

Politics and Gender Relations in Kenya: A Historical Perspective

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Introduction

SECTION 2A OF KENYA'S Constitution allowing for multi-partism was repealed in 1991. About 5 years have gone since this important constitutional amendment in Kenya. Yet there is still disparity in the social history of gender relations in Kenya. The distribution of power in gender relations have tended to favour masculinity rather than femininity, making the decision-making process largely a male-dominated one despite the androcentric claim of the practice in the social, economic, political and religious institutions in the country. Indeed, this realisation calls for an examination into the reasons giving rise to the persistent imbalance in the political relations, in spite of the promise and drive towards building democratic institutions in the country.

That women have not participated fully in the political decision-making process of various world governments cannot be overstated. Consequently, they have not effectively influenced policies in the process of development of their societies. The problem of women's invisibility in the global social, economic and political relations explains the hitherto existing gender imbalances. Indeed, in conventional ethnological and colonial anthropological literature women's contribution to the production of goods and technologies, knowledge and the general social values, were largely viewed as incidental. Women's description in such literature revolved essentially, around their reproductive role as mothers and spouses complementing that of men whose political, economic, technological activities are the only ones which are acknowledged (Sow 1994:6).

Given the above conceptualisation of gender relations, men were and are still seen as the agents of change who made and continue to make most decisions affecting society in general. This has had far-reaching implications for social relations and the process of power distribution. Studies conducted in the global political relations indicate that women parliamentary representation, for instance,

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in most countries, is less than 10 per cent with the exception, perhaps, of Sweden and Norway which have 38 and 36 per cent respectively. Even some of the world's largest democracies at the end of 1991 such as the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK), could boast of only 5.8 per cent and 6.4 per cent of the women's participation in political decision-making positions respectively (Nzomo 1993:9). This is a grim picture of gender relations obtaining, globally.

Hitherto, in Africa, the situation is no better— there has been no woman head of state in any of the African countries. The highest position a woman has ascended to in the last three decades of Africa's independence is the office of the Vice-President. In this case, Uganda seems to be exemplary by African standards considering that even during the regime of the infamous Idi Amin in the early 1970s, a woman was appointed to a ministerial position. In other African countries such as Senegal, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Zambia only a handful of women have been appointed to the cabinet.

Yet in the constitutions of most African countries, women and men have the full political rights — the rights to vote and to hold offices at all levels in the decision — making process. There are various explanations for women's under-representation in the political process. The deep-rooted patriarchal ideology defines gender relations at all levels of the political economy. For example, socio-cultural systems and the legal system all impinge on social relations.

It is, in fact, ironical that despite the claim of constitutional equality of all citizens in African countries, and the participation of individuals in the political economy, gender imbalances, continue unabated. Indeed, while discussing gender relations in the Senegalese political process, Fatou Sow (1989:35) bemoans this unfortunate development asserting that:

In 1983, (only) three women held cabinet-level posts, posts deemed to be particularly suited to women's sensibilities (Health, Women's and Social Affairs, etc.). No woman has run one of the 'high powered' ministries overseeing economics, finance, foreign affairs, or justice. In 1978, eight out of 100 parliamentarians were women. The first woman mayor was elected in 1984. The political parties are models of patriarchal hierarchy; women serve on committees and within party organisations. Women in the opposition parties (either as wives or as *camdrades*) do not fare any better.

The above observation applies virtually to all African countries. There is a gender imbalance in political relations of Africa in which men are preponderantly dominant. That men, therefore, have controlled indigenous, colonial and even modern forms of governance of the state in Africa cannot be gainsaid. In fact, their control has translated into laws, policies, and spending

patterns which coincidentally benefit men mostly. It is apparent that women's seemingly personal, everyday experiences are structured by policies which make a claim to 'gender — neutrality'. Yet these policies are, to say the least, experienced differently by men and women thus rendering it inadmissible to talk of gender — neutrality in the political process of Africa (Parpart and Staudt 1990:1). This is because the policies are gender blind.

This paper postulates that prevailing analyses of the political processes in Africa and Kenya in particular, presented the processes affecting women and men on the continent in similar ways. They did not consider the possibility that these processes might not be gender — neutral, given that patriarchy pervades the entire spectrum of human relations in history. Moreover, they overlook the fact that there might be differences in the ways in which women and men experienced them. As a result, men's experiences and understandings of the political processes have become, perhaps, the authentic ones. This kind of thinking has come to increasingly deny the validity of women's experiences which might not fit into the dominant patriarchal world-view of most societies (Lovett 1989:23). While this paper rejects such an exclusivist approach to the process of governance biased against women, it also discusses how positive gender relations can be enhanced in Kenya's new democratic project.

By the term Kenya's new democratic project, the author means the pluralist politics of governance adopted in the country after the repeal of Section 2A of the Constitution of Kenya in December of 1991. This section of the constitution had confined Kenyans to a single party political space which did not allow for an alternative since 1982 when the country became a one party state by law. The new dispensation in the early 1990s allowed Kenyans to form political parties of their own choice as an alternative system of governance to the only and ruling party in existence then, the Kenya African National Union's (KANU). There is no doubt, pluralism enabled Kenyans to embark on politics of change in the country to include hitherto suppressed voices. However, the main question is whether positive gender relations have been enhanced despite the expansion of political space for greater participation of the citizens of Kenya in the political process and the respect for human rights.

Gender Relations in Precolonial and Colonial Societies

The root cause of gender discrimination and biases in Kenya as in other African countries can be explained variously. These include cultural prejudices and stereotypes seen, especially, to be against women's empowerment. In most Kenyan communities social, political and economic roles have been apportioned to both men and women, in the process, defining relationships and status of individuals within society. For instance, it is common to hear the claim that

women should naturally know 'their place' in society. In this regard, women are expected to accept the 'obvious' assumption that men are 'thinkers', 'philosophers', 'scientists', 'politicians', breadwinners and even 'spiritual leaders' *par excellence*. Conversely, women are said to be 'homemakers', they are 'led', are 'submissive', are 'workers', are 'dependants' and play the role of mothers of the nation (Mukabi-Kabira, 1993:26). The above characterisations obtain from the perception of African women in colonial historiography as:

... Keepers of the homestead ... urban prostitutes or costly dependent wives of wage labourers in sociological work. (In fact), a false picture was presented by African male chiefs and elders and was happily reproduced by European social scientists (Mbilinyi 1985:130).

These together with cultural division of roles in society have over the years, been reinforced by the so-called wise sayings. Some of these 'wise' sayings have been created out of long experiences from which bodies of knowledge and 'wisdom' have emerged.

Thus, these sayings have authority of 'tradition'. Traditions have come to constitute the ideology of most societies in Kenya. It should be emphasised that ideology, as is the case with myth, has a basic function which is to give an event a historical intention, a natural justification—a system of justification which is in itself a message. Both ideology and myth, in fact, make things and events to look innocent and innocuous in the way events and situations are presented. Yet in essence, they tend to prop up the *status quo* in social relations. Mukabi-Kabira (1994:4) notes how tradition has affected gender relations in general in the following words:

These cultural forms influence the way men and women behave at home, women apologise in different ways for their education. They play down their expertise and leadership qualities. They insist they have to know and practice more before they take leadership roles. Others buy peace on a daily basis. They tell their husbands how great they are. Elite women, for instance take loans to buy their husbands cars while they go to work by bus. They make their husbands believe that their (women's) ideas are theirs (husband's ideas). They take loans to buy houses in their husbands names ... They always seek approval.

The above presented picture is reproduced at different levels of gender relations in Africa. Gender differentiation and its biases against women start at birth. From the time babies are born the community treats boys and girls differently. In fact, some African traditional cultures have special ways of announcing the sex of the new-born baby. In the Kikuyu indigenous system, for instance, if a boy was born his birth was announced by the birth attendant with five ululations and a girl they would be four. In the Luyia and Luo communities of western Kenya when a man died his burial rites took four days to be performed, whereas a

woman's burial rites were performed in three days. These cultural practices has significant implications for gender relations and the distribution of power, especially during colonialism which placed women in a second class position socially. The customs of Kenyan communities reinforced and reproduced the patriarchal ideology which permeated the entire spectrum of their social, political and economic activities.

This explains why in most precolonial and colonial societies of Kenya women did not hold significant positions in the political decision-making process. Save for a few cases in the Luo, Kikuyu, Gusii, Giriama and Meru communities. In these communities some women leaders played significant roles in the leadership aspects of their people. These leaders included, chief Mang'ana of Kadem (Luo), Wangu Wa Makeri (Kikuyu), Mora Moka Ngiti (Gusii), Mekatilili (Giriama) and Ciokalaine - O - M'barungu (Meru). Their participation in governance at the highest level of the political hierarchy, notwithstanding, the main actors and custodians of real power of these societies were men. Moreover, even in the economic sphere, men dominated and were the ultimate decision makers. For instance, they advised on how agricultural surplus from households was used by its members, thus, disempowering women, generally. Basing on this postulation, radical feminism concludes women were subordinate to men in indigenous societies (Nzomo 1995a).

However, African scholars of the nationalist perspective have postulated that the oppressive gender relations in Africa are not a function of conditions in pre-colonial Africa, but a creation of colonialism. In fact, they argue that the stability of African institutions:

... was disrupted with the onset of colonialism. The colonialists, ignored the political role of women played in traditional cultures and confined them to the stereotyped roles that characterised their own women in the Western World. African women now found themselves systematically excluded from participation in the new set-up (Oduol 1993:25).

True, as Mudimbe (1988) has argued in his powerful discourse on the *Invention of Africa*, colonialism tended to organise and transform non-European areas into fundamentally European constructs. But, was all well as regards gender and power-relations in Africa prior to the coming of the Europeans? Colonialism might have exacerbated bias in gender relations but, it certainly, did not create the inequalities. Gender inequalities existed, however, they may have been so sharply as they came to be characterised during colonialism and in the independence era.

In the process of resisting the cultural imperialism of the West, nationalist scholars perpetuated the invisibilisation and subordination of women. In their characterisation, for instance, an ideal woman was seen as one who was submissive, married, rural-based, faithful and loyal to a spouse and parents. Well, these are acceptable attributes, only when policies at the household and state levels encouraged equity in social relations. They however, became detestable when the aggressive urban and independent-minded women are considered as vicious, manipulative and immoral (Meena 1992:9-10). The changing relations of production in the global economy demand that gender relations were re-examined in the light of contemporary needs and exigencies.

In retrospect, colonialism enacted laws in Kenya to facilitate colonial domination and the exploitation of the Africans. The educational system was also reformulated to meet colonial interests and goals. The colonialists approached issues of social, political and economic concern with extreme ethnocentricism. They interpreted African institutions in the light of Western cultural values. Thus, in the colonialists' conception of gender relations, real power was vested in men. Power was concentrated in men, a tendency which they reinforced for enhanced economic gains to the colonial capitalists. For instance, labour laws, taxes, laws pertaining to the movement of people and the land tenure system were enacted. These laws facilitated the marginalisation and disempowerment of women in gender relations as there were no provision for women to own land. Moreover, women were restricted to rural areas as men were required to work for the colonial state, on European settler farms and industries.

The colonial state in Kenya served as an instrument of primitive accumulation by further introducing marketing and financial structures. It also appropriated land and livestock from Africans, instituted forced labour and built port facilities and railways. All these measures exploited and dehumanised Africans, impinging fundamentally, on gender relations in general. For instance, women became over-burdened with community work on top of their traditional-defined domestic roles in the household.

Additionally, on matters relating to marriage, colonialism came to recognise four systems namely: Customary Law, Moslem Law, Hindu Law and Civil Law which embodies the English philosophy of life and Christian ethos. However, of the two systems (Civil Law and Hindu) are the only ones to date which recognise monogamous marriages while the remaining two (Customary and Moslem Laws) give credence to polygamous unions as well (Kameri-Mbote 1995:16). On the hand, separation and divorce seem to be considered within the

defining ideology of patriarchy. Men, apparently, have more rights to property than women within the marriage institution.

In most indigenous African societies male offsprings are preferred to female children. They are, particularly valued for the continuity in the family name. It is assumed that males unlike females, will more often than not, change their names as is the case in traditional sedentary agricultural societies. Therefore, they are far less likely to relocate on marriage because of patrilocal marriage customs (Etta 1994:71). Having found this arrangement in place in indigenous African societies, the colonialists encouraged parents in Kenya to send more boys instead of girls to schools which had been established by the missionaries and the colonial state. In this context, therefore, formal Western education denied girls an equal opportunity as that of the boys to education. This explains why girls have not been able to develop fully their capabilities to compete favourably for employment opportunities with boys to date. This has led to the marginalisation and disempowerment of women in Kenya in general.

Given that women have not had equal educational opportunities as men, they have been treated as inferior to men in terms of possession of skills as it relates to job market. Conversely, they have not been able to participate in top-level decision-making process. This has effected their participation in political and economic activities. Indeed, lack of adequate of education of girls has contributed to women subordination in gender relations. Drawing from these realities, the feminist movement in Kenya took advantage of the political space expanded in 1991 to agitate for positive enhancement of gender relations. In fact, it has gone to the extent of agitating for the formation of a women led political party.

Toward Enhanced Gender Relations

In the foregoing section, gender relations and the distribution of power in indigenous African societies and during colonialism were discussed. It was observed that both dispensations impinged upon social, political and economic relations of individuals. Gender imbalances existed although, variedly, during the two periods. This is not to say that on attainment of Kenya's political independence in 1963, the situation changed to ensure there was equity in political, social and economic relations. This is far from it.

During the nationalist struggle women overcame the stereotyped roles which confined them to the domestic domain and instead actively participated in the process of decolonisation of Kenya. That women felt that weight of colonialism in much the same way as men, has been vigorously debated in decolonisation literature (Presely 1992). The advent of colonialism had far-reaching implications on Kenyan peoples. For instance, the Kikuyu, Maasai and Kalenjin.

communities lost vast tracts of their land. Taxation and forced labour were introduced drastically affecting numerous Kenyan societies. These impacted on the social and economic relations of both men and women countrywide. That explains why by the 1930s women's roles in society had been drastically transformed — they had become wage labourers and suffered as a consequence of British colonialism. In fact, some women in Kenya had already established themselves into powerful guilds of sex workers by the late 1930s. Three distinct categories of sex workers namely; *watembezi* (street walkers), *malaya* (those who stayed in their rooms waiting for clients) and *wazi-wazi* (open)¹ had evolved during colonialism. Women like men had to seek employment to make ends meet.

As a result of the conditions created by colonialism, women in Kenya were compelled to force changes in the African indigenous social contract. The Kikuyu women, for example, became directly and actively involved in African nationalism alongside men. However, when men did not recognise their role in the decision-making process and relegated them to their stereotypical domestic roles, they disagreed and women formed the Mumbi Central Association (MCA) in 1930 to fight for their rights and freedom from colonialism. Thereafter, Kenyan women continued to demand inclusion in the political mainstream.

In due course, men came to perceive women as their allies in the nationalist struggle. Women, for instance, were involved in the *Mau Mau* independence struggle movement, fighting on the battle fields, making political decisions and even administering oaths which was a preserve of men in the Kikuyu society (see Kanogo 1987; Presley 1992). This marked the beginning of transformation of gender roles within the Kikuyu society as was the case with other Kenyan societies. Indeed, during Kenya's struggle for independence women became increasingly active in the public domain. But did women continue to enjoy their new-found rights and freedom after attainment of independence?

Whereas the nationalist fervour had mobilised both women and men in the struggle for independence (*Uhuru*). Power was essentially, transferred to a few men who inherited the colonial administrative apparatus. Power was transferred to a handful of men whose major preoccupation was to re-invent the African

1 *Watembezi* is the oldest form of sex workers in Nairobi, existing as early as 1899. Literary *Watembezi* comes from *kutembea*, a Kiswahili word meaning to walk — these are street sex workers. *Malaya* is the second form of sex workers emerging in Nairobi about 1922 or 1923. These sex workers stayed inside their residence waiting for clients. *Wazi-Wazi* is the third form of sex workers who made their contacts while sitting outside their residence.

masculinity (Meena 1992:9). This was with total disregard of the fact that women also had contributed fundamentally to the country's decolonisation and, therefore, had a right to enjoy the 'fruits of *uhuru*' like men. It is against this background that the biased gender relations and the need to correct the imbalance should be understood. The democratisation project in Kenya has included as its agenda, the need for equity in gender relations.

At independence, nationalist leaders made a promise to safeguard human rights and equality. This also meant that women would be integrated into the process of governance of Kenya. The Government's Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965 on *African Socialism and Its Application to Planning in Kenya* clearly indicated that political participation by men and women in Kenya would be on equal terms, including standing for elective office as guaranteed in the independence constitution of Kenya. Yet as Oduol (1993:28) correctly observes:

... Women soon realised that just as their contributions had been ignored during the colonial era, independence would not bring any remarkable changes to their lot. The government failed to involve them on an equal basis with their men in the country's economic, political and social institutions ... The early years of independence up to 1971, therefore indicate no major landmarks of women's involvement in politics.

It is ironical, also to note that while under the colonial political governance women held one or two of specially elected seats, but when the opposition parties of independent Kenya introduced the motion to preserve this practice in July 1963, it was defeated in the National Assembly (*Ibid*). Indeed, it is evident that throughout the 1960s and the early 1970s, the post-colonial state in Kenya acted and behaved as if the question of gender equity in the policies of the country was irrelevant in Kenya. In fact, in the National development plans and major policy documents the critical role women played in the national political economy was considered as inconsequential (Nzomo 1989:9). Maria Nzomo (1995b:39) argues, for instance, that:

... between 1978 and 1982, the government allocated to women programmes the equivalent of 0.1 per cent of total government expenditure for that period. Government grants to women's groups dropped significantly from 3.3 million Kenyan shillings in 1986, to 2.6 million in 1987 ... By 1991, the token government contribution further dropped to about 60.5 per cent, to less than a quarter million (KShs.206,000) Kenya shillings in 1992.

The subordination of women goes on despite the fact that women in Kenya from 52 per cent and men 49 per cent of the population. This calls for positive enhancement of gender relations toward equity. But is this the case?

In the post-independence Kenya the under-representation of women in the public decision-making domain is disquieting, betraying the gender bias in the

political relations of the country. For instance, between 1963 and 1969 there was no woman elected or nominated to Kenya's National Assembly (Parliament). However, between 1969 and 1974 the situation improved slightly when women formed 0.56 and 8 per cent of the elected and nominated members of Parliament respectively. By the late 1980s there were 5 women elected and 2 nominated members of Parliament in Kenya. The picture has remained relatively the same even after the re-introduction of multi-party politics of governance in the country in 1991. The pluralist political dispensation which promised to open the gates for popular participation in the democratic process has not lived up to its word. Nevertheless, there has been a slight increase in women representation in Parliament.

In a Parliament of 200, there are only 6 elected and 1 nominated woman member. Of these only 1 is cabinet minister despite the election promises by the various political parties that they would have more women representation in the august house. Moreover, it would be argued that the ministry of culture and social services which the only woman leads, is less powerful compared to ministries like those of finance, defence, economic planning and education.

Whereas the Government of Kenya recognises the need for equity in the employment sector, men are still dominant. For example, by 1987 women constituted only 21 per cent of all formally employed people. Moreover, only 1 per cent of those holding top-level positions in the civil service are women. The first woman Permanent Secretary in independent Kenya was appointed in 1987 — twenty four years after independence! The same story can be told of the private employment sector. By 1992, only 9 per cent of those holding executive and managerial positions were women.

To illustrate further, the disheartening gender imbalances in Kenya's political economy Table 1 will suffice.

In Kenya's public service sector job groups are categorised from A to T. A is the lowest category an employee can fall in. In Job group A to G are categorised cleaners, messengers, copy typists and secretaries. Starting from Job group H, the entry point is a university degree. Top-level management job groups are S and T. Indeed, Table 2 shows that by average in 1991 women accounted a paltry 20 per cent of total employees in the public sector. Moreover, they were concentrated in lower cadres — Job Group A to G. As we descend along the table, the number of women declines rapidly such that at Job Groups S and T women are not to be found (see Table 2).

That equal representation of men and women in social, political and economic spheres would promote the interests of women and men, and enhanced gender relations cannot be overstated. A democratic system of governance, therefore, depends on women and men, together participating in the political, social and economic processes of any given country. Moreover, it depends:

... on the accountability of the rulers to those they rule. Power is shared. Such a government is not forced on the people. It is established with their agreement and voluntary support (Amisi 1992:1).

Table 1: Female Participation in the Labour Force: 1970 to 1989

Year	Female Participation as Percentage of Total			Total
	Private Sector	Public Sector	Self Employment	
1970	14.2	14.5	14.55	14.4
1975	14.7	17.5	16.8	16.3
1983	17.2	18.4	29.4	29.4
1984	17.85	19.6	30.8	30.8
1985	18.5	20.7	35	35
1986	18.3	22.5	38.6	38.6
1987	21.5	22.1	36	36
1988	22.6	21.6	37	37
1989	21.2	20.9	36.3	36

Source: Nzomo 1995a:21

It has be emphasised that various factors contribute to the gender imbalance in Kenya's social, political and economic relations. Indeed, this paper has already explained in the foregoing pages how the process of law, the educational system, the political set-up and the economic system tend to favour males rather than females in gender relations. Considering all these factors, it is imperative that women and men alike are empowered on more equitable terms in order to change the society's arrangement that invisibilises women, creating stress on men at the same time.

Table 2: Distribution of Employment by Job Group in 1991

Job Group	Cumulative		Total	Percentage Female
	Male	Female		
A	41,477	12,060	53,537	22.3
B	9,235	2,815	12,050	23.4
C	18,257	6,004	24,261	24.6
D	24,885	10,547	35,345	29.6
E	15,122	3,318	8,440	18.0
F	62,470	14,296	76,266	18.4
G	18,247	4,575	22,844	20.1
H	9,931	2,344	12,275	19.1
I	5,460	823	5,283	15.6
J	5,032	916	5,948	15.4
K	2,748	472	3,220	14.7
L	1,203	163	1,356	12.0
M	603	47	650	7.2
N	280	15	295	5.1
O	140	6	140	4.1
P	78	5	83	6.0
Q	17	0	17	0.0
R	4	0	4	0.0
	215,191	58,336	273,527	

Source: Nzomo 1995a: 23.

But how do the above mentioned factors impinge upon gender relations in post-independent Kenya? The fundamental human rights and freedom of the individual are contained in Chapter 5 of the Kenya constitution. This chapter guarantees to every person in Kenya under Section 70, irrespective of her/his race, tribe, place of origin or residence or other local connection, political

opinions, colour, creed or sex human rights. Moreover, section 82, prohibits enactment of any law that is discriminatory. Discrimination, however, is defined in all other contexts except that based on gender. This is a significant omission in the constitution and legal process. Indeed, legal experts have taken advantage of this anomaly, because no law exists capable of challenging it (Muli 1992:37). Any attempt to remove discriminatory laws from the constitution in Kenya has proved problematic. For example, in both 1976 and 1979, a male-dominated parliament rejected the Marriage Bill which intended to provide women equal status with men in matters relating to marriage and divorce as well as the rights to property ownership. In 1996 Kenyan legislators refused to pass a bill in parliament outlawing female circumcision.

Furthermore, the practicalities of the legal process demonstrated, for instance, in May 1987, how the legal system tended discriminate against women by its inability to recognise the rights of Mrs. Wambui Otieno to bury the remains of her dead husband (S.M. Otieno) at a place of her choice as his widow. Wambui was engaged in a legal tussle with her late husband's Umira Kager clan over whether she had the final say in the burial place of the body. A Nairobi court ruled that Otieno be buried according to the cultural practices of his Luo community. In this case, patriarchy won the day. The case was significant in explaining gender relations in Kenya (see *The Weekly Review*, No. 620, 1987).

Perhaps the other most powerful factor shaping the current process of power distribution and gender imbalances is the educational system. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and also the Abuja Declaration on Participatory development (1989), everyone should have a right to education. However, although educational opportunities for all Kenyans have increased tremendously since 1963, substantial gains towards equality between the sexes have been evident only in the lower levels of the educational system—the first years of schooling. For instance, in 1963 there were a total of 892,000 pupils in primary schools, 34 per cent of whom were girls. In 1993 there were 5.43 million pupils in primary schools with girls constituting 49.1 per cent of the total enrolment in Kenya (Kibera 1995:6). Whereas the increase of enrolment of girls at this level of education is encouraging, only 34 per cent of the girls who enrol actually complete primary school education as compared to 48 per cent of the boys. The reason for the higher drop-out rate for girls is related to socio-economic factors in society and biological attribute of the girls, resulting in early pregnancies. The perception of parents of their children has a bearing on attrition rates. Most parents consider male children as a better 'investment' option. They regard education for their male children as a form of insurance in their old age, saying that female children will get married and benefit the families of their husbands. Consequently, when families cannot afford to send

both sons and daughters to school, they opt to provide fees for their sons instead of girls. Girls, as a result, are denied education.

As regards secondary school enrolment, there has been a remarkable rise in the enrolment of girls. In 1963, for instance, girls' enrolment formed 32 per cent of total of Kenyan secondary going students and had risen to 44.3 per cent in 1993. Nevertheless, the gap between boys and girls seems widens as they move up the ladder of the educational system. The average enrolment of women in Kenyan universities is about 29 per cent of the total student population at that level of education.

The disparity in student enrolment in educational institutions where males outstrip females has had significant implications for gender equity in Kenya's political economy. Generally, the high status occupations are awarded to those with better educational qualifications. This explains why men occupy high-level positions in the decision-making process and employment in general (Table 2). Given the less formal education females have, most women are automatically excluded from lucrative as well as influential jobs. Furthermore, employment of women is confined to the industries and service jobs such as education and agriculture which do not require very high educational qualifications.

To enhance positive gender relations in the politics of change in Africa as is the case with Kenya, it is imperative that women and men are empowered equally. Here, society must accept two fundamental assumptions. First that, sex differences are not necessarily gender differences. Second, that whatever differences and similarities exist between genders, social, political and economic subordination is a cultural rather than a biological attribute, and, hence has to be considered within that context and changed (Tadria 1989:41).

In the current patriarchal-defined social and economic relations of individuals, males are expected to be the breadwinners. This 'traditional' expectation of men as household heads creates stress on men and, conversely, reinforces the patriarchal ideology. This practice has a devastating effect on men given as it identifies their sense of worth in the work they do. In fact, the power derived from men's breadwinning role in which they are socialised into accepting and fulfilling oppresses them on the other hand (Gaciabu 1995:3). Most women, as a result, look upon men to make decisions in the household, an attitude that is eventually reproduced at the higher levels of political and economic participation of individuals. Thus, women are marginalised and subordinated by the patriarchal ideology.

Conclusion

This paper has acknowledged the imbalance in gender relations and the distribution of power in Kenya. To minimise and, perhaps, eradicate gender inequalities in Kenya's social, political and economic relations, women and men should be given equal opportunities to pursue education. But considering that already women are disadvantaged, more opportunities should be provided to them than men following the principle of affirmative action. There is a need to build more educational institutions for females and to change attitudes of parents towards the education of females. In Kenya there is an on-going debate about whether to introduce the quota system of admission for girls to educational institutions or not. It is being argued that considering cultural prejudices and domestic obligations of girls, the entry point of girls in educational institutions at all levels should be lower than that of boys. This should be enforced until such a time that equity will be realised.

On the hand, laws which tend to marginalise women should be reviewed with the view of erasing or making them gender-sensitive. In Kenya, a Law Reform Commission charged with the responsibility of examining and evaluating laws relating to women and society was set up in 1994. It is hoped that when a bill is drafted by the Attorney General based on its findings and presented to Parliament, the august house would discuss it fully. It should re-examine and obliterate gender discriminative laws from the Constitution of Kenya.

Above all, the road to empowerment of women and the enhancement of gender harmony in Kenya's politics of change, presupposes that more women be involved in the process of public decision-making. It is not enough to be content with constitutional provision of rights and freedoms of all individuals while in practice gender discrimination continues unabated.

Commendable efforts, however, have been made and progress registered by the women's movement in Kenya towards gender equity. The organisations involved include, African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD), The National Committee on the Status of Women (NCSW), Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organisation (MYWO) and the National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK). But to realise equity in social relations of Kenya, women and men will be required to debate pertinent issues impinging on achievement of equity in gender relations. A dialogue, certainly, is necessary. In this regard, women organisations should also increasingly incorporate men into their programmes for change. Moreover, the existing and new political parties in Kenya will be required to formulate programmes which are less gender-biased.

Above all, women should be encouraged to vie for high offices in the political process in order to influence policies that affect their lot and society in general.

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