

The Feminist Discourse and the Case of Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA)

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Abstract

Literature on women and gender has sought to present the violation of women's rights from a patriarchal perspective. Through international instruments, recognition of women have been collaborated. The rise of feminist civil society organisation seeking to influence policy decisions at international, regional and national levels have emerged. In Zimbabwe, the role played by women in the socio-economic development of the country have shown the indispensable role of women in society. Through Women of Zimbabwe Arise, this paper discusses the role that WOZA has played in articulating the role of women in nation building through the observance of their right.

Keywords: Zimbabwe, women, gender, human rights, nation-building, participation, patriarchal

Introduction

Most African societies have thrived on patriarchal attributes from time immemorial with decision-making processes have been left to men This has subsequently resulted in women accepting their role as that of producing children and looking after the family, and in some cases being engaged in household chores. The colonial era upgraded this subjugation of women by even denying them their franchise to vote in elections of any kind. With the emergence of feminist movements sweeping across the globe, women began to demand recognition both at work places as well as in various decision-making processes, including involvement in politics. However, with the rise of feminist groups in Britain gender equity rose in prominence with increased demands on authorities for gender equity and gender equality.

Gender and Participation

The literature on women and gender highlight the slow pace of transformation and change despite the introduction of gender biased policies and strategies that has tended to dominant the participatory discourse globally and nationally (Rowan-Campbell, 1999:12). In the rural areas the inequality between men and women is even more pronounced where decision-making and and-ownership are vested in men and women are relegated to subservience (SARDC, 1997:27). This tends to put women in a precarious position, especially in an era where gender equality has gained international recognition on the backdrop of increased pressure by feminist groups to demand this recognition and partake in programmes that affect their lives. Vincent (2004:111) concurs that development interventions are only effective if those at whom these interventions are directed are involved in their planning, implementation and evaluation. Gaventa (2004:4) even suggests that participation is a basic right that requires that citizens perform certain duties as part of their citizenship entitlements. WOZA is one such civic group that has taken up the challenge to confront the patriarchal Zimbabwean society to demand participation in governance processes, observance of human rights and the right of women and children.

In practice, because power relations between people are addressed, participation all too often involves only the voices of the vocal few and poor people and women, in particular, tend to lose out, being marginalized and overlooked in 'participatory processes (Kabeer, 2002:57; McEwan 2005:973). Moreover, as has happened with mainstreaming gender in development (Goetz, 1994), the adoption of participatory approaches by powerful international institutions and governments could submerge the more radical dimensions of participatory practice (Cornwall,2003:67; Kabeer, 2003:58). This pits participation with radicalism. Radical participation as a platform for citizenship not only emphasise community involvement in the processes of local development, but also demand that social development lead to substantive empowerment of community members in terms of rights, power, agency and voice (McEwan, 2005:973).This perceived connection between citizenship, social development and substantive empowerment has been central to attempts reshape and reformulate citizenship, especially given that in most cases prevailing power relations remain untouched, specific groups remain excluded from participation and thus disempowered (Jones and Gaventa, 2002:5).

Proponents of the feminist theory argue that activists for women's rights as human rights can hope to maximize the effect of the significant changes in international law regarding women's rights that emanate from international forums on women (Ackerly & Okin,1999:134). The feminist theorists have criticized the liberals

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whom they accuse of having "...effectively barred women and others from direct participation in civil society because it is believed that their 'disorderly' nature rendered them unable to be rational and reasonable and to develop a sense of justice" (Pateman, 1988, in Barnnet and Low, 2004:99).

The above trappings of the Social Movement theory coincide with those of the Feminist Theory. Feminist Theory is an extension of feminism into theoretical or philosophical discourse and aims to understand the nature of gender inequality and exams women's social roles and lived experience as well as female politics in various fields (Chodorow, 1991:5). Feminist theory aims to understand the nature of inequality and focuses on gender politics, power relations and sexuality in a democracy. Generally the feminist theory provides a critique of social relations; much of feminist theory also focuses on analyzing gender inequality and the promotion of women's rights, interests, and issues. The focus of incorporating the feminist theory will be to draw from their mobilization and advocacy strategies.

Demands by women for equality with men have been a continual theme in Western Society since 1777, when women have been fighting for their rights with possibilities that of women fomenting a rebellion (Buechler, 1990:27). The origins of feminism have been attributed to the change in social values that justified an attempt to change social relations, as well as the development of democratic values and the legitimization of rebellion that resulted from the French and American Revolutions both of which have been used by the Western women as a philosophical basis for their own rebellion (Amin, et al 1990:25). Analysis of existing literature on women helps to eclectically draw lessons that highlight the ways in which feminist organizations such as WOZA construct their agenda as part of their commitment to democratization process and the establishment of democratic institutions.

Marxists theory argues that society is fundamentally constructed of the relations people form as they do and make things needed for survival. MacKinnon (1989:3) further notes that feminist theory presents the molding, direction, and expression of sexuality through which social relations of gender are created, organized, expressed, and directed, creating the social beings known as women and men. Both Marxists and feminists present accounts of the way social arrangements of patterned and cumulative disparity can be internally rational and systematic, yet unjust. The arguments by both Marxists and feminists are theories of power, its derivatives and its mal-distribution which translates to portrayal of social inequalities. While Marxist present scholars present feminism "...as a social creation, feminism scholars view feminism as a socially rational, internally necessary to unequal social orders but historically contingent"(Gauthier, et al ,1980, in MacKinnon, 1989:4). Marxists have criticized feminism as bourgeois in theory and in practice, implying that feminism works in the interest of the ruling class (MacKinnon, 1989:5). One of Marxists' widely assimilated views of working women has been that working women are a liability to the working class because women are more exploitable than their male counterparts. MacKinnon further argues that Marxists portray the employment of women as a contributory factor in undermining the power of the working men to resist the hegemony of capitalism. This leaves women as an impediment to counteracting capitalism and empowering the masses. Engels on the other hand concurs that women are oppressed but notes that this suppression emanates from the specific form of family in class society. Engels points out that woman's economic dependencies a critical nexus between exploitative class relations and the nuclear family structure. Marxism and feminists concur that women are not socially subordinate because of biological dependence, but because of the place to which class society relegates their reproductive capacity (Leacock, 1998:321). According to Engels, women's status is produced through social forces that give rise to the origin of the family, private property, and the state. Additionally, Engels does not think that a division of labour, on the basis of sex does not constitute exploitation and that such practice should be encouraged.

The dependence theory chronicles the genesis of the marginalization of women as a result of the capitalist mode of production. For dependence theorists, the inequality between men and women cannot be understood in isolation from the polarizing tendencies of capitalist mode of production which places the 'peripheral' countries of the Third World in a relationship of dependence with the metropolitan centres of the First World (Kabeer, 2001:46-47). This is where the predominant of the feminist debate emanates from. Saffiotti, 1977, in Kabber, 2001:47) further points out that women's situation is a resul of two intersecting contradictions: 'the contradiction between social classes which is dominant in capitalist social formations, and the contradictions between sexes, which is subordinate in the same type of social formation'. In the underdeveloped regions, the growth of highly capital intensive relations of production in the course of economic growth had led to a general process of pauperization and marginalization of which women suffered disproportionately (Kabeer, 2001:47).

Under feminism, conscious-raising inquiries into intrinsically social situations, into a mix of thought and materiality which comprises gender in the broadest sense in that feminism approaches its world through a process that shares its determination: women's consciousness, not as individual or subjective ideas, but as collective social being. This is the premise on which feminist movements like WOZA derive their inspiration to fight for the cause of women and raise women's awareness on issues that affect their lives, including those that pertain to governance, human rights and citizen participation.

Women and the Feminist Theory

Feminist theory highlights the ways in which a feminist organization such as WOZA constructs its agenda as part of its commitment to democratization processes. Feminist theory aims to understand the nature of inequality and focuses on gender politics, power relations and sexuality¹ in a democracy. Generally the feminist theory provides a critique of social relations; much of feminist theory also focuses on analyzing gender inequality and the promotion of women's rights, interests, and issues. The focus of incorporating the feminist theory will be to draw from their mobilization and advocacy strategies.

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Given this different effect of Industrialisation, it should not be surprising that feminism has always been largely a middle class movement, with working class women fighting their battles primarily in the labour movement and often envying the leisure of the middle class female without seeing the devastating effects of economic dependence. However, the women's movement did not reach its zenith until middle class and working class women were able to ally in the struggle for suffrage (Buechler, 1990:28). In the United States, the impetus for feminism came when women began to work in the abolitionist movement and found that their effectiveness was hampered by their exclusion from many abolitionist societies and by the social stigma against women speaking in public. American women attending a World Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840 were prohibited from participating and made to sit in the balcony behind a curtain. Among them were Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who had organized the first Women's Rights Convention eight years earlier. Susan B. Anthony did not join the movement until 1851, but she became its most tireless and persistent organizer. Such famed abolitionists as Fredrick Douglass and Sojourner Truth were also active feminists.

The struggle for voting rights dominated women's struggle for recognition during these years in which women in Great Britain became the forerunners of the international suffrage movement, but not until they changed their tactics. Decades later, women's suffrage societies, which were led first by Lydia Becker² and then by Millicent Fawcett³, had held meetings, circulated petitions, lobbied Parliament, and disseminated literature, especially John Stuart Mill's '*On the subjection of women*'. In 1903, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) was formed in Manchester. Through civil disobedience, the WSPU attracted much sympathy from the public and the resulting publicity convinced the WSPU that this was the way to arouse public opinion over suffrage (Frechet and Worndl 1993:77).

Prompted by the inflexibility and patronising attitude of the Liberal Party cabinet and Prime Minister Henry Asquith, the WSPU employed increasingly militant tactics. They invaded Parliament, heckling ministers,

1 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminist_theory

2 Lydia Ernestine Becker (1827-1890) was an active leader in the early British suffrage movement and an aspiring amateur scientist. Becker differed from many early feminists in her disputation of essentialized femininity. Arguing that there was no natural difference between the intellect of men and women, Becker was a vocal advocate of a non-gendered educational system in Britain. Available on <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Lydia-Becker> (Accessed 1 November 2008)

3 Millicent Garrett Fawcett was a British reformer, feminist and suffragist. In the British campaign for woman suffrage, Millicent Garrett Fawcett was known for her "constitutional" approach: a more peaceful, rational strategy, in contrast to the more militant and confrontational strategy of the Pankhursts who were English suffrage activists changed the course of women's history with their radical agitation. Available on <http://womenshistory.about.com/od/suffragists/p/fawcett.htm> (Accessed 1 November 2008)

chained themselves to the gates of government buildings and chanted '*votes for women*' until dragged away by the police, marched in good weather and bad, disrupted political meetings by shouting for the vote, broke windows, pour acid in mail boxes, slashed museum paintings, and burned government buildings (Amin et al 1990). When arrested by the police, they underwent long hunger strikes in prison. Their campaign was broken by World War I, in which the militants enlisted wholeheartedly, where they fought alongside their male counterparts, and afterwards, partially in gratitude for their cooperation, suffrage was extended to some women over 30 years of age¹. In the USA, the suffrage movement mainly concentrated on state-by-state activity and by 1912 nine states had granted two million women the vote, having eclectically drawn from the WSPU's militancy and organised a major suffrage parade of 8,000 in Washington on the day Woodrow Wilson arrived for his inauguration (Frechet, 1993:76). The state and the suffragists came into conflict frequently, while at the same time the activists attracted increasing attention with their tactics of mass demonstrations, picketing, and occasional hunger strikes. Although NAWSA disowned the militants, it was stimulated by them to renewed suffrage activity (Jenkins, 1983:12). With globalisation and improved communication setting in, the same feminist mobilisation strategies came to be employed in different parts of the world, ranging from Latin America and Africa. Thus, the resource mobilisation theory coincides with all the basic principles and objectives of the feminist movements, as well as those of the social movement theory where the objective is to mobilize members for engagement with government on issues of policy.

Feminist Movements in Africa

The emergence of feminist movements of the backdrop of dominant patriarchal society in many African states has been a challenge and an enduring exercise. Much of the literature on the rise of feminist movements is encapsulated within the social movement and feminist theories both of which endeavour to present women as victims of male dominance. Thompson (1998) points out that Third World feminists maintain that women's roles as farmers, for subsistence and cash, remain trivial to 'mainstream' theory and also in terms of government policy. This has influenced the state to consider women as belong to a lower rung and as such unable to be considered as independent. However, on the political landscape, women have shown more courage in confronting authorities than their male counterparts. Previously side lined in the allocation of resources as well within family circles where males were sent to school at the expense of women, research has attributed their assumed passiveness to low levels of education. This could also explain why many women's groups tended to concentrate on social issues and leaving more demanding engagements like political participation to males. The Market Women's Association of Nigeria (MWAN) is so powerful and can influence policy through civil disobedience and is able to mobilize their membership quickly, and if not consulted on pertinent issues, can embark on civil disobedience by closing down their market and disrupting peace, thereby making the state ungovernable. In Nigeria, the Market Women's organization is one of the most influential social movements in the country and cause the economy of the country to come to a stand-still if any of their demands are not met by government. In Liberia, it was the famous marches by women's' organizations that brought down Charles Taylor's regime through engaging in civil disobedience. In South Africa, religious organizations were the only outlet for political activity during apartheid through which citizens were able to express their disenchantment. This usually puts social movements and civil society organizations on a collision course with the state.

Rise of Feminist Movement in Zimbabwe

African communities have been characterised by their patriarchal structures that have dominated African societies from time immemorial. As such many African governments, at the inception of their respective first independence governmental structures, have incorporated gender and affirmative action policies within their legislative framework in response to the increasingly wave of change and as an expression of good will and acceptance of gender equity for purposes of nation building. Then there are those Africa countries who gained political independence through the barrel of the gun, where during the liberation war, female fighters fought alongside their male counterparts. At the attainment of independence, the former female liberation fighters demanded their share of the independence spoils, thereby forcing such governments to enact gender policies that would address the needs and aspirations of women. It is therefore befitting that when the postcolonial governments became despotic and authoritarian women become the most affected as they become victims of rape, abuse and even torture. This has given rise to the formation of feminist civil society organizations whose way of mobilization transcends a demand gender equity but include the observance of human rights, good governance and citizen participation.

Piecemeal attempts at addressing the plight of women soon after independence in Zimbabwe saw the creation of the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs, initially perceived by women as

¹ "Feminism" Non-Plagiarizedd Essays-UK, Sample Paper,(2006). Available on <http://www.nonplagiarizedessays.co.uk/sample.html> (accessed 1 November, 2008)

presenting them with a platform to advance their interests with government support (Goredema, 2007:39). However, this ministry, in consonance with ruling party dictates, limited its activities to supporting women within highly circumscribed notions of their place in society, consistently evading and challenge to the oppressive and exploitative status quo (ibid). This added disappointment to women most of whom had bore the brunt of the liberation struggle from colonialism. This hopeless situation became a cause for concern among women who saw not much difference between the attainment of political independence and the colonial era insofar as their social status was concerned.

Tarusenga (1999:54) points out that ‘...although Zimbabwe is signatory to the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), there has been little change in the status of women in the country’. Zimbabwe women still face gender discrimination, play an insignificant role in the decision-making, have limited access to resources and their contribution to the national economy is still not officially recognised (Goredema, 2007:40). The reality is laws are discriminatory, there is lack of enforcement mechanism and there is also a lack of government commitment (CEDAW Shadow Report1997). Gender equity policies have remained ‘statements of intent rather than blueprints for action’¹. McFadden (1999:12) has further criticised women’s organisations who, until the early 1990s, have tended to ‘shy away from making more radical demands on the state, preferring instead to work with and in the state, more often than not as an expression of the personal/class interests which the dominant leadership bring into the movement structures’.

In a crisis, women bear the brunt of shortages of basic commodities, price hikes and have to fend for the family. This is the battle which the Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) found itself in at its inception in 2002 at a time when Zimbabwe was experiencing its worst economic and political crises characterized by gross human rights violations, politically motivated violence and shortage of basic commodities. It was also at a time when the economic crises had resulted in the shrinking of the country’s economy, resulting in job losses for many males, leaving women to fend for the family.

In response to the government’s non-committal attitude towards the implementation of gender sensitive laws, a proliferation of women’s organisations, such as Musasa Project, the Zimbabwe Women’s Resource Centre, Women and Law in Southern Africa [Zimbabwe] and Women Of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) were formed. The formation of these women’s organisations and their subsequent participation in the national constitutional reform debate (between 1995 and 2000), showed how women’s gender-specific demands had been integrated into the broader demand for democratic change (Saunders, 2007:31).

It is widely acknowledged that the women’s movement (with all its ideological and other diversities) is one of the most dynamic in Zimbabwe. Available literature show that from colonial period to the present, the movement has remained one of the most visible forms of social organisations political activism, and support to women in communities (Makanje, et al, 2004:2). Throughout these periods, the women’s movement has changed its strategies and approaches to gender questions. The changes the women’s movement has undergone are indicative of the wider changes in the NGO sector in general. Additionally, the women’s movement has presented a unique way in which it has dealt with issues of justice, power and rights. A vivid illustration would be that of the Women of Zimbabwe Arise, which illustrates an understanding and engagement with power dynamics and the extension of empowerment as a critical case study of work on rights and participation.

The Evolution and Trends in the Women’s Movement in post-colonial Zimbabwe

The historical development of the NGO sector can be viewed within the context of the political and economic backdrop. Modernisation of the African woman was a major colonial project, with religion, morals, good housewifery skills training, health and hygiene being the main areas of concentration. In the 1970s, as the African women came into towns in larger numbers, fear of disease and contagion increased the zeal around this project. In urban townships and rural communities, women were mobilised religious groupings such as Ruwadzano (Church Mothers Unions), as well as social clubs which had begun to mushroom as a conduit for women’s interactions and as a platform through which they could articulate their economic, social and even political problems away from the sight of the law which prohibited such deliberations. It must be noted that these early feminist formations were the forerunners of today’s very strong (numerically), women’s organisations in the country. Organisations such as Association of Women’s Clubs (AWC), and the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) which grew out of these early clubs, today command some of the largest, well-organised and visible memberships. It became common knowledge that in every rural area, one would find such organisations teaching its members survival skills.

The colonial era was characterised by major black struggles around the issues of land political power. By definition and by extension women were excluded from these two issues because land was perceived to belong to the male heads of households. Thus women’s struggles could not have been around these areas. Equally the struggle for self-rule and political power was viewed as man’s terrain. This trend continued until the

¹ Tarusenga, R ‘Principles of Indigenous Economics’, 1974, pp43-44

early years of independence. The formation of Women's Action Group (WAG) in 1983 marked a turning point in the language politics and ways of organising by women (Makanje, 2004:10). From the late 1970s up to the early 1980s, women's movements focused on matters of welfare. The marked change had started to occur during the armed struggle when women joined the liberation struggles as combatants in their own right.

At independence women's participation was acknowledged and rewarded through the passing of various pieces of legislation notably the Legal Age of Majority which made women majors under the law for the first time, and the Sex Disqualification Act which allowed women to hold public office as well as other legislation which gave women equal pay. These pieces of legislation were passed by government, partly as a result of pressure from women leaders within ZANU PF and partly out of government's own volition (Makanje, 2004:11). These changes were driven by the need to mobilise women to participate in post-independence development and reconstruction. The police crackdown on women (including commercial sex workers, single women and any woman) found loitering on the streets during night time that occurred in 1983 was roundly condemned by feminists who proceeded to form WAG in the same year. This was in direct response to this violation of women's rights by the government.

The unique nature of WAG was that, for the first time a women's organisation used the language of rights-women's rights and human rights. The formation was also a re-conceptualisation of women and women's responsibilities, a departure from the language of women's movements before it. WAG also presented a paradigm shift from the precedence set by previous similar movements. The new organisation openly criticised government of violating rights of its own citizens and criticised government policy and actions thereby setting a stage for direct confrontation with the state and making a departure from supporting government and non-political engagement. WAG also set another precedence of protests by writing letters of protest to the Prime Minister and Ministers among senior political leaders. WAG further compiled dossiers of cases of abuse on women and presented these to the state.

WAG on their part, reminded government about the participation of women in the liberation struggle and sought consolidate the gains of independence by ensuring that women's rights of movement and self-determination, women could not be mobilised to 'participate' in post-independence nation building. Without the right to utilise public spaces, WAG argued that women could not equally enjoy the fruits of independence. This revealed the limitations of patriarchal nationalist ideology. The operations and engagements of WAG with government opened up floodgates for the formation of other pro-democratic feminist organisations, with the Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) having been the most notable after WAG.

Women and the Civic virtue: Case of WOZA

The formation of WOZA was prompted by women's desire to get recognition in their demand for participatory space on developmental political, economic as well as on social issues affecting their lives. Over the years, women had been subdued by cultural and traditional practices that impeded their involvement in political and economic issues, or to get into activism as a way of expressing themselves. WOZA came about as a manifestation of this dire need by womenfolk to participate in the various facets affecting women and children in particular and the general populace in general. WOZA also came about as a response to the fast diminishing participatory space and the degeneration of the democratic institutions within the country, the enactment of restrictive legislation, coupled by an unprecedented economic meltdown.

Briefly stated, WOZA's principal objective is *"To impart knowledge and skills enabling women to make informed decisions, build strength of character that demonstrates courage and leadership qualities, increase participation in governance, act as human rights defenders and facilitate the networking of expertise and skills between women towards elevating the standing of women in society"*. This composite objective has enabled and increased the resolve of women activists in WOZA to campaign for the general welfare of the generality of the Zimbabwean public. This also justifies their relevance in a number of areas ranging from human rights, governance and activism and their involvement in the constitutional reform debate¹.

WOZA's mission statement is premised on the notion of "[e]mpowering Zimbabwean women with knowledge and skills designed to stimulate courageous activities within the community". Their vision is "[t]o enable Zimbabwean women to make independent decisions and actively participate in their community's development". In its operations, WOZA has been involved in areas or sectors that incorporate civil activism; democracy & good governance; education/training; human rights; religion; women and their welfare².

WOZA activities have transcended feminist boundaries and have incorporated the right of children to free education, workers who should be provided with descent working conditions, as well as parliamentarians who should address political, economic and social problems bedeviling the country. WOZA activists justify their involvement in these areas by virtue of their being mothers and housewives who in most cases bear the

¹ WOZA- <http://www.kubatana.net/html/sectors/wom010.asp>

² <http://www.kubatana.net/html/sectors/wom010.asp>

brunt of the suffering of their families and are the ones who should put pressure on authorities to ensure that their children get adequate food, that workers (their husbands) get adequate remuneration and that basic commodities are available and affordable.

The most visible inclusiveness of WOZA's objectives has been the incorporation of men into its midst thereby making it a non-sexist civic group and reaching out to a more diversified membership than before. It was a turning point in the constitution and composition of WOZA as it sought to be non-sexist and accommodative of all persons irrespective of gender. This action also stabilized and strengthened WOZA's propensity 'to campaign for the rights of every person in the country enabling it to transcend its former discriminatory position of representing women and children.

WOZA members continue to show great resilience and bravery in adversity, despite continuous detention by government. WOZA has its unique way of drawing the attention of authorities to their demands. Initially a purely feminist organisation, WOZA has transformed into a non-sexist organisation with male members within its ranks. Their demands have assumed a national character, seeking redress of national phenomena such the provision of free education to students and making the prices of basic commodities affordable for everyone in the country. They even at one time summoned female Parliamentarians to put a motion in parliament to have sanitary pads made available to women free of charge, as well as female condoms and birth control pills. Since then, WOZA have regularly summoned parliamentarians and other people in authority in various sectors to address outstanding issues. In recent months, WOZA activists have confronted school headmasters demanding to know how school fees can be paid in foreign currency when workers are being paid in local currency. WOZA also demanded increased educational opportunities and availability of basic commodities at government-controlled prices for their families, arguing that they were the ones who bear the brunt of the suffering children. WOZA has a unique brand of protest in that it is peaceful but very engaging and outspoken, involving demonstrations and clashes with the police. Most importantly, WOZA have also been sucked into the constitutional reform debate alongside other civil society groupings across the country.

WOZA and the Constitution Making Process

Just like much of the pro-democratic affiliate members of civil society, WOZA have also found itself in the midst of the constitutional reform debate where it has consulted its membership on those issues that they want to see included in a new constitution for the country. They have subsequently provided a critique of Article 6 of the GPA under which the constitution-making process is provided for.

In the constitution-making deliberations, WOZA has consulted with its members in recent months on the constitutional reform process initiated by Article 6 of the Global Political Agreement (GPA). They have also recognized this as the opportunity to play a role in making this process result in a truly democratic Zimbabwe. WOZA has already been involved in joint civic society discussions on these developments and will continue to take part in a coordinated response. WOZA points out that they are prepared to participate fully in the process but do so under protest as they feel there are serious shortcomings in the procedures articulated in the GPA. WOZA has also expressed concern that in coming up with the GPA ordinary Zimbabweans were not consulted and did not input into the 15 September 2008 Global Political Agreement. They further note that it may therefore prove inadequate as a tool of creating a truly people-driven constitution. Constitutional Amendment 19 went further in providing wide-ranging direction and oversight role to the Parliament of Zimbabwe, which makes the constitutional process subject to political party control. Whilst WOZA acknowledges that the people voted for Members of Parliament and Senators and recognise that they can be expected to represent the views of the people in their constituency, constitution making should be an inclusive process¹. It is a given that the whole nation needs to take ownership of their right to determine how they are governed. They maintain that at the very least, elected representatives need to conduct public meetings to hear the views of the people in their constituencies in open and direct discussion rather than making unilateral decisions on behalf of citizens like what eventually happened in 1999 during the Constitutional Commission submissions to the President and at the national Referendum. WOZA hasten to warn that should the flawed constitution-making process continue, it runs the risk of being rejected by the electorate at the national Referendum, after which many resources will have come to waste.

On the rule of law and human rights, WOZA has also voiced some concern and argue that a legitimate constitution-making process should be done in a stable and peaceful environment with no coercion. WOZA feels that there is no real operating climate for full enjoyment by citizens of all their freedoms of expression and assembly. There continues to be flagrant disregard for the rule of law, politically motivated and indiscriminate arrests and detentions and a climate of fear remains. Citizens need a tangible sign that they will be able to meet

¹ Zimbabwe's Constitution Making Process - A WOZA Perspective; Available on <http://www.radiovop.com> [Accessed on 26 August 2009]

and debate without harassment before a truly meaningful process can be embarked upon¹.

WOZA bemoans the legacy left behind by the Lancaster House constitution with regards to the social status of women where they were reduced to second-grade citizens with limited rights. They chronicle a brief historical development of constitution-making in Zimbabwe and how citizens were deprived of the opportunity to come up with a constitution that would give them their constitutional rights. They further recognise that Zimbabweans have long dreamed of their very own constitution, not a temporary arrangement that the Lancaster House Constitution was supposed to be. Instead of getting a truly people-driven process in 1987, the constitution was changed to become a one-party state. In 2000, politicians in

ZANU PF wanted to change the constitution again to give the State President even more executive powers. WOZA insists that it was among those civic groups which mobilized their members to vote 'NO' in the National Referendum held in February 1999 because they wanted less concentration on executive powers. They acknowledge that they have had too many false starts and still need to complete this reform process and come up with a constitution that they would be proud of for generations to come.

Given this background, WOZA has made a spirited commitment to participate in the constitution-making process. They further noted that in this spirit and commitment to the constitutional reforms outlined in the WOZA People's Charter and reaffirmed in the Zimbabwe People's Charter, WOZA "...will fully participate in order to ensure people are able to input into this most important of documents. We will contribute despite the threat of arrests and detentions. We will meet any attempts to disrespect our views with 'tough love'²". They have also promised to see the constitution-making process to the end and into the referendum stage by maintaining that they "will take the step towards a fresh process with commitment and vigour, eager to vote in a referendum for a new constitution. We are impatient to arrive at the day we can vote in a free and fair election conducted in terms of the provision of that new democratic constitution so that we can complete the change and get on with our lives".

Given the various challenges and temptations that WOZA has encountered over the years, such as constant detention by law enforcement agents, WOZA has mobilized its members and came up with a list of 17 emotional recommendations which if adopted, would give the civic group an opportunity to participate in the writing of a people-driven and women-friendly constitution for the country.

Participation of Women in Civics

Literature on women and their propensity for activism has been attributed to the fact that women generally feel isolated and insecure, thereby resulting in them wanting to keep to themselves. This has seen women establishing gender-specific civic groups along social, political and professional lines as a consolation for their perceived second grade citizenship, hence their complacency in issues of governance. Some of which include the Zimbabwe Women

Lawyers Association, Zimbabwe Women Parliamentary Association, Women of Zimbabwe Arise. Even within government institutions, especially allocations have been given to women, e.g Ministry of Gender and Women Affairs.

Interaction with feminist organisations revealed that the majority of female respondents are of the view that in any crisis, women are the most affected victims. In an economic crisis women are left to fend for the family while men sit on their laurels. In a war situation, women are victims of rape, an infliction which haunts them for the rest of their lives and usually results in HIV/AIDS transmissions, and unwanted (unplanned) pregnancies, and possible divorce from the existing husband. As such they have taken to defending themselves by being proactive and coming to the forefront of demanding for their rights. Arguments abound that women have cited dangers associated with confrontation with the state, such as arrest, torture and possible eviction from their residence as possible repercussions that they cannot contend with, especially given that in such an eventuality they would leave their children at the mercy of relatives, friends and neighbours.

Conclusion

If the global trends on the rights of women are anything to go by, then feminism is bound for a big success in global politics. Across the globe, calls for the recognition of the female voice in decision making processes have gained popularity. National constitutions and legislations have been redesigned to cater for the accommodation of women. In the SADC region, a quota has been reserved for women seats in the legislative assemblies of individual member states. In the corporate world, South Africa has taken a lead in promoting the image of women in managerial positions. It can therefore be noted that the voice of women have been able to influence policy decisions in both nation states as well as on the globe. In Zimbabwe, recognition of the rights of women has been recognised and incorporated in the constitution as well as in different pieces of legislations. In the new

¹ Op.cit

² See section on The Zimbabwe Charter under

Constitution Parliamentary Committee (COPAC) Constitution,¹ the rights of women as been vividly represented thanks to the role of civil society in campaigning for such rights.

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¹ The COPAC was an inter-party select committee of parliamentarians that was tasked to make nation-wide consultations to get the views of the public on what should be contained in a new constitution from July 2010 beginning of 2011.

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