

Maria Nzomo, *Women in Top Management in Kenya*, Nairobi, African Association for Public Administration and Management, 1995, iii+91p.

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The re-introduction of pluralism in Kenya in December 1991 raised hopes for the development of a society that would promote human rights as well as democratic values and practices. Consequently, the hitherto amenable women's movement was radicalised alongside other popular social and pro-democracy movements. All of them took the advantage of the expanded political space in the country to push forcefully, the agenda for respect of human dignity.

Indeed, popular struggles for democratisation and development became ubiquitous. Theme after theme of conferences, seminars, symposia and workshops emphasised on the need for mass participation in policy-making processes at party and state levels. Thus, women on their part, like any other interest groups, demanded strongly that they be listened to, their gender-based interests be mainstreamed within the new political dispensation. Above all, they demanded equal participation with men in the democratisation project. This is because, globally, the ultimate decision-making institutions within the household and society in general, are male-dominated owing to the prevailing deep-rooted patriarchal ideology.

Women in Top Management in Kenya challenges the dominant view that social, political and economic relations of individuals are based on an androcentric (gender-neutral) arrangement and, that following this, women are to blame themselves for their invisibility and marginality. Indeed, Nzomo sets out to determine and analyse the factors that hinder or facilitate women's advancement to top management positions in Kenya. Moreover, she also attempts to identify strategies that could be employed to facilitate women's advancement in decision-making in general, and top management, in particular.

In fact, five major factors determining women's advancement to top management positions are identified. These include: socio-cultural and corporate culture, education and training, institutional policy framework; legal framework and women's movement and networking.

According to the text under review, of all employees in the public and private sector in Kenya women formed only 21 per cent. It is asserted that in the public

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sector the majority of female employees, up to 75 per cent, are clustered in low ranking, low paying and gender-stereotyped jobs. On the other hand, only 15 per cent and about 9-10 per cent of women employees are to be found in middle and senior management positions respectively.

Having identified the major determinants of women's marginalisation, Nzomo underscores as a matter of urgency, the need to establish programmes for empowering women. These entail gender sensitisation, legal awareness raising and civil education of both women and men. It is hoped, these would eradicate retrogressive socio-cultural attitudes and values based on the patriarchal ideology.

However, the empowerment of women and enhancement of positive gender relations rests on the resolve and ability of the women's movement to network across class, political and socio-economic divides. That the class and politically based differences among women have militated against their general empowerment, have been underscored variously. Networking, for instance, avers Nzomo, 'is the weakest link in the women's movement in Kenya. Women in top management positions are generally still removed from the larger women's network and movement and have not yet developed their own network. Some of these women top managers find more affinity with fellow male top managers than with other women' (p. 47).

Given the above assertion, these women have completely internalised the dominant male corporate culture, as all their professional interactions take place in the context of that culture. Indeed, some top women managers have become more committed defenders than men of the *status quo* that oppresses fellow women (p. 47). The text illustrates this point by naming some women in senior public positions who have been victims of this. A more recent example, however, would suffice to further illustrate the point. It is still fresh in the minds of many Kenyans that a women-member of parliament supported vehemently the continued practice of female circumcision in Kenya — a detested cultural practice that dehumanises women.

The greatest strength of this book lies in its provision of numerous tables and statistical data on gender relations in Kenya's political economy. Indeed, this saves the author the trouble of explaining the gender imbalances. Moreover, the statistics from recent government and non-governmental sources boosts, considerably, the thesis advanced about women's invisibility. Also the appendices provide invaluable additional information of selected women in top management — their experiences and constraints regarding their professions.

Whereas this well researched study provides the reader with the all-important information on women in top management positions, it would have been

appropriate to examine and explain the roles played by gender-sensitive men in facilitating gender balance. Certainly, there are men who have supported women and gender-balance. This would help to demystify the assumption that men *per se*, are anti-empowerment of women. It is time gender studies rose above the exclusivist approach which ignores men's contribution in enhancing gender harmony. Nevertheless, this convincing book constitutes a scientific study of problems and prospects in the process of empowerment of women.