



**PROSPECTS FOR AFRICA –
EUROPE'S POLICIES**

The VENRO Project on the
Africa-EU Partnership

Local Power and Women's Rights – Gender Perspectives on Decentralisation Processes

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Foreword

By Christa Randzio-Plath and Merle Bilinski

Fifteen years after the fourth World Women's Conference in Beijing, the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action was subjected to a review in March 2010. The five regional reports presented ahead of the review present sobering results: In spite of some progress, women are still clearly underrepresented in positions of power and decision-making. Just 18 percent of parliamentarians world-wide are women. At local level, too, significant inequalities are apparent despite the decision-making structures in at least some regions appearing to be more accessible for women than at national level.

Since promoting decentralisation processes is becoming an increasingly important aspect in the context of development co-operation, it is vital to disclose the opportunities and constraints that local governance and decentralisation bears for gender equality. Decentralisation is frequently considered to lead to more effectiveness, greater participation and better access for the population to governance service and therefore to strengthen democratic governance in developing countries. The Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) highlights local authorities as key actors in development. But what opportunities does the transfer of decision-making powers to the local level have regarding the political participation of women? And how can the emergence of new inequalities be avoided if power is transferred to the local level? Given low participation rates for women in political offices and a low level of government accountability vis-à-vis women, it is important to know what prospects and risks the transfer of decision-making structures to the local level bears for the realisation of gender equality.

In order to discuss experiences and strategies regarding decentralisation processes from a gender angle, the VENRO project “Prospects for Africa – Europe's Policies” held a workshop with representatives of European and African civil society in November 2009. Its aim was to discuss the strategies and political measures needed to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women not only at

national but also at local level. The discussion was based on experiential reports from Europe and Africa. Here, the focus was on identifying the contribution that the JAES can make to gender equality and the empowerment of women as well as the role that civil society and non-governmental organisations assume in strengthening women's rights.

This documentation demonstrates the different experiences made by participants of the workshop from Germany, Uganda and Cameroon and presents the results of the discussion. Experience from civil society and politics shows that there is still a long way to go before gender equality is achieved not only in writing but also in its practical implementation. This applies equally to Europe and to Africa. The jointly formulated demands of African and European Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) representatives show the concrete need for politicians to take action. They demonstrate how important it is to define the implementation of gender equality as a key priority in the context of the JAES. If the African Union (AU) wishes to reach its goal of a 50 percent rate of women's involvement in politics by 2020, action has to be taken now. The implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action so far shows that the European Union (EU) has a lot to catch up on in this respect, too.

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Gender and Decentralisation: An Introduction

By Christa Randzio-Plath

Without equal political, social and economic participation of women, it will not be possible to overcome poverty, underdevelopment and inequality in access to income, education, health and food. Governance therefore has to be more participative. Decentralisation of governance might be a chance to achieve a more participatory and inclusive mode of governance, because it may contribute to deepening democratisation.

Decentralisation is a form of governance that transfers political decision-making to the regional and local level. People expect decentralisation to foster more and broader political participation of citizens in local and regional development processes as well as providing better answers to their needs. In developing countries, decentralisation is also justified by the argument that on the grounds of allocative efficiency, enhanced responsiveness and effectiveness, it helps poverty reduction. In theory, citizens have more control over decisions taken at local level, and actions will reflect their needs and preferences better. Over the last few years, the debate on local governance has focused on how to:

- deepen democratic self-government and strengthen participatory forms of development;
- reform the state, modes of governance and methods of government so as to give citizens greater voice and influence in decision-making;
- enhance the accountability of government and the responsiveness of public policies to the needs of the population, and especially the poor;
- increase the effectiveness of public policies and service delivery (the principle of 'subsidiarity');
- enhance social capital by fostering social cohesion and trust within local communities;
- provide dispute-resolution mechanisms to manage conflict peacefully at local level.

In addition to these points, decentralisation may contribute to gender equality because it approaches women better: Women frequently belong to the marginalised groups of society. Actually, they are not only excluded from citizenship and rights, but their interests and concerns in public decisions and public services are not reflected in political decision-making. The lack of democracy in gender relations excludes them from participating in governance. This also hinders poverty reduction. Since participation and ac-

cess to decision-making is easier for women at local level, a gender-sensitive implementation of decentralisation processes could foster democratic governance structures. This applies to women both in urban and rural areas. Given that communication structures make organising in urban areas easier for women, it is necessary to focus on the challenges of decentralisation for rural women.

As already underlined in the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995, women in rural areas are more discriminated and marginalised than other women. In Sub-Saharan Africa, seven out of ten women work in the agricultural sector, mainly in subsistence-level agriculture. They lack economic security and endure very hard working and living conditions. They are the main producers of staple crops such as rice, maize, sweet potatoes, etc. and account for 60 to 80 percent of people's food intake. This corresponds to 90 percent of rural food intake. Despite this fact, women face enormous challenges:

- Women do not have equal participation in decision-making;
- Women do not have equal access to tangible assets including equipment and land;
- Women do not have access to credit and markets;
- Women do not have equal access to training;
- Women have more working hours than men not only because of the double burden but especially also due to the type of work they do.

Considering this situation, decentralisation could be a concept for an equal participation of women in society. In theory, this might be true because women are more knowledgeable than men regarding the needs of the population, especially the poor. But successful political participation also depends on the public environment. Traditions and cultures as well as religions very often hinder women's access to power. Local governance is closely linked with the empowerment of voiceless groups, such as the poor and women. Decentralisation may enable women to participate in decision-making, but unless gender equity is an explicit objective, existing gender imbalances may simply be replicated.

However, there is progress in their political participation world-wide. This is despite the fact that only 18.5 percent of the parliamentarians are women. Rwanda and the Nordic countries are the big exceptions, with more than 40 percent participation. Also, the offices of State President



and Prime Minister are still far from being in the hands of women: not even ten percent of the leading figures in the 192 member states of the UN family are women. And the EU has fewer female leaders than the AU countries.

Decentralisation may function and contribute to good governance if both women and men are participating in local decision-making. But there could be a problem: often, the local elite tries to get hold of local power. Because of traditions and perceptions of women's role in society, the population do not give women the rights they are entitled to. Here, there is still a long way to go.

One of our project partners told the Marie Schlei Association that in Kigoma, Tanzania, for example, nobody appreciated the work done daily by women. After special training and with access to credit, some of the women organised themselves, started projects alongside their daily work and earned money, sometimes even more than men. Gradually, husbands started encouraging their wives to be involved in the projects and do more. Sometimes, the husbands even started to help with the household. Now, in Kigoma, the first women are attempting to engage in local politics. To them, there is still no social justice when they see that men get the land title or better quality land, easy access to water and the support of public services. They are also more affected by the lack of public transport and security in order to tap more and more profitable markets. So prejudices in a society can undermine the efficient and effective contribution of women in rural areas to fighting poverty and underdevelopment. However, the economic success of women can contribute to role changes and their political participation. Thus women's concerns get on the agenda, and their political influence in decision-making grows.

Many women first engage in politics at local or municipal level. However, recent decentralisation trends have

not necessarily led to greater participation of women in local councils or as mayors of towns and villages. In fact, the findings of recent research by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) indicate that even where there are quotas, women are often treated as proxies for male family members or are simply ignored while the real decisions take place when women are not in the room. While there are shining exceptions – some women have been extremely influential at local level, such as women in Senegal or in France – there is more to do to improve the capacity of women to participate effectively in local decision-making and to empower them.

Female participation in politics can only be successful if :

- quota systems facilitate access to political posts;
- women networks promote women;
- women's interests are clearly addressed;
- women's interests are linked to the concrete needs of the people;
- women get financial funds, training and publicity;
- women empower themselves.

In recent years, developing countries have increased the democratic basis of sub-national governments, often complementing the restoration or deepening of democracy at national level. Local governance is believed to enhance both the legitimacy of government by strengthening participation and accountability in policy-making and the efficiency of public services by improving information, input and oversight. Therefore, decentralisation is in the interest of women.



Gender Perspectives on Decentralisation: The Ugandan Experience

By Miria R. K. Matembe

Decentralisation can be described as a move away from authoritarian central government rule to a lower administrative arrangement with the view of bringing the benefits of development and a welfare state closer to the people.

Decentralisation policy in Uganda

Decentralisation in Uganda dates back to 1962. In 1986, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government took power and enacted several laws empowering the local authorities to participate in the delivery of services to the masses within their respective jurisdictions. These legislations started with statute No. 9 of 1987, statute No. 15 of 1993 and Local Government Act No. 1 of 1997, which came into effect in March 1997. The general principles for the im-

plementation of the decentralisation policy are contained in the 1995 Constitution.

The structural set-up is such that the district council is the supreme political organ of the district. It is presided over by the district Chairperson, who is the political head of the district. The District Council is the legislative arm of local government, while the District Executive Committee and the local public service comprise the executive arm of the local government. The Civil Servants are headed by the Chief Administrative Officer (C.A.O).

District councils conduct their business through council committees; Production and Marketing Committee, Health and Environment Committee, Education Committee; General Purposes Committee, Finance Committee and Works and Transport Committee.

Gender perspectives on decentralisation

Local governments offer women an important point of access to politics and governance. Women may find it easier to become politically involved at local level because of family and domestic commitments, and through support from local NGOs and community groups which make it a more accessible starting point for action. Local governance is regarded as being appealing to participation for women because of its focus on basic community services.

The case for Uganda

In Uganda, since 1986, women have had the opportunity to participate in politics and governance through the policy of Affirmative Action and the principle of gender balance, both enshrined in the National Constitution of 1995. Indeed, these two principles have increased the percentages of women in politics to the tune of 32.8 percent in parliament, 30 percent in local government councils and between 20 to 30 percent in cabinet, judicial and constitutional bodies.

The composition of district councils according to the Local Government Act, 1997, includes women councillors directly forming one third of the council, one female youth representative, and one female representing persons with disabilities. It is a requirement of the Local Council Act that the executive committee of the council which is the governing body of the local government must have at least one woman as one of the five officials that constitute the committee. This gives women some representation on the governing body, which is responsible for policy initiation and preparation of the budget.

Ideally, therefore, women have the opportunity to influence policy and budgetary allocations and programmes of the council to make them gender-sensitive and responsive to women's needs and interests.

Is this happening?

It is unfortunate that the situation on the ground is different. There is clearly a missing link between women's participation and their influence. Women are in decision-making positions without having influence on the decisions of the local government councils. They are in power but without power, or rather they are serving power. Their participation has not had the desired impact on policy and legislation: to make them gender-responsive so as to enhance their equality and empowerment.

Why?

Decentralisation per se does not remove the barriers that have all along disempowered women in Uganda and denied them the ability to realise their potential and enjoy their rights. These barriers include:

- customary and cultural practices;
- ignorance and lack of education;
- discriminatory and inadequate laws;
- lack of economic independence;
- religious misinterpretation.

Culturally, women are not perceived to have a role to play in politics. They are expected to be home-makers and to stay in their homes. This being the case, women are frequently marginalised within their own political parties, and leaders often choose not to provide financial and moral support for women candidates.

The women in local councils are marginalised when it comes to debating and being listened to because they are considered to be women with not much to offer. Only one woman holds the position of chairperson of a district (2006–2011).

The societal attitude towards women undermines their confidence to come out and engage in politics. Likewise, the stereotyping that women are not meant to be in politics prevents women from electing fellow women to these positions of power.

Again, many women have been unable to participate due to their household responsibilities, including acting as the primary caregiver for their children, the elderly, and extended family members.

The widely-held view that politics is “dirty” and therefore not good for decent women is also a barrier. Because of this view, husbands and families are reluctant to have their women in the public eye, while at the same time, women fear mudslinging and intimidation and harassment characteristic of political campaigns.

Ignorance and lack of education is a very big constraint to women's empowerment within the local government structures. Women do not enjoy similar access to education or training as men. Lack of education and skills undermines women's confidence to offer themselves as candidates. Even those who dare and find themselves in governance positions cannot debate effectively because of the inability to read and understand the documents, such as policy

budget statements. They lack skills of public speaking, yet there are few among many more knowledgeable and educated men. They find themselves lonely and scared.

Lack of economic independence

Women have been constrained from entering local-level politics by lack of finances for campaigning. Generally, women in Uganda do not own property, and many of them are not in gainful employment, especially those at local level. Yet politics is a very expensive venture.

Discriminatory and inadequate laws

Despite the existence of an extremely gender sensitive national constitution, Uganda's laws continue to be discriminatory and inadequate as far as the promotion and protection of women's rights is concerned. The government has been reluctant to translate the constitutional spirit into appropriate laws and policies for promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. Women continue to struggle for the enactment of legislations on family laws, sexual offences, women's land rights, etc.

Corruption

All these other constraints have been compounded by corruption, which has become systematic and widespread. Corruption in Uganda takes away funds meant for service delivery and therefore denies the people the benefits of decentralisation through accessibility to social services. These services include health, provision of water, education, and infrastructure such as roads. When corruption eats into the funds that are meant to provide these services, the women cannot realise and enjoy their rights.

Recommendations to strengthen the political participation of women in Uganda

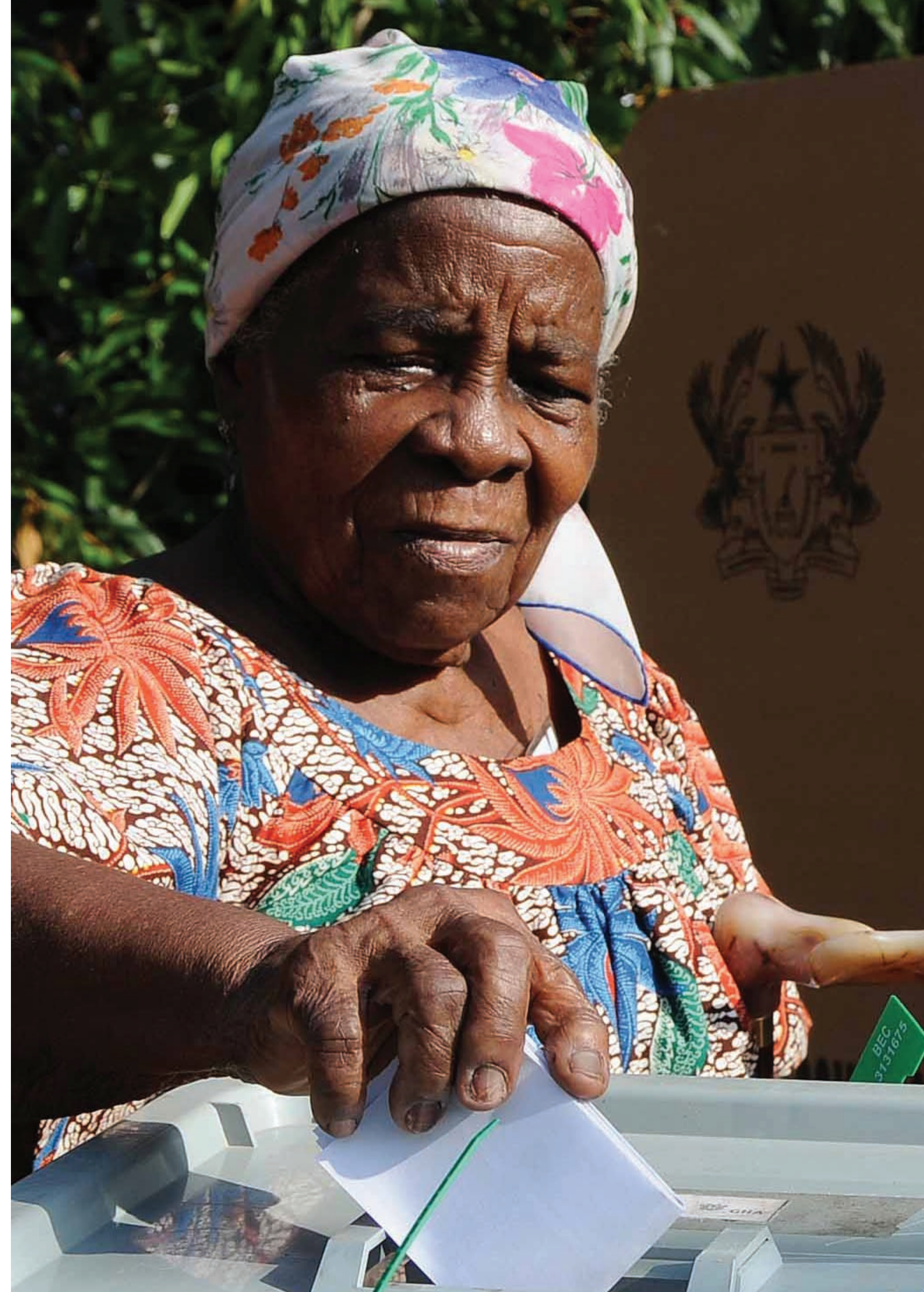
- National and local governments should expand quotas and reservations for women in all institutions of decentralised governance, including local bureaucracies, and implement mechanisms to ensure women's active and effective presence in leadership roles within them. The long-awaited Equal Opportunities Commission in Uganda should be established to come up with deliberate programmes to deal with gender issues.
- Political parties should deliberately promote gender-inclusive internal democracy through quotas or other mechanisms and promote women in key decision-making positions within political parties.

- Introduction of mechanisms to facilitate women's effective political participation, such as quorum rules requiring a minimum presence of women in decision-making sessions, and women-only forums that are clearly linked to mixed forums. This will boost women participation in the democratic process at the local level.
- Only one third of all women take the opportunity for political participation because of associated problems they face. Additional measures such as awareness-raising campaigns and training can make it easier for local women to take the opportunity to political participation offered by the decentralisation programme.
- Women's leadership must be fostered and valued in political and non-political spheres through formal and informal training. Women should be trained in the skills of understanding formal and informal functioning of politics, fundraising, use of the media, agenda setting, networking, alliance building, negotiating, lobbying, etc. This would make women's roles as voters, candidates, elected officials and political leaders more effective, from the grassroots level on up.

Conclusion

In order for decentralisation to contribute to gender equality and equity, central governments must promote and protect women's access to local governance, and ensure the availability of financial and other resources to meet women's practical and strategic needs. They must create structures of accountability that enable women to exercise their rights, particularly their rights to productive resources such as water, land, credit, and labour. Both central and local government must promote the education of girls and adult literacy for women. Local governments must also adopt specific practices and mechanisms to support and facilitate women's participation.

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Local Commitment in Germany – Ways of Access and Experiences of Female Politicians in Communities

By Manuela Möller

With a woman chancellor as head of government and several women in top positions in politics, governance and media, the presence of women in politics has become more conspicuous in Germany. But with these public and successful women, one can easily lose sight of how much still has to be done in political everyday life – especially when it comes to local affairs. Only a quarter of the local political mandates are owned by women. And there are still local parliaments where not a single woman is represented. When it comes to local leadership positions, even fewer women can be found; only four percent of the full-time mayors and less than ten percent of rural district administrators are women.

What needs to be done to increase the number of female politicians in local communities? To find answers, the EAF – European Academy for Women in Politics and Business¹ – in assignment with the Federal Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women and Youth, interviewed about 1,100 female local politicians (voluntary as well as fulltime and paid) from more than 500 communities with over 10,000 inhabitants. The study “Local Commitment – Ways of Access and Experiences of Female Politicians in Communities” is currently the most comprehensive survey regarding locally committed politicians in Germany.

Who are the female local politicians?

Voluntary local community politicians are women experienced in life and work. 89 percent of them are over 40 years old. Their education is higher than the average; every sec-

ond woman is an academic. The women interviewed have strong bonds in their communities. Most of them live in the same community, where they are politically committed, for 30 years. Usually, they keep their mandate for several election periods. Half of the interviewed women spend at least ten hours, and some of them more than 20 hours, a week on local community politics; the other half spend less than ten hours a week on local politics. Currently, reconciling work and family life with voluntary political commitment is only possible in succession for most women. Voluntary commitment fundamentally depends on child care and/or elderly care and their employment situation. 64 percent of the local politicians interviewed are employed in other jobs, half of them fulltime and half part-time. Most of the unemployed women are retired. Fulltime employment alongside a political mandate is usually only possible when the employer provides flexibility of working time or supports political commitment.

71 percent of the women interviewed are mothers, but most of the children are already teenagers. Only a third of the group have children living with them at home who are less than 16 years old. A quarter of the voluntary local politicians – and this is the biggest group – neither have children in their household nor are they working. But 15 percent of the female politicians in local communities have both: children at home and fulltime employment. If there are partners, their support will be a crucial success factor. 82 percent of the local community politicians live in a marriage or a committed partnership. 80 percent of them feel very well supported by their partners.

How to become a local community politician?

The civic involved and committed women of today are the local community politicians of tomorrow. Local community politicians are women who are generally involved in volun-

tary work from childhood on. They wish to improve something, to champion common interests, and they are not satisfied with private solutions; in the course of their lives, they perform various forms of voluntary work: 86 percent of the interviewees were involved in voluntary work before they got a mandate as a politician.

From the view of the respondents, civic involvement and a political mandate are closely interwoven. Associations, clubs, initiatives, and civil society organisations track similar subjects as local community parliaments or rural districts, but at different levels and with different political power. Running for a political mandate is linked to the wish to be more effective and to broaden the civic commitment with more information, contacts and power for decision-making.

However, addressing women can have a huge impact: the idea to get involved in local politics is very rarely born by the women themselves. 62 percent of the local community politicians got the impulse from the outside: 65 percent of them by political committed people (political party, local community politicians etc.), 25 percent from people in their environment (friends, colleagues etc.) and ten percent from their own families. Civic involvement plays a crucial role in making the environment sensitive to potential community politicians. Civic involvement gets women in touch with local bodies, makes them well-known and increases respect for them in the community environment or the political parties.

What are the experiences of the female community politicians?

Local community politicians want to do something for others and for themselves. 87 percent value the political influence they have – in terms of common participation, but also in terms of enforcing concrete concerns of community members. Only four percent are interested in continuing a political career at a higher level.

All in all, one third of the interviewed women said that they also wanted to take advantage of their political commitment for their personal development. Local community politics is an interesting learning field and boosts self-confidence. 37 percent are looking for a new personal challenge. Once women are involved in local community politics, they want to stay: 76 percent of the women interviewed want to run as candidates again next term. However, the political culture and institutional frames are regarded as being in considerable need of improvement. Over half of the respondents see shortcomings in party politics and the matter of facts. They want a more convenient working climate and a more co-operative working style, and they argue for more efficiency in the session and speaking culture. 40 percent complain about the external framework of local

community politics, like too bureaucratic procedures and the extra time required because of the bureaucracy; legal and financial restrictions of political action and options as well as disenchantment with politics and a lack of respect for the political commitment among community members and the media.

What can be done? By whom?

57 percent of the interviewees argue for political and educational empowerment measures to strengthen women. Close to a fifth of the respondents explicitly wish more support from their own political party. Especially in smaller communities and rural districts, the self-prescribed quotas are often not followed.

Women should be not only targeted and recruited by political parties and groups but also be given support measures which focus on the short time resources many of them have. Local community politics in Germany seems to be in need of a push for modern and professional politics which can also have a positive effect on the political participation of women. All in all, local community politics needs more attention and respect; the variety of topics and the rewarding side of local political commitment need to be better appreciated and communicated.

Stronger collaboration of local community politics and civic commitment requires greater attention. Associations, clubs, initiatives, and civil organisations are social authorities for civic commitment and constitute the most important reservoir for future political candidates. One of the main problems for women is limited time resources. A sufficient infrastructure for childcare and family services is necessary in view of the societal framework. In addition, all measures leading to a fair allocation of tasks between men and women ought to be employed.

Finally a commitment-friendly economy culture needs to be mentioned: To reconcile community commitment with employment and family care, alongside the fundamental understanding of the employer in the first place, women need timely and local flexibility. It is a matter of fact that no democratic community can accept the inadequate use of half of the potential of its population – least of all in community parliaments where democracy is based. Therefore: More women in local community politics!

1. The EAF – European Academy for Women in Politics and Business – is an independent non-profit organisation and works above party lines. All programs and projects are scientifically monitored and evaluated. The EAF aims for equal representation of women and men in leadership positions and a children-friendly society in which men and women can balance their leadership responsibilities with family life.

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Potentials and Constraints of Decentralisation Processes for Gender Equality in Cameroon

By Tilder Kumichii

Decentralisation raises expectations for increased participation in decision-making by women. Despite these expectations, women are still underrepresented. They constitute less than 15 percent of mayors in Africa. In Cameroon, for example, six percent of mayors and 13 percent of municipal councillors are women. In the 2007 municipal and legislative elections in Cameroon, less than 20 percent of candidates were women.

The questions however are: Is the women's presence available and felt in leadership positions in this 'seemingly' decentralised government? Are gender concerns taken into consideration in the process at all? Talk less of being a key one?

A picture of the situation

Legal dispensation in Cameroon since the late 1990s took a keen interest in elaborating texts governing the decentralisation process in the country. So far, decentralisation has focused on the councils or local government, where political participation offers possibilities. State structures or government institutions have also been decentralised to the regions – at provincial, divisional and sub-divisional levels.

In Cameroon, one may talk of about ten percent of women in key positions in government as a whole, at all levels of government administration, and in key political



leadership positions at decentralised levels. The effort on the ground so far (in terms of legislature, and other forms of lobby and capacity building in Cameroon) is still too grossly insufficient and far-fetched to support and make women, 'the others in the Nation', properly felt and engaged in the leadership process, as they should be. The simple reason for this is a lack of political determination to address this problem of inequality.

Gender equality continues to be a problem, with many factors limiting the effective participation of women in local governance. Some of these factors are:

- lack of political will to properly implement the laws laid down and legislation;
- societal barriers and norms regarding gender and women's leadership;
- limited political skills and experience of women;
- inadequacy between resources and responsibility at local level;
- lack of support or interests of political parties in women's leadership;
- weak national systems that do not promote accountability to gender equality and representation of women.

Local leadership – an important opportunity to foster women's leadership!

There are many opportunities for the transfer of decision-making powers to women at local level. These include women being very active in their households and in their communities. They have a solid understanding of local issues and in one way or the other are helping to address them. The needs that women and their families face everyday can be practically met through local leadership. Women are involved in grassroots development activities, which build their confidence in the capacity to address local issues. And last but not least, local politics is less complex and local elections are less expensive, less confrontational and less aggressive for women.

Way forward

For decentralisation to be effective, it MUST entail creating the enabling environment (with the required tools and possibilities) to uplift or cut down the weight or load from a central control system, and getting down directly to those in need. It is not about giving the shadow and keeping the real substance as is the case in most African countries. There is need for political decisions on the portion that women must occupy in decentralised governance. This should be

supported by an implementation strategy and a monitoring and follow-up mechanism. Politics should move from texts elaborating to real implementation, which facilitates the comfortable participation of women.

What can the Africa-EU Strategy do?

- Facilitate capacity building and training for women's participation in local governance.
- Encourage networking between women leaders in the EU and Africa, even those who intend to become women leaders in Africa.
- Facilitate exchange visits between the women leaders in Africa themselves and also with the EU women leaders for the exchange of good practices.
- Lobby the African Governments to see women's leadership in decentralised structures as a contribution to the attainment of the MDGs.

What can Civil Society and NGOs do?

- Organise lobbying activities at the level of national governments on issues of women's participation in local governance in decentralised structures.
- Continuous sensitisation of political parties to see women's participation in leadership as an asset.
- Sensitise women to take up the challenge of getting into leadership positions in decentralised structures.
- Organise trainings and capacity building sessions for women to get the required capacity to access leadership positions.
- International NGOs to network and support NGOs in Africa to carry out the above activities.

Conclusion

Women are an important resource that should be leveraged for the achievement of development for all. Given the potential that women have, their participation in decision-making and active involvement in the decentralisation process is absolutely vital.

Tilder Kumichii is Programme Co-ordinator for Gender Empowerment and Development (GeED) in Cameroon.



Account of Discussion

By Merle Bilinski

Equal political participation of women requires not only their quantitative presence in parliaments and decision-making committees but also the opportunity to gain qualitative influence on political decisions. This applies to political structures in Europe as well as in Africa. Similarities between gender imbalances in the political area in the North and in the South represent a key insight of the workshop “Local Power and Women's Rights – Gender Perspectives on Decentralisation Processes” held by VENRO and facilitated by Birgit Dederichs-Bain in Bonn on the 27th November 2009. Around 30 civil society experts – women and men – from seven different countries discussed the opportunities, risks and challenges of the decentralisation processes for the implementation of gender equality and developed recommendations for political decision-makers in the context of the Africa-EU Strategy.

It became obvious that the obstacles to assuming political offices at local level are often encountered in moving from acting in an voluntary capacity in the civil society area to fulltime decision-making posts at the level of local governments. Here, exclusion mechanisms are closely linked to a socially and culturally established division of roles and labour between women and men but are also caused by unequal access to economic and financial resources. The notion that individual women holding political offices guarantee the implementation of gender

equality often places exaggerated expectations on them. Even decentralisation processes do not contribute per se to women's empowerment. To truly achieve equal rights, campaigns struggling for equality have to simultaneously change political structures and strengthen women so that the latter can also take advantage of the changes to frame-work conditions. Here, co-operating with innovative men is imperative.

Recommendations developed at the workshop following concrete experiential reports from Germany, Cameroon, Uganda and Mozambique above all contain those contributing to a “transformative leadership style”. Linking quota to supporting an active and effective participation of women as well as sensitisation campaigns and capacity development was called for. According to the NGO representatives, supporting civil society and, above all, local women's rights organisations is a key issue in ensuring that they can raise their interests in political processes. The discussions clearly showed that equal political participation of women and men at all political levels is an elementary issue of democracy that needs to be addressed by development measures. Therefore, the Africa-EU Strategy's claim to contributing to democratic governance and realising human rights cannot be put into practice without a gender balance and the empowerment of women. Here, there is a lot to catch up on in the North as well as in the South.



Recommendations for the Achievement of Gender Equality in Local Governance

Developed by the participants

1. Measures undertaken within the context of the Africa-EU Strategy should promote the quantitative and qualitative participation of women with the goal of achieving a gender-sensitive transformative leadership among men and women leaders across the society. This includes the development of new strategies to challenge societal attitudes and cultural norms that are barriers to women's leadership in local governance.
2. National and local governments should expand quotas and reservations for women in all institutions of decentralised governance, including local bureaucracies, and implement mechanisms to ensure women's active and effective presence in leadership roles within them.
3. Political parties should deliberately promote gender-inclusive internal democracy through quotas or other mechanisms, and promote women in key decision-making positions within political parties at local level.
4. Additional measures such as awareness-raising campaigns and training should be used to break gender stereotypes and address men in a supportive environment. This can make it easier for local women to take the opportunity of political participation offered by the decentralisation programme. It can create a culture of acknowledgement for local political commitment, and facilitate the collaboration of the local stakeholders.
5. Men who are willing to challenge prevalent masculinity structures and promote transformative leadership structures at local level should be identified and worked with.
6. Women's leadership must be fostered and valued in political and non-political spheres through formal and informal training. Women should be trained in the skills of understanding formal and informal functioning of politics, fundraising, use of the media, agenda setting, networking, alliance building, negotiation, lobbying, etc. This could include coaching and mentoring programmes for newcomers.
7. In the context of the Africa-EU Strategy, development partners' support should scrutinise systems and institutions at the time of entry and not only at the time of recall to minimise contradictions in support. The EU's direct investment into gender work and women's empowerment should be explicit to safeguard and protect fragile initiatives.
8. Partners in the Africa-EU Strategy should intensify their support to civil society organisations working on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.
9. Systems of infrastructure and time management in communities should take the practical needs of women into consideration.
10. Social and political capital (through existing networks) should be developed as a key to increasing women's representation and influence in local governance and facilitate the establishment of a “transformative leadership” which means participation that makes a difference.
11. Global learning, exchange and networking of women in leadership positions should be promoted and appropriate funding provided, also for the provision of women's fora.
12. The integration of gender and women in the design and reform of electoral systems should be promoted, including improving electoral financing with a special focus on the financing of electoral campaigning for women's candidates.
13. Effective decentralisation strategies with proper funding and management of the local budget including gender budgeting should be promoted.
14. Efforts aimed at ending violence against women in general and in particular to women candidates should be promoted.
15. Sex-disaggregated data should be collected on the political representation of women and men at the local level.

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- World Vision Deutschland
- W. P. Schmitz-Stiftung
- Zukunftsstiftung Entwicklungshilfe bei der GLS Treuhand

VENRO currently has 118 members

* Guestmember



VENRO is the umbrella organisation of development non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Germany. The Association was founded in 1995 and consists of around 120 organisations. Their backgrounds lie in independent and church-related development co-operation, humanitarian aid as well as development education, public relations and advocacy. 16 one-world networks are part of VENRO. These represent about 2,000 local development initiatives and NGOs.
www.venro.de



With the project “Prospects for Africa – Europe’s Policies”, VENRO seeks an active civil society contribution to the implementation of the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership. The project builds on co-operation with African partners that began during VENRO’s successful EU Presidency Project in 2007. VENRO member organisations then worked together with their African partners to develop statements for policy-makers, the media and the interested public on the main topics of the project: energy and climate policies, regional integration and trade; and gender.
www.prospects-for-africa.de

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