



EDITORIAL

This month, MEWC published its first report from our Women's Political Participation Monitoring project "[WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION ACROSS AFRICA 2011](#)". The report seeks to provide an overview of the role of women in elections across Africa in 2011 by covering the position of female candidates before and after the elections have taken place; it is one of the first election monitoring projects in the field focused solely on the women's political participation.

The aim of the report is to provide an analysis of women's participation in African politics, incorporating primary and secondary sources to reveal achievements and obstacles to women's political empowerment. We aim to provide a platform for feminist views and voices of parties and voters on the ground. The first objective is to provide an easy to use tool to follow the role of women in elections across Africa by covering the female candidates before and after the elections have taken place.

It is the view of Make Every Woman Count that women's political participation is crucial to achieving other outcomes in women's rights and development, specifically increasing the number of female friendly laws curbing gender based violence, land owning rights, divorce laws, access to education and better healthcare. We also believe that the participation of women is imperative in post conflict societies, especially where UNSCR 1325 is yet to be implemented.

For decades, African women have been sidelined in taking part in the social, economic and political development of the continent. However, today, African women are proving that women's participation and leadership is a vital to poverty alleviation and peace process in Africa.

2010 and 2011 were very important years for women's political participation. In 2010, gains for women were registered in just half of all parliamentary elections or renewals. The most notable progress was seen in Northern Africa in post-revolutionary Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. North Africa saw women's representation in single or lower houses increased from 9.0 per cent to 11.7 per cent between 2010 and 2011.

Sub-Saharan Africa has also seen recent progress, with Ethiopia, Madagascar and the United Republic of Tanzania recording improvements in 2010. Women now have better access to a level of decision-making that directly impacts their lives and the issues they care about.

According to the Africa Progress Report for 2011, "Women's representation in parliaments in Sub-Saharan Africa is now higher than in South Asia, the Arab states or Eastern Europe." Rwanda is by far the most female-friendly legislature in the world, with women holding over 50% of the parliamentary seats.⁶ "From its inception, The African Union adopted a 50 per cent quota for women's representation, which is reflected in the composition of the AU Commission. Again, this standard reflects and reinforces efforts to enhance women's representation at the national level. Angola, Mozambique and South Africa have exceeded the 30 per cent benchmark for their legislatures.

However, there is still a lot that needs to be done to increase women's political participation and put women in decision-making positions. What remains an issue across Africa is the lack of political support women receive. 'Gender Equality' may be enshrined in the constitution but it is often nominal.

A number of countries have yet to adopt any form of quotas, in the Central African Republic the lack of constitutional quotas centered on gender parity in political and public office amounts to gender blindness. In number of countries there are voluntary quotas (Morocco and Cote d'Ivoire) but there appears to be no mechanisms or sanctions that ensure the complete institutionalization of list voting system and police the implementation of the quota system.

African women also face difficulties in obtaining detailed information on their rights, obligations and responsibilities as citizens. In some cases such as in Gabon this lack of information has contributed to a decline in female political participation and activism in Gabon in the latest elections.

Regardless of the goals and benchmarks set down in 1995 at the Beijing Platform for Action or the Gender Equity's Act in Politics (2010), a gender perspective has yet to be incorporated into all areas of governance, law and society in general ensuring women equal access to state resources and equal opportunities.

Gender equality and women's political participation are important markers of inclusive peace building and good governance. Women's greater participation in politics and public life in conflict-affected regions should be at the heart of post-conflict reconstruction programming and policy-making, helping to significantly increase the culture of plurality in post-conflict political life.

Lastly true democratic development is incomplete and impossible without the full inclusion and integration of women in all aspects of society.

MEWC through the publication of this report hopes to provide and encourage more collaboration between, women leaders, potential female candidates, women's organisations, governments and international organisations. We aim to create a strong network of services for women and for the progress towards women's full inclusion and integration in African development.

Rainatou Sow
Executive Director, Make Every Woman Count

INTERVIEW OF THE MONTH

[AFRICA: Interview of the Month with Mariam: A Victim of FGM/C](#)

Mariam (not her real name) is from West Africa, she is among the million of women who have undergo FGM/C in Africa. In this International Day against Female Genital Mutilation, Mariam has decided to share her story with us in the hope that it will stop people from performing this horrible practice on young African women. The 6th Feb. has been designated by the United Nations to raise awareness amongst the general public about this traditional practice, which severely violates the human rights of women and girls.

In the 28 countries in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East where female genital mutilation/cutting is performed, some 130 million women and girls have been affected. In addition to causing severe pain, FGM can result in prolonged bleeding, infection, infertility and death. The practice is still widespread in spite of a global commitment following the 2002 UN Special Session on Children to end FGM by 2010.

How old were you when you were cut?

I was just 5 years-old when I went through FGM/C. The all thing happened when I was on holiday with my sisters to visit my uncle in the capital.

How and where did it happen?

I was so excited when my mum told that I was going on holiday with my sisters to visit my uncle in the capital but I had to get a great mark at school in order for me to go. It was my first time that I was allowed to go in the capital on holiday and I guess you could imagine my excitement.

On the day of the trip in the summer holiday my sisters and I were all packed and ready to go. Until then, I would go days without sleeping just thinking about my summer holiday in the capital.

I didn't know that my first summer holiday will be the worst holiday ever. One week after our arrival, my uncle's driver was meant to take us to the playground with my cousins and my aunt. On our way to the playground, the driver stopped in a health centre. I said to my aunt 'this doesn't look like the playground' and I asked why we are stopping at a health centre. My aunt told me that we were going to visit a sick relative and that it won't take too much time.

We stopped in front of an office and a lady wearing a white blouse came out to greet us and asked my aunt to come in. After 10 minutes, my aunt came out and asked me to come with her first before the other girls, which I found later was because I was the youngest one and it always starts with the youngest girl first. When I walked in, I saw my two aunts standing there, and I was thinking why are these two here and why do they look so sad. I was asked by the nurse to come on the table and that she is going to just touch me down there and to see if everything is OK and that it would not hurt at all. I looked at my aunts and they told me to do what the nurse said. I jumped on the table and the next thing I knew was that my aunt had her

arms around my eyes and my mouth to stop me from seeing anything and screaming.

I could feel a pain like someone was cutting a part of my body and it hurt so much. In my screams, I was asking the nurse why she is doing this to me; I have been a good girl so why are you cutting me? I told her that I wanted to see my mum and my dad and that if my mum was here she wouldn't have let her hurt me so badly. While listening to what I was saying, all my aunts had tears in their eyes and they were all trying to hide their faces but it was too obvious. As I was getting down of the table screaming and crying, my aunt told me that she is very sorry but all girls have to go through it at some point in their lives. I looked at her and said right to her face that I wished she could have waited the next time I came to see her because this was my first holiday and I wanted to enjoy myself without spending my holiday in pain.

Back home, my uncle was very upset at my aunts and asked them why they did it. He then had to call my mum to tell her the news. Days before my mum arrived, I wouldn't eat or play with anyone; I spent my time crying. I never went back to visit my uncle again and I don't think I will ever forget my aunt for what she did to me.

What is your message to parents who are planning to cut their daughters?

FGM is a bigger issue than what people think. I always read reports and news that tell of some villages where women said that they have stopped cutting their daughters. The truth is they haven't stopped. They say it to please the international community or the UN,... but FGM is so much a part of our culture in Africa that I don't see any end to it. One of the ways of ending it, it think, would be perhaps to show the consequences on the victim's life. Perhaps after that, our mothers, aunts, grandmother would understand how much pain they are causing us.

What does your life look like 23 years later?

23 years later, the cutting still has a disastrous effect on my life. I got married 2 years ago and I always have to fight with myself when it comes to sex with my husband. Since that day, I never let anyone touched me down there and that was one of the reasons that I was still virgin when I got married at 26 years old. I am a good looking woman but my whole life I just pushed back all the guys that wanted to go out with me.

I always try to find excuses for not having sex with my husband because of the pain I still have since the cutting. I don't know how long my marriage is going to last if I keep on avoiding my husband. The question is: although I love my husband more than anything else, should I keep on suffering while having sex or shall I just avoid him? I don't know the answer to this question but there is one thing that I am sure about, my life will never be the same again. They destroyed my life without asking and without knowing the consequences of their acts. I may end up without husband and without children because of what they did to me.

"Will I have a normal life again, the answer is NO. By cutting that part of me, they remove something that I will never be able to get back again"

TOP WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY NEWS

[SENEGAL: SENEGALESE WOMEN WANT DIALOGUE TO DEFUSE ELECTION VIOLENCE](#)

Source: Trust Law

Political leaders in Senegal should sit around a table and hold talks to end weeks of unrest as the country nears a Feb 26 presidential poll, a network of women's groups said on Tuesday.

[GHANA: MINISTER ASK WOMEN TO SUPPORT CRUSADE FOR GENDER EQUALITY](#)

Source: Vibes Ghana

Hajia Hawawu Boya Gariba, Deputy Minister of Women and Children Affairs, has called on women to support the crusade for gender equality and empowerment in the bid to eliminate the obstacles they face in life.

TOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN NEWS

[TANZANIA: SOLIDARITY NEEDED TO UPROOT GENDER VIOLENCE](#)

Source: Tanzania Daily News

The Women's Legal Aid Centre (WLAC) Director, Ms Theodosia Muhulo has underscored the importance of joint efforts from all people in the society in fighting gender based violence, saying that without cooperation from the grassroots the problem would remain unsettled.

[UGANDA: MAIMING WOMEN: SOCIETY AND JUDICIARY NOT DOING ENOUGH](#)

Source: Daily Monitor

Grisly and ghastly are probably the most apt words to describe the story that appeared in this newspaper yesterday, of a young woman whose hands were chopped off by an angry ex-husband (Man held over attack on ex-wife, Daily Monitor, February 6).

TOP POLITICAL PARTICIPATION NEWS

[KENYA: HOW POLITICAL PARTIES SIDELINE WOMEN LEADERS](#)

Source: Daily Nation

Kenyan political parties routinely flout their own policies and manifestos on gender representation. And, among the big players, President Kibaki's Party of National Unity is the worst culprit, with just 18 per cent of its leadership positions occupied by women.

[AFRICA: AFRICAN WOMEN'S LONG WALK TO FREEDOM: SOME GAINS, BUT AN UPHILL CLIMB STILL LOOMS](#)

Source: Africa Renewal

Africa's political independence was accompanied by a clarion call to eradicate poverty, illiteracy and disease. Fifty years after the end of colonialism, the question is: To what extent has the promise of that call been realized for African women? There is no doubt that African women's long walk to freedom has yielded some results, however painfully and slowly.

TOP ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT NEWS

[TANZANIA: WOMEN IN UNGUJA AND PEMBA HAPPILY MAKING MONEY AND SAVING](#)

Source: Daily News

A popular Kiswahili proverb known by many Zanzibarians goes like this "Haba na haba hujaza kibaba" in other words drop by drop the vessel will get filled.

RWANDA: WOMEN FARMERS YIELDING PROFITS AND BETTER FUTURES IN RURAL RWANDA

Source: UN WOMEN

"I never thought I would be able to pay the school fees for all five of my children and our family's health insurance costs as well!" exclaimed Euphrasia Musabyemariya.

TOP HIV/AIDS & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

GHANA: STUDENTS IN NKORANZA SOUTH DISTRICT EDUCATED ON ADOLESCENT REPRODUCTIVE ISSUES

Source: VibeGhana

Nkoranza South District Directorate of Education in collaboration with Ghana Health Service, has organised a forum to educate students and staff of Nkoranza Technical Institute on adolescent reproductive issues.

LIBERIA: LIBERIAN WOMEN LOOK TO FAMILY PLANNING TO STAY IN SCHOOL, STRENGTHEN BUSINESSES

Source: Global Press Institute

Health officials and women in Liberia say family planning options can empower girls and women to stay in school and concentrate on their businesses. But many fathers and husbands here don't approve of the introduction of family planning. As a result, many young women are keeping their contraceptive choices secret.

HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN

GHANA: WOMEN ACTIVISTS CRITICIZE PRESIDENT FOR NEGLECTING THEIR ISSUES

Source: Public Agenda

Civil Society groups, women rights activists as well as the Women Caucus in Parliament have expressed their reservations about the President's silence on women and children issues in his state of the nation's address to Parliament.

UGANDA: CELEBRATING WOMANHOOD

Source: The Monitor

The International Women's Day may be that special time set aside to commemorate the strides women have made and go back to the drawing board and plan the future of this gender, however every day is a celebration of womanhood. The pride, success and determination ingrained in the being of every woman. Some women shared why they feel blessed to be who they are.

GENERAL

SOUTH SUDAN: WOMEN ORGANIZE WORKSHOP TO EMPOWER THEM

Source: The Citizen

The South Sudan Women Empowerment Network in partnership with the UN women and NPA yesterday organized a workshop set to end today.

[NIGERIA: WORLD BANK TO PARTNER FG ON GENDER PROGRAMMES](#)

Source: Daily Trust

The World Bank is to partner with the federal government on women and children programmes, Sector Leader, Human Development of the organization in Nigeria, Foluso Okunmadewa, has said.

FEATURED RESOURCES

[WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION ACROSS AFRICA 2011](#)

Source: Make Every Woman Count (MEWC)

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[PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING AN ESSENTIAL PACKAGE OF SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES: GUIDANCE FOR INTEGRATING FAMILY PLANNING AND STI/RTI WITH OTHER REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND PRIMARY HEALTH SERVICES](#)

Source: UN FPA

The goal of this guidance document is to provide a framework for developing an essential sexual and reproductive health (SRH) package. It focuses on two priority areas: 1) integrating family planning into maternal and newborn care services, and 2) integrating services for preventing and managing sexually transmitted infections/reproductive tract infections into primary healthcare services.

This guidance document comprises three sections. The Introduction explains and justifies why the development and implementation of an essential SRH package should be planned and framed within the World Health Organization's six Building Blocks of Health Systems.

UPCOMING EVENTS

[WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO PEACE AND SECURITY REFLECTED IN QUILT EXHIBITION](#)

Source: UNFPA

Date: 08 March 2012, 18:00-00:00

Location: New York, New York (North Gallery Public Lobby, United Nations)

On the 101st anniversary of International Women's Day, 8 March, UNFPA will sponsor a major quilt exhibition that illustrates the hopes, fears, and challenges that women face all around the

world. The exhibition is a tribute to the strength of women and a promise to support their efforts to take care of themselves and their families. It is also a testimony to their role in weaving the social fabric of their communities.