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Front cover: *Oxfam workshop, Beijing Conference*   *Photo:* Nancy Durrell McKenna

Contents

Editorial

Despite the advances towards recognition of women's political, economic, and social equality with men during the twentieth century, there is a continuing lack of women leaders to determine the political, economic, and social progress of humanity. Women are largely absent from senior positions in the national and international institutions that govern our lives.

In contrast, women have set up thousands of vibrant, visionary organisations of their own, which have had considerable success in influencing the policy of governments, international financial institutions, and development agencies over the past 30 years. However, while this success is to be saluted, women's continuing absence from the key political and economic institutions that shape women's and men's access to and control over resources is a scandal. Why are women leaders still marginalised from real power, and what will it take to change this?

Articles here attempt to answer these questions, and offer insights for development policy makers and practitioners, who aim to promote gender equality and support women would-be leaders, within wider society and their organisations. Moving beyond technical 'fixes', including training for leadership, they argue that the institutions that rule our societies themselves need to be transformed, in order to promote gender equality. Writers here make a clear distinction between women's and feminist leadership, but discuss the complex relationship that exists between these concepts. Some are personal testimonies, describing the authors' experience of the struggle to lead – whether as politicians, activists, or 'change agents' in development institutions.

Development, democracy, and women

The view of the male leaders of colonial and post-colonial governments was that the 'backward' position of women in Third World countries would be improved as a result of economic development, as this would finance 'modern' education, and encourage the formation of democratic, social, and political institutions.

However, contrary to the beliefs and hopes of many, a high level of national wealth and the presence of a democratic political system do not automatically lead to equal numbers of women and men in government. In 1996, Switzerland ranked 12th in the United Nations' Human Development Index (HDI) ranking, while Côte d'Ivoire ranked 154th. However, Switzerland and Côte d'Ivoire each had 7.1 per cent of positions in government at all levels filled by women (UNDP 1999, 240-1). Countries that have adopted commitments to promoting women in leadership

positions through policies of affirmative action include South Africa and Uganda, both of which have a far greater number of women in political leadership positions than many Western nations.

The Beijing Platform for Action, the output of the UN Fourth Conference on Women, sums up the issue as follows: 'Despite the widespread movement towards democratisation in most countries, women are largely under-represented at most levels of government ... and have made little progress in ... achieving the target endorsed by the Economic and Social Council of having 30 per cent of women in position at decision-making levels by 1995' (United Nations 1996, Section G paragraph 181). It seems that, despite the fact that women in North and South played a central role in the struggles of the twentieth century to achieve political, civil, and social rights, 'women's representation ... is not a necessary consequence of greater degrees of democracy in civil and political institutions' (Goetz 1998, 241). This is because citizenship and democracy are not gender-neutral concepts (Lister 1997).

If women are to become leaders, this depends on them attaining 'social as well as civil and political rights, and upon gaining institutional power' (Molyneux 1998, 241). Studies of gender and institutions over the past 15 years have highlighted that women's chances of attaining leadership are limited by gender biases, which are inherent in the institutions – whether parliaments or bureaucracies – that run the world. Their admission procedures, rules, and working culture reflect their roots in Western Europe, three centuries ago, when citizens were assumed to be male and white (Lister 1997). Because of the male bias of parliamentary and bureaucratic institutions, women will not automatically find their interests represented, or themselves in leadership positions, as a result of a transition to democracy. While voters often assume that women and men stand an equal chance of attaining a leadership position in democracies, would-be women leaders are in fact much less likely to be elected, since political parties and parliaments have cultures, systems, and procedures that are biased in men's favour. Those women who are elected are often those who play according to the rules of the game, rather than challenging them.

Ironically, as Sylvia Tamale points out in her article on African women's parliamentary leadership, some political structures indigenous to Africa offered women a greater degree of scope for political and economic leadership then they have under parliamentary democracy, and power was not so closely associated with men and maleness, but these structures were swept away in the colonial and post-colonial era.

Women's leadership and development

Policy makers in Northern governments, international development agencies, and international financial institutions, are gradually coming to the realisation that just and sustainable economic development depends on women being free to make decisions on a par with men at all levels of society. In particular, it is essential to have more women in political leadership if women's gender interests are to be advanced. If leadership is male-dominated, gender biases in distribution and control of resources will remain, and women will continue to be more vulnerable to economic poverty and social marginalisation.

Taking its lead from the international women's movement in setting an agenda for equality, peace, and prosperity, the Beijing Platform for Action stressed that women's full citizenship, and right to lead, need to be pursued as ends in themselves. This would ensure that democratic governments fulfil their role of representing the interests of all, and not just those of elites. It states, 'Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in

decision-making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society, and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning' (United Nations 1996, paragraph 181). Since Beijing, many development organisations have given attention to the issue of promoting women's leadership. With differing degrees of success, they have started to confront the issues of male bias in their culture, systems, and procedures, outlined in the previous section. Two articles here – from Peggy Antrobus, and David Kelleher and Aruna Rao – challenge leaders of development organisations to join in this work of transforming institutions, and offer their thoughts on how to do so.

From 'empowerment' to 'leadership'

A focus on women's leadership may seem to be a logical progression from the commitment to 'women's empowerment' made by many development organisations in the late 1980s. The impact of 'empowerment' initiatives on gender relations has been highly variable, and the topic of heated debates among researchers.

Many development interventions that aimed to promote the empowerment of women focused on women's leadership at household and community level. For example, countless development projects aim to promote women's 'participation in decision-making' at community level, while others focus on the 'economic empowerment' of women leaders of households. Attempts have been made to increase women's autonomy within male-headed households by promoting their involvement in income generation, and resources have been poured into projects and programmes which aimed to promote women's participation in community-level decision-making, and to alleviate the poverty of women household heads and their dependants.

However, development policy and practice informed by a commitment to 'empowering' women has not often focused on promoting women's leadership at the level of the state and national institutions. Thus, the current popularity of promoting women's leadership as a development goal has heralded a shift towards funding different kinds of activities. Strategies for promoting women's leadership focus either on building the capacity of women themselves, or on overcoming the structural barriers that they face.

Building women's capacity for leadership

A growing number of international and national development organisations have started to support training courses that aim to promote 'women's leadership', chiefly through stressing the importance of education, and of skills- and assertiveness-training. For some, this is merely another example of taking a political issue and neutralising it through providing a technocratic response. In her article, Sara Longwe focuses on women's leadership training in the context of Zambia, arguing that development organisations should support women's campaigning and advocacy activities, and challenge governments to put their commitment to gender equality into action. She sees leadership training as an apolitical strategy favoured by development agencies that have adopted the language of power and politics, while doing little to challenge unequal relationships between women and men, the South and the North, and political elites and grassroots communities. In contrast, Lesley Abdela provides a more optimistic view of leadership training, drawing on her own experience of working to promote gender parity in parliament in the UK and other countries, and discussing the role of leadership training courses for women in different countries. Abdela sees such training as a necessary part of promoting women's leadership in politics,

while she acknowledges the need for structural change to counter male hostility to women.

While education cannot be assumed to lead to women attaining leadership positions in parliament, good-quality education does play a key role in building women's capacity to become leaders in society. Education is needed that encourages independent, critical thought, fosters self-confidence, and provides young girls with a vision of what they might become. In her article in the role of secondary schools in promoting women's leadership, Jill Sperandio discusses Ugandan women's and girls' views of the roles of schooling, and exposure to female role models, in encouraging them to become leaders in later life.

Overcoming the structural barriers
A key structural barrier to women's leadership is lack of legal equality. Until every national legal system enforces women's rights on a par with men, women will continue to be second-class citizens. Violence and mental intimidation will continue to be the ultimate barrier to women's leadership at all levels of society, from household to state. Women need laws that assert their full citizenship and enforce their rights. Kwong-Leung Tang discusses the recent process of obtaining the Optional Protocol to the Women's Convention (often known as CEDAW, although this acronym actually refers to the Committee that enacts the Convention). The Optional Protocol provides women in ratifying countries with an international legal instrument to use if their own national legal system fails to enforce their rights. She points out the huge role of the international women's movement in obtaining the Optional Protocol, but highlights the fact that ongoing work is needed to ensure that governments ratify it, and that women have access to it through legal literacy and resources to enable them to use the law.

A strategy that aims to overcome structural barriers in male-biased institutions is affirmative action (also known as 'positive discrimination'), which has been adopted within political parties in some countries, and by some bureaucracies. Recruitment procedures are developed with the aim of redressing an imbalance of men and women at senior levels. In both Uganda and South Africa, governments-in-waiting have agreed a policy of affirmative action, in order to gain women's support at the polling booths (Goetz 1998). In her article, Sylvia Tamale discusses the experience of the significant number of Ugandan women who entered parliament as a result. She highlights the fact that continuing discrimination, as well as internalised ideas about male and female behaviour, hamper female MPs and prevent their full participation in governance.

Alliance-building: women's organisations and 'change agents'

In view of the huge difficulty that women have in entering leadership positions in governments and bureaucracies through the normal procedures, many women activists choose to further their concerns by lobbying and campaigning outside mainstream government and bureaucratic structures. As Peggy Antrobus shows in her article, the success of the international women's movement over the past two and a half decades is particularly impressive because of two things. First, women's organisations differ extremely widely in their aims and agendas. There is no single set of 'women's interests', 'because of differences between women by class, ethnicity, race, religion and so on' (Goetz 1998, 243). Collective action depends on agreeing to differ on some issues, in order to further a common goal. Second, this collective action has been undertaken in the face of the attempts of conservative forces,

including right-wing women's organis-
ations, to derail the process by undermining
the principle of gender equality. It should
be recalled that there is a very important
difference between women's action and
feminist action (in the sense of action that
seeks to transform unequal gender power
relations), which is not always brought
out strongly enough in debates and
documents: not all women are feminists,
and not all feminists are women.

In order to achieve real change for
women, however, engagement with
mainstream institutions is necessary. A key
strategy for the international women's
movement has been to build alliances with
feminist women – sometimes referred to as
'change agents' (Macdonald et al. 1997), who
are working inside the mainstream. In her
article, Peggy Antrobus considers the
scope for women inside bureaucracies to
further feminist agendas, and shares her
own experience of what she terms
'transformational feminist leadership'
which transforms the agenda of a
bureaucracy from within, and transforms
an international agenda to ensure it reflects
the concerns of feminists. Throughout the
United Nations conferences of the past
25 years, the international feminist
movement has worked with huge skill to
ensure that the outcomes of the conferences
have included a strong feminist element.

What is different about women's leadership?

It is obvious that half the leaders of
humanity should be female on grounds of
equity alone, because women make up half
the human race. Debates on how women's
leadership may or may not differ from
that of men should not distract us from
this point. Having said this, the world
needs leaders who will further the
agenda of peace, equality, and sustainable
development.

The link between personal identity and
leadership style is a complex one. There is
no guarantee that women leaders will
promote gender equality, and there is also
no guarantee that male leaders will not do
so. Bureaucratic and democratic principles
dictate that leaders should represent the
interests of others, even when these
interests are at odds with their own.
However, while some leaders can and do
represent agendas that they do not share
personally, this principle is often forgotten:
there is a very clear relationship between
personal identity and experience, and
commitment to furthering a cause.

In their article, Kavita Datta and Cathy
McIlwaine ask whether women household
heads adopt a different style of leadership
from their male counterparts. Their
conclusion is that it is mistaken to assume
that individual women household heads
will necessarily adopt different leadership
styles. Factors that influence an individual
woman's leadership style include her age,
ethnicity, and economic status, and the fact
that surrounding culture and social
structures remain biased in men's favour.
While some women do pursue more
egalitarian leadership styles, others emulate
those associated with men.

In her article on Bangladeshi women's
experience of leadership in the garment
industry, Petra Dannecker discusses the
case of a union set up by women garment
workers themselves – the Bangladesh
Independent Garment Workers Union –
and compares women's experiences within
this union with their feelings of alienation
from the formal trade union, dominated by
men. The organisation aims to improve
employment conditions and support
members in ways that they define
themselves. Through cultural programmes
and legal literacy training, among other
activities, it aims to generate a feeling of
solidarity.

Peggy Antrobus's article concentrates on
women leaders only, rather than focusing
on men's potential to advance the feminist
agenda. In the context of bureaucracies,
she points out that women who have not

previously advanced gender concerns may be influenced to do so. It is also possible for women leaders to switch allegiances at strategic moments. For example, within 'mainstream' political or bureaucratic institutions, it is very rare for women to have risen to leadership positions on a platform of women's gender interests, and advancement may depend on their loyalty to another cause. However, when there are many women in leadership positions, they may be able to advance the cause of women despite the risk that their actions may not please those in authority.

Considerable attention has also been given over the years to the issue of organisational structure. Is a hierarchical command structure inherently inappropriate to further women's interests? Some argue that a form of politics that is genuinely democratic and respectful of the right to self-determination should reject bureaucratic organisational structures in favour of flat, co-operative structures. However, it is extremely hard to envisage a substitute. Indeed, there is considerable evidence from women and men who work in flat organisational structures that formal forms of dominance and control are replaced by informal forms – resulting in a 'tyranny of powerlessness' (Molyneux 1998).

However, it is true that collaborative work between different organisations in the women's movement has led to networks and coalitions in which it is sometimes hard to discern leadership. In their article, Aruna Rao and David Kelleher discuss the different values and ways of working associated by many with feminist commitment, and identify key qualities in transformational leaders. If hierarchical organisational models and notions of top-down control are completely rejected, the notion of leaders as those who have power over others has to be questioned. Social transformation is about recognising the power within all of us to become leaders.

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'Point of order, Mr Speaker':

African women claiming their space in parliament [1]

Sylvia Tamale

At the close of the millennium, there is a wave of invigorating air sweeping across the African continent. The refreshing breeze can be felt in the form of women smashing the gendered 'glass ceiling' in a bid to overcome the cultural and structural barriers that impede their political careers. In this short article, I examine the relationship of African women[2] to parliament. In the first section, I look at women's involvement in politics in pre-colonial Africa, and then examine the barriers to women's political activity thrown up by colonialism. This history explains much about women's absence from contemporary African national assemblies. I then focus on one state – Uganda – looking closely at the policy of affirmative action there, and the reality of male bias, prejudice, and sexual harassment that women MPs confront when they manage to enter parliament.

African women are currently giving men a run for their money in the highest political offices of their land. They include Eileen Sirleaf-Johnson of Liberia, Rose Rugendo of Tanzania, Charity Ngilu of Kenya, Inonge Mbikusita-Lewanika of Zambia, and Margaret Dongo of Zimbabwe. Specioza Wandira-Kazibwe, from my own country, Uganda, is the first woman to ascend to the second highest political position in the land: a true rarity in Africa, and across the world. But African women remain grossly under-represented in the institutions that make decisions for their nations. By the close of the last millennium, in only 17 African countries did women account for ten per cent or more of parliamentarians.

Clearly, we have a problem here. African women were active participants in the struggle for political independence all over the continent. More recently, they have also played active roles in liberation movements, in countries including Uganda (Byanyima 1992). But in spite of these contributions, women in Africa still represent a very small minority of state national legislators. South Africa has the highest number of women representatives among national legislatures in Africa, and was the first African country to achieve the 1995 UN target of 30 per cent for the representation of women in parliament (United Nations 1996, para 182). Seychelles stands second at 27.3 per cent, followed by Mozambique, Namibia, Eritrea, and Uganda. At the other end of the spectrum are countries such as Djibouti and the Comoros, where the assemblies are exclusively composed of men. Have African women always been absent from the decision-making process in their communities?

This article is based on research I conducted between 1995 and 1998. The information on Ugandan women parliamentarians comes from notes I made from observations in the National Assembly, and interviews with legislators – 40 women, and 15 men.[3]