

Report On Consultative Workshop On Political Feminism In Context Of Agenda 2030

Held At Sarova Panafric Hotel,
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FES: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

FIDA: Federation of Women Lawyers

KEWOPA: Kenya Women Parliamentary Association

MCA: Member of County Assembly

SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals

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The workshop was opened by Mr. Henrik Maihack, the resident representative of FES Kenya. In attendance were different women's organizations from the civil society, and independent institutions that advocate for gender equality and political feminism. Other individuals that were also present included elected and nominated female representatives of different counties in Kenya.

Mr. Maihack began by introducing FES as an organization, and the work they have been doing to advance the Political Feminism Agenda on the African continent. This workshop was being held in the backdrop of an international workshop on Political Feminism in Africa, which had been organized by FES Mozambique in October 2016. As reiterated by Mr. Mailhack, it was important to engage the civil society to review where feminist political movements in Kenya stand, and discuss ways in which they can work together on local, national, regional, and global levels.

During the workshop, there was discourse on Goal five of SDGs, and its contribution of feminist thinking and action for the political and economic empowerment of women. Other questions that were extensively discussed were as follows: 1) *Women representation in elective positions – does it translate to gender justice?* and 2) *How can we use the SDGs to promote gender justice in Kenya?*

This report entails the dialogue held on the above issues, and the action plan adopted by participants.



Goal Five Of SDGS – The Contribution of Feminist Thinking and Action for the Political And Economic Empowerment of Women.

The Presentation was given by Prof Dr. Christa Randzio-Plath, President of Marie-Schlei Association, and a former member of the European Parliament. She started off the presentation with the origins of Goal five of SDGs – Gender Equality – and went on to explain the ways in which it would contribute to the political and economic empowerment of women. Dr. Randzio-Plath emphasized on the need to first address gender equality as a cross-cutting issue that it is. Bringing in her experience of working with women in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, she specified that women’s political empowerment goes hand in hand with economic empowerment.

She added that one of the ways in which the above can be achieved, is if feminist political movements continue to advocate for the establishment of structures that accelerate women’s fight for representation on both political and economic fronts. These included:

- i. Granting access women access to Research hubs such as universities.
- ii. Pushing for governments’ implementation of Gender Quotas.
- iii. Fighting for fair access to resources.

Dr. Randzio-Plath also noted the importance of recognizing intersectionality in political feminism. The recognition will allow us to conceptualize its interrelationships to other social divisions such as race and class.

The discussant Ms. Salina Salou, the Head of Policy and Advocacy at ACORD, also raised one of the biggest challenge faced by mothers in the work place.

i. **Maternity leave:**

By law, women in the work place are entitled to 90 calendar days of maternity leave. However, some employers do not respect this. Citing a recent example of a lady whose contract had been terminated during her maternity leave, Ms. Salou stated that it is important for

women to know their rights in the work place. She suggested that one of the solutions to this problem is teaching women in our communities about their rights, and also ensuring that they are knowledgeable on what legal steps they should take incase their rights are violated by employers.

Women Representation in Elective Positions – Does it Translate to Gender Justice?

Panelists:

Mrs. Mercy Mwangi – KEWOPA
 Ms. Schaeffer Okore – Siasa Place
 Mrs. Teresa Omondi – FIDA

Moderator: Marggie Peters, Program Coordinator, FES Kenya

Mrs. Teresa Omondi: FIDA

Mrs. Omondi argued that women representation in elective position can only translate to gender justice, if the two necessary conditions of right numbers and right support are met. In absence of the two conditions, gender justice cannot be achieved.

Mrs. Omondi focused on some of the challenges that prevent women from getting into elected positions:

i. Numbers

Mrs. Omondi asserted that numbers matter in the fight for gender equality, and in the implementation of change in government. Putting the discourse into the Kenyan context, she emphasized that during elections it is about the numbers – the candidate with the most votes wins a government seat. She stressed that with more women in elected positions, more women's and non-women's issues will be put on the table. She added that it is imperative that women are fairly represented as they make up a big percentage of the electorate.

ii. Political Party financing

One of the factors that deter women from running for elected positions is lack of funds. Compared to men, majority of women do not have that financial capacity to make huge investments in political parties. Therefore, when there are positions available to compete for, the ones who have made the most investment in the party –men –will automatically be nominated, leaving the women at the bottom of the ladder.

iii. Standards set for women in elected positions

Mrs. Omondi highlighted that the bar set for women in elected positions is way higher than that set for men. The female politician has to tick various boxes including quality leadership, and the burden of representing the entire female population. While the male politician has no standard to worry about. Mrs. Omondi added that merit in leadership should definitely matter, but should be applied to both genders –not just women. The very high standards set for female politicians discourages them from running for elected positions. Getting the numbers right is what is key, and it will be followed by the evaluation of their leadership skills.

Until the above factors are achieved, Mrs. Omondi believed that women in elected positions will not translate to gender justice.

Ms. Schaeffer Okore: Siasa Place

Ms. Okore argued that “women representation in elective positions does not translate to gender justice.” Ms. Okore's stressed that gender justice will be achieved once political feminism is crafted as an alternative ideology, and as an alternative structure that will change the ways in which the current male model of politics allows women to engage in it.

i. Feminism in African context

Explaining feminism in the African context, Ms Okore underlined that political feminism in frowned upon in our societies. “Africa celebrates femininity, but not feminism.” A pretty woman is notable, and so is a good cook, a good wife, and a good mother. However, once the female individual has an opinion, or has an idea to implement, she is immediately shut down. Still on the topic of political feminism, Ms. Okore particularized on why it is important. She noted that Political feminism allows us to question the current systems and ideas in place, such as Democracy. “If it is the rule of the people,

by the people, for the people; are women considered as part of the people?"

ii. Isolation of Organizations and Movements in Civil Society

Ms. Okore also highlighted that one of the reasons to why there is a lot more to be done by feminist political movements is because they work in isolation. She stressed that it is imperative for organizations and movements to work together as a unit, in order to strengthen their cause; otherwise the impact will be minimal.

iii. Capacity building

Ms. Okore reminded attendees the importance of capacity building. She added that it is important to equip women who are voters, candidates, and politicians with knowledge and skills that enable them to operate in the political spheres that are male dominated.

iv. Unlearning patriarchy

Lastly, Ms. Okore raised the significance of unlearning patriarchy. She emphasized that both men and women being conscious about the norms of a system that has oppressed women, will be essential in changing the ways in which the current prejudicial political structures operate.

Mrs. Mercy Mwangi: KEWOPA

Mrs. Mwangi argued that women representation in elected positions can translate gender justice if the following challenges at the decision making levels are eliminated.

i. Numerical disadvantages

Female legislators will continue to be disadvantaged by their low numbers. Few female MPs means that issues on their Agenda are less likely to be passed or brought to the negotiation table.

ii. Standards set for women

Like Mrs. Omondi had pointed out, Mrs. Mwangi also supported the challenge of double standards that women face in parliament. Female legislators are all expected to be outstanding leaders. Questions such as "what have female

legislators done?" indicate ridiculous standards set for women as male legislators are not asked the same question. Unless the bar us lowered gender injustice will continue to exist.

iii. Political party interests

Ms. Mwangi's last point underlined the clash that can take place between political party interests held by female MPs, and their will to advance the gender equality agenda. A female politician might be held back from calling out gender inequality within her party as this action would jeopardize her advancement in the party.

How can we use The SDGS to promote Gender Justice in Kenya?

Panelists

Ms. Catherine Nyambura: FEMNET
 Dr. Florence Nyokabi : National Gender and Equality Commission
 Ms. Emily Maranga: GROOTS

Moderator: Robert Muthami – Program coordinator, FES Kenya

Ms. Catherine Nyambura: FEMNET

Ms. Nyambura was positive on the impacts of SDGs, and how goal 5 can be used to achieve gender justice in Kenya. Even though the SDG goals are not politically binding, Ms. Nyambura believes that they have enabled a renewed political attention to political feminism on the African continent. According to Ms. Nyambura, the following issues can be addressed by the SDGs framework.

- i. Unpaid care work
- ii. Sexual reproductive health
- iii. Policy frameworks that include women
 - i.e Women making decisions on fiscal policies.

Dr. Florence Nyokabi: National Gender and Equality Commission

In reference to her commission, Dr. Nyokabi stated that one of the challenges that institutions like hers face is being funded by the government. Holding the government accountable to actions that are not inclusive, and taking them court, risks the possibility of their institution receiving the budget it has requested for.

Dr. Nyokabi reiterated that inclusive development is key in using the SDGs to promote Gender Justice in Kenya. She stated that “Development should not be something that is done to us (as women), but something we take part in.” For women, particularly those in elected positions such as MCAs, have to be able to efficiently take part in any developmental processes

Ms. Emily Maranga: GROOTS

In her opening remarks, Ms. Maranga stated that SDGs have to be localized by local institutions. This way, women at grass root levels will be able to own the process and achievements that come with attaining gender justice in Kenya. She added that County governments should set aside part of the budget that is aimed at women’s development in areas of resources, water and sanitation, and education.

5.0

Action Plan

Prior to the workshop's closure, the participants established action plans that they intended to think about and implement. They were as enumerated below:

- i. Continue to focus on the common denominator of feminist political movements – Politics, and how it allows women to engage.
- ii. Ensure capacity building.
 - Train elected and nominated female representatives on how to utilise their positions efficiently.
 - Ensure voters, candidates, and citizens understand their rights as enshrined in the Kenyan Constitution.
 - Public Participation Act.
- iii. Profile women, and celebrate their strides.
 - This will then allow the participants to push the media to escalate what they have already been working on.
- iv. Rethink inclusivity in Political Party structures.
- v. Be data conscious.
- vii. Localise SGDs
- viii. Assess the ways in which President Uhuru Kenyatta's BIG 4 embody gender equality and political feminism.

6.0

Conclusion

The meeting ended successfully at 4:00pm with a vote of thanks Mr. Henrik Maihack, the Resident Representative of FES Kenya.

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