* by men, often in polygamous marriage. Under some interpretations of Sharia law, as with the recent sentencing to death of a woman in Northern Nigeria, the legal system may enforce ownership and control by a dead husband.

This brief overview of the situation of women's oppression in Africa is presented here to remind the reader of the enormous gender issues which the African Union has to face up to if it is to claim any serious interest in democracy and human rights. Since the African Union's activities will be mostly concerned with the co-ordination and harmonisation of national policies, it is the developmental programme of the Union – NEPAD – which provides the vehicle for political and socio-economic development, and therefore for action on women's rights.

² See Article 23 of the 1991 *Constitution of the Republic of Zambia*, where Clause 4 effectively removes most of the protection against gender discrimination which was apparently provided in Clauses 1 and 2.

3 A Framework for Analysing Internal Planning Coherence

Although NEPAD describes itself as a ‘programme’, it is better understood as a large scale regional strategic development plan. In this section we identify the essential elements of a development strategy, so that in the next section we can use these elements to assess the internal coherence of NEPAD in its treatment of the gender element within the plan.

Of course it is often the case that development plans do not measure up very well to the sequence of planning logic which is suggested below. If so, this is because the planning was not adequate. To the extent that a plan reveals internal contradictions or lack of logical connections, the justification for the development interventions are suspect.

A strategic development plan should typically present itself as a rational argument, pursued by logical connections along the following sequence:

Elements of a Strategic Development Plan

Situation Analysis

Policy Imperatives

Problem Identification

Formulation of Goals

Identification of Appropriate Intervention Strategies

Implementation Strategies and Objectives

Management System

Situation Analysis refers to the initial review of the situation in the area that is of interest to the plan, particularly to mention the various problem situations which might need to be addressed by the plan. Here, with NEPAD, we find mention of quite different types of problems: firstly to do with globalisation, and Africa’s need to get a fair share of the benefits from the process; secondly partnership with the West, and the need to escape from the prevailing pattern of Western domination of a ‘rider and horse’ type of partnership; thirdly, the catalogue of developmental problems of African poverty and underdevelopment.

Policy Imperatives refer to those aspects of the policy environment which are relevant when deciding what to do about the given Situation. In terms of formal planning logic, no Situation can be said to present a Problem unless there are Policy Principles that dictate that aspects of the situation are unacceptable, and therefore present a Problem on which action must be taken to eliminate or alleviate the Problem. However, the relevant policy environment is commonly omitted from plans, presumably on the assumption that everybody knows what the policy principles are, or otherwise because some aspects or the situation are ‘obviously’ unacceptable, and are ‘obviously’ adopted as a problem. In the case of gender, the reader would like to know what principles of gender equality guide NEPAD.

Problem Identification. As already mentioned, in planning logic a problem only formally comes to light when Policy Principles are set against the Situation Analysis. Despite this formal logic, many problems are identified as ‘obvious’, and may indeed be so. But the ‘obvious’ aspects of problem identification tend to be notably missing in the area of gender. Whereas many ordinary problems are ‘obvious’ without recourse to looking at the

policy, gender issues tend to get overlooked, along with the gender policy itself. Gender issues may be overlooked as being 'political' in plans that take a technical or purely economic perspective. They may be overlooked where the vocabulary is gender neutral, in terms of 'people', 'farmers', 'target group', 'beneficiaries', and so on, which provide an easy formula for gender blind treatment of development issues. Most of all, gender issues are likely to be overlooked by male planners who are definitely not interested in recognizing or addressing issues of gender inequality. With gender issues, it may be necessary to wave the gender policy in planners' faces before the existence of gender issues can be admitted. Despite the common lack of identification of gender issues, it is usually very easy to give gender issues a specific and precise identification in terms of the size of gender gaps, and the existence of discriminatory practices. In the case of NEPAD, the reader would like to know which gender issues, such as identified gender gaps or forms of gender discrimination, are of particular interest to NEPAD.

Formulation of Goals should follow naturally from problem identification, where a goal may be summarized as an expressed intention to address a problem, perhaps with a statement of intended quantified outcomes, to be achieved in a specified time. However, it is not uncommon for the transition from Problem to Goal to show a complete disappearance of a gender issue. Or it may be that a broad principle to address gender issues does not lead into any goal to actually address a gender issue. For example, since NEPAD claims to be interested in both democracy and gender inequality, the reader might expect to find a definite goal to close (the presently huge) gender gaps in parliamentary membership, and a statement of the time period for this target to be achieved.

Identification of Appropriate Intervention Strategies. The logic in moving from Goal to Intervention Strategy is that the chosen intervention, in order to be effective, must tackle one or more of the underlying causes of the given problem. But with poor planning, the intervention is merely considered to be a 'good thing to do', without any established causal connection with the original problem. Very often intervention strategies are not made clear or explicit within a strategic plan, but remain implicit within the statement of goals. Where a plan's gender orientation proceeds as far as gender oriented strategies, it is often found that there is no clear logical, experiential or empirical connection between the gender issues and the proposed intervention to address it. Very often the systemic or structural aspects of gender discrimination are forgotten, and interventions are aimed at increasing women's confidence, skills, literacy, and so on, i.e. limited to increasing women's access to resources.

Implementation Strategies are the methods that are chosen to actually implement the intervention strategy. They are therefore the lower level strategies. For example, the goal of increasing women's representation in parliament may be achieved by the broad intervention strategy of affirmative action. This may be achieved by various implementation strategies, such as reserved seats for women, or mandatory rules for political parties on proportion of females amongst candidates, or providing special material support for female candidates. A Strategic Plan should normally end, at least in its substantive content, at the level of Implementation Strategies. The remainder of planning, from Implementation Strategies onwards, is concerned with the lower levels of action planning, programme and project planning.

Objectives are the expression of the more specific and more detailed intention of implementation purpose, especially in terms of activities and intended outcomes. Very

often an implementation strategy is not properly identified or even justified, but may be deduced by its being implicit within a list of objectives.

The Management System sets out the system of organization and management for implementation and supervision. From a gender perspective, it is particularly important that there is a management system capable of understanding and implementing gender oriented objectives, and for monitoring progress on gender objectives. It is also important that women are represented in management, and that women amongst the target group, beneficiaries and affected community are involved in the planning and management of implementation projects. However, there is often a mistaken belief that representation of women in management can *substitute* for the gender objectives which are missing from a development plan. A programme manager may claim that, although there may be no gender objectives, the programme will nonetheless be implemented in a *gender sensitive way*. Such an argument, in terms of the above analytical framework, is self-evident nonsense. A management team can only enter the difficult project of addressing gender issues if there is a clear mandate in the programme plan to address particular gender issues, by means of specified intervention strategies. In the case of NEPAD, we should expect that the plan should *not only* state clear goals and objectives to address specific gender issues, but *also* that the NEPAD management system is gender balanced, and includes people who are trained in gender planning and implementation, and experienced in recognising the obstacles and difficulties arising from patriarchal opposition to policies of gender equality.

4 Analysing NEPAD: Gender Fade Away

Having now set out the desirable planning logic which NEPAD ought to follow, how well does NEPAD follow this logic in the area of gender issues? Let us look at the above seven headings again, now to look at main aspects of the adequacy of the treatment of gender issues within NEPAD. This present section will look at the first six headings (i.e. from Situation Analysis through to Objectives), and the following Section 5 will look at the adequacy of the proposed NEPAD Management System.

Situation Analysis. (This is to be found in the NEPAD sections on **Africa in Today's World, The Historical Impoverishment of a Continent**, and **Africa and the Global Revolution**.) Here there is no mention of a single gender issue. In terms of logical coherence, how can NEPAD be proposing to address gender issues when none were even mentioned in the situation analysis set out in the introductory sections?

Policy Imperatives. The main NEPAD document has a very weak and unsatisfactory policy statement concerned with '*promoting the role of women in development*', but this has now been bolstered with the supplementary NEPAD **Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance**. This is more in line with the similar text of the **Constitutive Act of the African Union**. This **Declaration** includes the principle that

... it is a binding obligation to ensure that women have every opportunity to contribute in terms of full equality to political and socio-economic development in all our countries. (Article 11).

This same **Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance** also reaffirms (at Articles 3 and 4) its allegiance to the **UN Convention on the**

Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the ***Beijing Declaration***, and the ***OAU African Charter on Human and People's Rights***. This latter document includes the following principles:

Every individual shall be entitled of the rights and freedoms recognised and guaranteed in the present Charter without distinction on any kind such as ...sex ... (Article 2)

Every individual shall be equal before the law. Every individual shall be entitled to equal protection of the law. (Article 3)

The state shall ensure the elimination of every discrimination against women and ensure the protection of the rights of the women and the child as stipulated in international declarations and conventions. (Article 18.3)

Problem Identification. Given the very serious situation of women's oppression and marginalisation summarised in Section 2 of this paper, then clearly the above principles should have comprehensive and serious implication for the recognition of priority gender issues which ought to be a primary focus for NEPAD action. Given NEPAD's own declared interest in good governance, democracy and human rights, one might be entitled to expect a priority interest in identifying and removing instances of legalised discrimination in law (both statutory and customary). However, NEPAD does not identify any specific gender issues that need to be addressed. After the Situation Analysis, which does not mention gender issues, NEPAD moves straight from Policy Principles to Goals. There is no identification of the focus of problems to be addressed, except insofar as these are implicit within the Situation Analysis or the Goals.

Goals (under the NEPAD heading of ***Sustainable Development in the 21st Century***). Despite the fine expression of gender principles, NEPAD's expression of gender goals is very vague and lacking. There is an overall 'long term objective' to '*promote the role of women in all activities*', which is vague to the point of meaninglessness. There is a 'goal' to '*make progress towards gender equality and empowering women by eliminating gender disparities in the enrolment in primary and secondary education by 2005*'.

This latter goal of 'gender equality and empowering women' is not merely a goal, but also includes the intervention strategy of more schooling for women. There is no explanation of how the intervention relates to the goal, let alone the relevance of this strategy in societies where women are up against barriers of legalized discrimination.

From the earlier expression of fine principles, the goals have faded away to almost nothing, with no observable logical connection. Completely missing from the goals is any intention to increase women's representation in parliament, government and top decision making positions. This is despite clear commitments both in the African Platform (para. 105f) and in the Beijing Platform (para.182) which endorses the UN Economic and Social Council guideline of 30% women in top decision making positions

Intervention Strategies (to be found in the NEPAD sections on ***Conditions for Sustainable Development and Sectoral Priorities***). Here there is absolutely no gender element suggested in any of the three 'initiatives' on *Peace and Security*, *Democracy and Political Governance* or *Economic and Corporate Governance*. But since NEPAD identified no gender issues or goals in these areas, perhaps it is not surprising that

NEPAD can now find no strategies – since there are no issues to address, and no goals to pursue!

Obviously the authors of NEPAD have not referred to the *Beijing Platform for Action*, which at para 190 and 191 lists no less than nineteen alternative strategies that can be used to increase the proportion of women in decision making positions in politics and economic governance. One of these suggested strategies asks governments to ‘*Take positive action to build a critical mass of women leaders, executives and managers in strategic decision making positions.*’ Another strategy is concerned with ‘*Taking measures, including ... in electoral systems, that encourage political parties to integrate women in elective and non-elective positions in the same proportion and at the same levels as men.*’

The only NEPAD Goal which is gender oriented (para 68) provided an intervention strategy for closing gender gaps in school enrolment. But when we look under the Education strategies (para 120-125) we find that this intervention strategy has gone missing – there are no objectives nor activities with which to implement the strategy.

Without going further with this analysis, it is clear that the NEPAD interest in gender issues has now entirely evaporated. What started out with fine statements of principles of gender equality has now faded away to nothing.

NEPAD is better understood as being in the category of empty lip-service to principles of gender equality. *In principle* NEPAD is much in favour of equal rights for women, but *in practice* it proposes almost nothing in the form of action to realise these principles. Absolutely nothing is proposed in the areas of democracy, good governance and human rights, which are not only crucial for women’s advancement, but which are supposed to be NEPAD’s priority area of interest! NEPAD’s introductory statements on gender equality therefore prove to be nothing more than window dressing, lip service and hot air. They are not followed by any identification of the gender issues in these areas, let alone the formulation of goals and objectives to address gender issues in these areas.

5 Male Dominated Management of NEPAD and the African Union

Since NEPAD is lacking in gender oriented objectives, there is obviously very limited relevance in any discussion on whether the management system has the necessary skills or organisation to pursue gender oriented objectives (see also the discussion of *Management System* in Section 4, above).

The discussion of gender oriented management would become relevant only if NEPAD could be radically revised to include gender oriented objectives related to the main goals focused on democracy and human rights. In this case, appropriate gender oriented management would become relevant.

Probably because NEPAD was formulated before the agreement on the Constitutive Act of the African Union, NEPAD says nothing definite about the management system for its implementation, and no management system or institutional structure is proposed. It is merely stated that ‘the heads of state promoting NEPAD will advise the AU on an appropriate mechanism for its implementation’ (para. 198). In the meantime, there is to be a ‘Heads of State Implementation Committee’ to identify strategic issues and review

progress (para. 200-201). Obviously this Implementation Committee, of five heads of state, would be a formula for male domination of management.

However, now that the African Union has been formed, we may presume that NEPAD would be managed by some distribution of responsibilities, as yet to be set out, within the organs of the Union. Therefore we now look at the main organs of the Union, which are as follows:

- 1 The Assembly, composed of Heads of States and Governments
- 2 The Executive Council, composed of Ministers of Foreign Affairs or other ministers or officials designated by their governments
- 3 Seven Specialised Technical Committees, reporting to the Executive Council, and composed of government ministers or senior officials
- 4 The Pan-African Parliament, whose functions and membership are as yet undetermined
- 5 The Commission, acting as the Secretariat of the Union

Obviously, by present definition of its membership, the Assembly, Executive Council and Specialised Technical Committees, will all will be extremely male dominated, reflecting the male domination of the national institutions from which these organs draw their membership.

Despite this structural male domination of the Union management, there has been a strange claim that there was agreement on 50% female participation at the AU Heads of State meeting in Durban in July 2002. A newsletter of the *Femmes Africa Solidarite* claims that:

It is thanks to the Senegalese delegation to the AU, headed by President Abdoulaye, that ... upon his intervention advocating for the African Women, the President did not face any opposition from his peers on the gender parity proposal recommending 50% participation of women in all AU organs.³

If this 'lack of opposition' is to be interpreted as consent (which would seem to be a big IF), then perhaps the agreement was for membership of the Commission and other purely administrative organs whose functions are yet to be determined, and whose members are yet to be appointed. If so, the usefulness of such gender parity in membership faces two obstacles. Firstly, gender parity does not in itself necessarily bring an understanding of feminist principles and policies. Secondly, an administrative body – by definition - does not make policy, but merely implements policy determined at the political level, which in this case seems well set to remain patriarchal and male dominated for the foreseeable future.

³ *Historical Move Towards Gender Equality in Africa*, undated *Press Release* from Femmes Africa Solidarite, Geneva, Switzerland.

The areas of policy for the Executive Council and its Technical Committees are divided along purely along traditional sectoral lines:

- Rural economy and agriculture;
- Monetary and financial affairs;
- Trade, customs and immigration;
- Industry, science, technology, energy, natural resources and environment;
- Transport, communication and tourism;
- Health, labour and social affairs;
- Education, culture and human resources.

In other words, there is no designation for the policy area of democracy, human rights and good governance, which is supposed to be a main area of interest of NEPAD. By the same token there is no place to put the management of implementation of policy on women's rights.

As with NEPAD itself, the Constitutive Act of the Union shows ambivalence and contradiction on the subject of gender equality. Whereas one of its 'principles' (in Article 4) is '*the promotion of gender equality*', another principle is '*non-interference by any member state in the internal affairs of another*'. And for patriarchal men, the question of 'how we treat our women' is definitely an internal matter, even at the domestic level, never mind the national level!

Given this principle of non-interference in internal affairs, it is difficult to see how the representative of any one state could bring up the question of discrimination against women in another state, or indeed bring up any human rights issue obtaining in another state. And perhaps we may presume that a state representative is not likely to raise an issue of a transgression against human rights in their own state!

Given the above considerations, we may conclude that if NEPAD were to include objectives to address gender issues, then the African Union would not be the right organisation to implement it. However, since NEPAD does not include any significant gender oriented objectives, and none in the area of democracy and human rights, it would seem that both NEPAD and the African Union are well matched patriarchal bedfellows.

6 Governmental Reluctance to Address Gender Issues

The pattern of gender fade-away exhibited by NEPAD is nothing new. In fact it is very typical and representative of what may commonly be found in development plans in Africa, of both governments and development agencies. There is a pervasive problem that development agencies and national governments exhibit a lack of political will in addressing gender policies. Instead there tends to be much vague lip-service, involving ill-defined phrases such as 'gender-sensitive' and 'gender-aware implementation' of development programmes, when in practice these programmes neither identify nor intend to address the important gender issues which affect all women in Africa. Instead their programmes employ 'watering down' strategies that serve to overlook, sideline or compartmentalize gender policy imperatives.

Underlying this failure to properly implement gender policies is a quiet but determined patriarchal opposition to policies of gender equality that is pervasive within development

agencies, and amongst the government bureaucracies of 'developing' countries. Only when we are able to recognize and analyse the obstructive strategies of patriarchal opposition, shall we be able to devise the alternative and counter strategies to deal with this sort of opposition.

7 The Patriarchal Paradigm

All of the countries of the African Union, to varying degrees, are patriarchal societies, with male dominated governments that adhere faithfully to patriarchal values of male supremacy.

Clearly the authors of NEPAD are severely gender blind. We may explain this blindness as being of a particular and well defined form, which we may term as paradigmatic patriarchal blindness. It is evident that the authors do not see, and do not want to see, any form of gender discrimination. Their whole interpretation of gender issues, such as it is, seems to have no societal or structural dimension. They do not seem to live in the same world of legalized, traditional and institutionalised gender discrimination that is actually the world inhabited by women in Africa. In all of NEPAD's preliminary description of the problem situations to be addressed by NEPAD, there is no mention of any gender issue. Even where the document presents a weakly gender oriented goal, we find that this objective is directed at a problem which has not been previously mentioned.

It is this patriarchal paradigm which can nicely explain the absence of any mention of gender issues in the discussion of democracy and human rights. Of course it could be that the authors deliberately removed the connection between gender and democracy, or deliberately avoided it. But more likely they simply could not see the connection. The clue to this interpretation may be found in the phrase '*promoting the role of women ... by reinforcing their capacity ...*' (NEPAD para 49, emphasis added). The vocabulary is very revealing of the mind set of the authors. 'Promoting the role of women' is a well worn phrase which insultingly suggests that women are not sufficiently 'playing their part' in the development process! Women need to be 'integrated in development'!

More revealing, however, is the phrase 'reinforcing their capacity'. Here is the main clue to the patriarchal paradigmatic mind-set. Women's lesser role and subordinate position arise from their lesser capacity! Therefore they need more education and training! It is no accident that the only significant gender oriented objective in all of NEPAD is concerned with gender equality in access to schooling. Not a word about the unequal gender division of labour, or that women are already doing most of the developmental work, or that women come up against barriers of gender discrimination which give the lion's share of the rewards to men, and the lion's share of unpaid work to women! How is more schooling going to alter that? Where schools teach female submission, it will make things worse!⁴

NEPAD is a statement written by male heads of governments who are, in varying degrees, staunchly patriarchal. In their home countries these governments tend to represent male interests, and defend the patriarchal status quo. Should we then be surprised if NEPAD has little recognition of gender issues, and even smaller intention to

⁴ A discussion of whether schools can contribute to the process of women's empowerment may be found in Longwe, 1997, *Education for Women's Empowerment or Schooling for Women's Subordination* in Carolyn Medel-Anonuevu (Ed), *Negotiating and Creating Spaces of Power*, UNESCO Institute for Education, Hamburg.

address them? More important, what are the strategies – if indeed they can be found - by which these representatives of patriarchy may be persuaded to adopt feminist policies?

This present assessment serves to draw attention to the large gap between the situation of institutionalised gender injustice in Africa, and governments' intention to do anything much about it. This lack of intention stands in stark contradiction to their own declared interest in democracy and human rights.

8 Conclusion: Towards Strategies of Action

The commitment to '*ensure the elimination of every discrimination against women*' (African Charter, Article 18.3) has been with us since it was adopted by OAU member states in 1981 – twenty-one years ago. This commitment has awesome implications, and implies a massive reform of statutory law, customary law and administrative practice in every African country. It also implies the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation, to outlaw all practices that discriminate against women. What has been our progress since then? What have African governments done to end the discriminatory laws enacted and administered by themselves?

And does the formation of the African Union indicate a sudden seriousness to implement this principle of gender equality? Unfortunately, the analysis of this paper indicates that NEPAD and the African Union both clearly exhibit a continuation of exactly the same pattern, of expressing fine sounding principles which do not lead to any subsequent action. Nor do they lead to proposals for action, or the prospect of action, or even an administrative framework which might enable action.

It is hoped that the analysis of this paper will serve to dispel any foolish illusion that African governments, as presently constituted, are likely to pursue policies concerned with equal rights for women – irrespective of how much they claim to commit themselves to the principles of democracy, good governance and human rights, especially for the purpose of collecting donor funding.

If strategies of action for women's rights are based on the benevolence and generosity of males, to voluntarily give away their present domination and privilege, then it is based on complete folly. Equal rights of oppressed peoples are never given; they always have to be taken.

Strategies of action have to be based on a proper and realistic assessment of the present situation, and the obstacles. It also has to be based on an assessment of the weakness in the position of those who hold power. This paper itself exposes one such weakness, in the ideological contradiction and hypocrisy of governments which claim to adhere to a particular set of democratic principles applicable to all, but actually do the opposite when their sectional interests are threatened.

Such understanding is the beginning of strategising. How does the women's movement get together and challenge patriarchal government on particular issues? How can patriarchal government be pushed to international embarrassment by exposure of ideological contradiction between word and deed on women's rights. Where are the more general issues, which lend themselves to a general African women's coalition for action? Which are the issues where women, despite their socialisation into patriarchal belief, can nonetheless readily see that they are being discriminated against and oppressed? Where

are the possibilities of North-South alliances within the sisterhood, for support from others who have already won some of these battles? Which are the development agencies, whether bilateral or NGO, which can be conscripted to the side of the battle for women's rights? Can progress on women's advancement be made a conditionality in granting development aid to patriarchal governments?

We need to discuss these strategic issues of patriarchal opposition, instead of basing our discussion on some starry eyed belief that men will voluntarily relinquish their privileges.

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