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The feminist discourse and the development of a civic virtue in Zimbabwe: Case of Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA)

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Recent literature on women and gender has sought to highlight the rising virtue against the violation of women's rights on the backdrop of a dominantly patriarchal society. Given the increasing global recognition and efforts to uphold the status of women, international instruments and legislation have been incorporated into the arguments that support the recognition of women's rights in every facet of social, economic and political life. This has given rise to a plethora of feminist civil society organisations seeking to influence policy decisions at international, regional and national levels. In Zimbabwe, the role played by women in the liberation struggle as well as in the post-colonial dispensation has justified the need for the upliftment of the status of women in society. Engagement with authorities to address the rights of women and children has been at the epi-centre of the feminist discourse in Zimbabwe. Through such feminist civil groups in Zimbabwe such as the Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), the fight for the women's rights and other gender equity issues have been taken to dizzy heights. This paper discusses the role that WOZA has played in articulating the role of women in nation building through the observance of their rights.

Key words: Feminist, women, gender, civil society, human rights, participation, patriarchal.

INTRODUCTION

Patriarchal societies have tended to sideline women by subjecting them not only to background roles, but going further to regard them as minors and beneficiaries. 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 decision-making processes have been left to men and 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 (Besson and Marti, 2006). However, with the rise of feminist groups in Britain that demanded for gender

equity, and the conceding and giving in to such demands by authorities led to same demands being exerted on African authorities, resulting in the concept of gender equity gaining ground on the African continent.

METHODOLOGY

In an endeavour to establish the opinion of women activists on the extent to which the feminist discourse has obtained in the country, the researchers interviewed 50 members of the WOZA civic group as well as an additional 10 women from different backgrounds and possessing different academic and professional backgrounds. A focus group interview was used as this approach enabled the researchers to interview women (and a few men) in one place. In the interview process the interviewers also sought to establish whether women have been participants in the formulation and

implementation of public policy and whether existing legislation helps to create a conducive environment for the inclusion of women in public affairs.

A gendered approach to participation of women: A theoretical perspective

There are several theories that speak to the way women are portrayed and/or treated in the socio-economic and political realms. Among the most notable theories that are discussed in this paper include the feminist theory, the social movement theory, the Marxist theory and the dependency theory. The literature on women and gender highlights the slow pace of transformation and change despite the introduction of gender biased policies and strategies that have tended to dominate the participatory discourse globally and nationally. In the rural areas the inequality between men and women is even more pronounced where decision-making and ownership are vested in men and women are relegated to subservience (Buechler, 2011:27). This tends to put women in a precarious position, especially in an era where gender equality and equity have gained international recognition and currency. This is on the backdrop of increased pressure by feminist groups to demand recognition and participation in programmes that affect their lives for effective development. 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' (Goetz and Gaventa, 2001:73). Moreover, as has happened with mainstreaming gender in development, the adoption of participatory approaches by powerful international institutions and governments could submerge the more radical dimensions of participatory practice. This pits participation with radicalism. Radical participation as a platform for citizenship not only emphasizes community involvement in the processes of local development, but also demands that social development leads to substantive empowerment of community members in terms of rights, power, agency and voice (Kabeer, 2003:58). This perceived connection between citizenship, social development and substantive empowerment has been central to attempts to reshape and reformulate citizenship, especially given that in most cases prevailing power relations remain untouched, specific groups remain excluded from participation and thus disempowered.

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 and Okin, 1999:134). The feminist theorists have criticized the liberals whom they accuse of having "...effectively barred women and others from direct participation in civil society activities and operations" (Price-Chalita, 2009). This pits feminist theory with the Social Movement theory. The Social Movement theory seeks to explain why social mobilisation occurs, the forms under which it manifests, as well as potential social, cultural, and political consequences that eventually obtains. Recent developments across the globe have noted that social movement theory and practice culminate in and is subsumed in contentious political activism. This explains why the operations of most social movements are associated with contentious politics.

The trappings of the Social Movement theory cited above coincide with those of the feminist theory. Feminist theory is an extension of feminism and aims to understand the nature of gender inequality examining 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 relation. 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 derives its propensity to foster mobilization and advocacy strategies within a group. 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.

Analysis of existing literature on women helps to eclectically draw lessons that highlight the ways in which feminist organizations construct their agenda as part of their commitment to the democratization process and the establishment of democratic institutions.

Social relations and decisions that people make as surviving strategies are at the intersection of Marxist and feminist theories. Marxists theory argues that society is fundamentally constructed of the relations people form as they do and make things needed for survival. On the same note, MacKinnon (1989:3) notes that feminist theory presents the moulding, 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 informed by theories of power, its derivatives and its mal-distribution which translates to portrayal of social inequalities. While Marxist scholars present feminism as 'a social creation and reaction to a phenomenon' (Kabeer, 2001:46-47), feminism scholars view feminism as 'a socially rational, internally necessary to unequal social orders but historically contingent' (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. Marxists further portray the employment of women as a contributory factor in undermining the power of the working men to resist the hegemony of capitalism. This argument presents women as an impediment to counteracting capitalism and empowering the masses. Engels, one of the fathers of socialism, maintains that women are oppressed and such oppression emanates from the specific form of family in class society. Engels further notes that woman's economic dependencies are 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 (Logan and Bratton, 2006:35). 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. However, Engels does not think that division of labour, on the basis of sex constitute exploitation and that such practice should be encouraged.

The dependence theory attributes the marginalisation of women to capitalism. The theory maintains that the marginalization of women is 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 predominance of the feminist debate emanates from. Women's situation is a result 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' (Kabeer, 2001:47). In the underdeveloped regions, the growth of highly capital intensive relations of production in the course of economic growth has led to a general process of pauperization and marginalization of which women suffered disproportionately.

Feminism and the feminist discourse

Feminism comprises gender in the broadest sense which gives feminism its global perspective and women's consciousness, not as individual or subjective ideas, but as collective social beings. 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 democratic governance, observance of human rights and citizen participation. Demands by women for equality have been a continual theme in Western society since 1777, when women fought 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, the development of democratic values and the legitimization of rebellion that resulted from the French and American Revolutions. Both revolutions have been used by the Western women as a philosophical basis for their own rebellion (Amnesty International, 2009). The other major cause was industrialisation, which disrupted the entire economic structure of society and with it the family as the basic unit of production. Women and children until the 20th century have been a prime source of cheap labour until the development of the free labour market in which individuals were hired and paid cash for their labour. Previously, women had worked as subsidiaries to the male head, who received the remuneration for family labour. This monopolistic access to the necessary resources for survival logically gave men more power over women, made women more dependent and contributed to the feeling of many women that they were useless dependents. In effect, women had to enter the labour market in order to get the wherewithal to buy what they had once produced in their own homes (Amnesty International, 2009). Economic necessity quickly brought women of the new masses into the labour market to work for substance wages. But the values of the emerging middle class, especially the '*cult of the lad*' and the emphasis on female leisure and consumption as signs of his husband's success, prohibited paid employment for middle class women (Amin et al., 1990:26). Thus they were kept in feudalistic relationship to their husbands.

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 (Buechler, 1990:28). 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. 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 Becker¹ and later by Millicent Fawcett², 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 (Price-Chalita, (2009).

Besson and Marti (2006) wrote elaborately about protest action by vindicated women. Prompted by the inflexibility and patronising attitude of the Liberal Party cabinet and Prime Minister Henry Asquith, the WSPU employed increasingly militant tactics. Women are said to have invaded Parliament, heckling ministers, chained themselves to the gates of government buildings and chanted '*votes for women*' until they were dragged away by the police, disrupted political meetings by shouting for the vote, broke windows, pour acid in mail boxes, slashed museum paintings, and burned government buildings (Besson and Marti (2006). Arrest by the police did not deter women from protest action. They underwent long hunger strikes in prison. However, their campaign was temporarily broken by the outbreak of the World War I. In the ensuing war environment, the female militants (and former protesters) enlisted wholeheartedly, and fought alongside their male counterparts, and afterwards, partially in gratitude for their cooperation, suffrage was extended to some women over 30 years of age³. In the USA, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), formed in May 1890 through the unification of the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) and the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) became the parent organization of hundreds of smaller local and state groups, canvassed for and by helping to pass woman suffrage legislation at the state and local level.

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 women in Washington on the day Woodrow Wilson arrived for his inauguration (Symington and Sprenger, 2005:45). 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

¹ 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)

² 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)

³ "Feminism" Non-Plagiarized Essays-UK, Sample Paper, (2006). Available on <http://www.nonplagiarizedessays.co.uk/sample.html> (accessed 1 November, 2008).

disowned the militants, it was stimulated by them to renewed suffrage activity (Skeet, 2009:12). With the passage of time the NAWSA was reformed as the League of Women Voters which continued the legacy.

With globalization and improved communication setting in, the same feminist mobilization strategies came to be employed in different parts of the world, ranging from Latin America and Africa. Thus, the resource mobilisation theory emulates most of 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. The engagement can assume either violent protest or peaceful engagement.

Feminist movements on the Africa continent

The emergence of feminist movement on the backdrop of a 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. The conception by Thompson (1998) that Third World feminist present the role of women as that of farming for subsistence and cash, remains a triviality to 'mainstream' theory and also in terms of government policy. This has influenced the state to consider women as belonging to a lower social stratum that makes them unable to be considered as independent. However, on the political landscape, women have shown more resilience in confronting authorities than their male counterparts. Previously sidelined in the allocation of resources 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.

However, modern developments have resulted in women taking a more confrontational role in demanding recognition and a show of power. 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 (UNDP, 2007). If not consulted on pertinent issues, the MWAN can embark on civil disobedience by closing down their market and disrupting peace, thereby making the state ungovernable and cause the economy of the country to come to a stand-still. In Liberia, it was the famous marches by women's organizations that brought down former President Charles Taylor's regime through engaging in civil disobedience. In South Africa, women's spontaneous rebellion against pass laws, was one of the self-made outlets for political activity during apartheid to show their disenchantment with the regime. This usually puts social movements and civil society organizations on a collision course with the state.

Rise of the Feminist Movement in Zimbabwe

African communities have been characterised by their patriarchal structures 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 increasing wave of change, expression of good will and acceptance of gender equity for purposes of nation building. There are also those African 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 some post-colonial governments began to gradually lose sight of the role of women in the liberation struggle, women became vocal and campaigned for such recognition. The absence of pro-women policies in some post-colonial African countries has relegated women to become victims of rape, abuse and even torture. This has given rise to the formation of feminist community based organisations as well as social movements whose quest for recognition by the predominantly patriarchal African society had gone unchallenged for decades. Among the demands by feminist movements 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 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. The hopeless situation became a cause for concern among women who saw not much difference in the situation of the majority of women, most of whom are based in remote rural areas. To them the social status of most women had not changed much. This statement is supported by Win (2004:19) who 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'. Zimbabwean women still face gender discrimination, play an insignificant role in decision-making (both domestically and nationally), have limited access to resources and their contribution to the national economy is still not officially recognised (Ndlovu, 2009:40). The reality is that existing laws are discriminatory, there is lack of enforcement mechanism and there is also a lack of government commitment (CEDAW Shadow Report 1997). Gender equity policies have remained 'statements of intent rather than blueprints for action' (Win, 2004:19). McFadden (1999:12) has further criticised women's organisations which, 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 (Saunders, 2007:29). 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 economic characterized by 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, diversities and nuances) is one of the most dynamic

in Zimbabwe. Available literature shows that from the colonial period to the present, the movement has remained one of the most visible forms of social organisation, 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 where a litany of feminist groups has emerged, especially in recent years. Additionally, the women's movement has presented a unique way of dealing with issues of justice, power and rights. A vivid illustration would be that of the WOZA, which provides an understanding and provides a platform with power dynamics and the extension of empowerment as a critical case study of work on rights and participation.

The evolution and progression of 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 (Makanje et al., 2004:1). In the 1970s, as African women came into towns in larger numbers, there was a general increased fear of disease and contagion. In urban townships and rural communities women were mobilised into religious groupings such as Ruwadzano (Church Mothers' Unions), as well as social clubs which had begun to mushroom as a conduit for women's interaction 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 (Ndlovu, 2009). 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 early years of independence in the 1980s. 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 status. 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. 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). 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 for violating rights of its own citizens as well as government policies 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 protest action 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 to consolidate the gains of independence by ensuring that women's rights of movement and self-determination should be observed and recognised for 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 and 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 debate⁴.

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 welfare⁵.

⁴ WOZA- <http://www.kubatana.net/html/sectors/wom010.asp>

⁵ <http://www.kubatana.net/html/sectors/wom010.asp>

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 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 that is able to reach out to a more diversified membership. 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 police for unauthorised public protests. Their demands have assumed a national character, seeking redress of national phenomena such as 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 affecting women, children as well as workers. At one time, WOZA activists confronted school headmasters demanding to know how school fees could be paid in foreign currency when workers were being paid in local currency. WOZA also demanded increased educational opportunities and availability of basic commodities at government-controlled prices, 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, resulting in the elaborate enactment of pro-women policies being included in Zimbabwe's new Constitution.¹

WOZA and the constitution-making process in Zimbabwe

Just like much of the pro-democratic affiliate members of civil society in Zimbabwe, 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. As their contribution to the reform process, they have subsequently provided a critique of Article 6 of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) under which the constitution-making process was provided.

WOZA has recognized this contribution as the opportunity to play a pivotal role in contributing to a democratic Zimbabwe. WOZA has already been involved in joint civic society discussions on similar developments and has continued to take part in a coordinated response. WOZA has shown commitment and preparedness in full participation in the contribution-making and revision processes. WOZA has also expressed concern that in coming up with the GPA ordinary Zimbabweans were not consulted. They further noted with concern that the GPA did not prove an adequate as a tool for the creation of a truly people-driven constitution. Constitutional Amendment 19 went further in providing wide-ranging direction and

oversight role to the Parliament of Zimbabwe, which made 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 process⁶. The whole nation needs to take ownership of their right to determine how they are governed, who should govern them and under what conditions. WOZA members 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 happened in 1999 during the Constitutional Commission submissions to the President and at the National Referendum that followed. 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 political environment with no coercion. WOZA feels that there is no real operating climate for full enjoyment of all their freedoms of expression and assembly by citizens. 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 and debate without harassment before a truly meaningful process can be embarked upon⁷.

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. WOZA provides a brief chronological historical development of constitution-making in Zimbabwe to show the extent to which women have been disregarded and how citizens in general have been 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 was one of the various civic groups that mobilized their members to oppose the one-party state system by voting '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. In March 2013 the new Constitution adopted and became to the new law of the country.

Given this background, WOZA made a spirited commitment to participate in the constitution-making and adoption 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 love⁸". 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

⁶ Zimbabwe's Constitution Making Process - A WOZA Perspective; Available on <http://www.radiovop.com> [Accessed on 26 August 2009]

⁷ Op.cit

⁸ See section on The Zimbabwe Charter under

Table 1. Presentation of participants in a workshop.

Region	Total no. of workshops	No. of participants	Attendance %	
			Female	Male
Bulawayo	7	1147	64	36
Harare	6	925	54	46
Manicaland	6	614	59	41
Mash. Central	1	52	77	23
Mash. West	5	696	41	59
Masvingo	6	757	60	40
Mat. North	7	755	53	47
Mat. South	5	586	59	41
Midlands	5	536	51	49
Total Average	48	6068	56	44

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 were later considered and incorporated into the new Constitution.

RESULTS

Several results from this research indicated that a lot still need to be done to enhance the participation of women in governance processes as well as in the formulation and implementation of public policy. The following responses concur with the need to incorporate women in different spheres of life. The results will emanate from the discussion on interaction through workshops, the level of women participation in politics; the impact of patriarchy on women, access to education, access to information, limited chances of securing formal employment and economic independence, residential location.

Interaction through workshops

It was noted that workshops enable women to interact and share ideas. The workshop atmosphere enables women to freely discuss issues that affect their lives. It was noted that at public workshops, there would more men than women which implies that women lose the opportunity to express themselves on matters that they want addressed or discussed in public. The following is a presentation of participants in a workshop (Table 1).

Participation in civics

Although WOZA has become the face of women activism in Zimbabwe, in general women present a low mem-

bership. It was also noted that with age, women show less interest in public activities and would rather devote their time to looking after children. Below is a statistical representation of WOZA members that attended a WOZA Annual General Meeting from the researchers interviewed the participants.

Residential location and participation

Residential location encompasses several factors that militate against women involvement in public affairs (Figure 1). Firstly the patriarchal nature of most African (and more so rural) societies has relegated women to the position of second class citizens whose duty would revolve around the home and in some cases attending to the field. Consequently, this practice has deprived women of access to information. These deprivations have culminated in women lagging behind in most progressive ideas and practices such as activism, access to information, limited chances of securing formal employment and economic independence. These attributes help in building an independent individual who is able to make informed decisions in different spheres. Below are responses from women respondents on factors that affect their political participation and this has been compared against their urban counterparts (Table 2).

Below are some of the responses drawn from women respondents on the key drivers to participation?

Responding to the question: ‘*What are some of the key drivers of participation?*’ most participants cited level of education and age, as well as residential location. One academic respondent expressed the view that:

‘Enlightening and educating citizens are the most viable pre-requisites for participation because it is mostly from informed⁹ and confident citizens knowledgeable about

⁹ For this study ‘informed’ does not necessarily mean educated. Even those with low literacy levels can be informed on certain issues

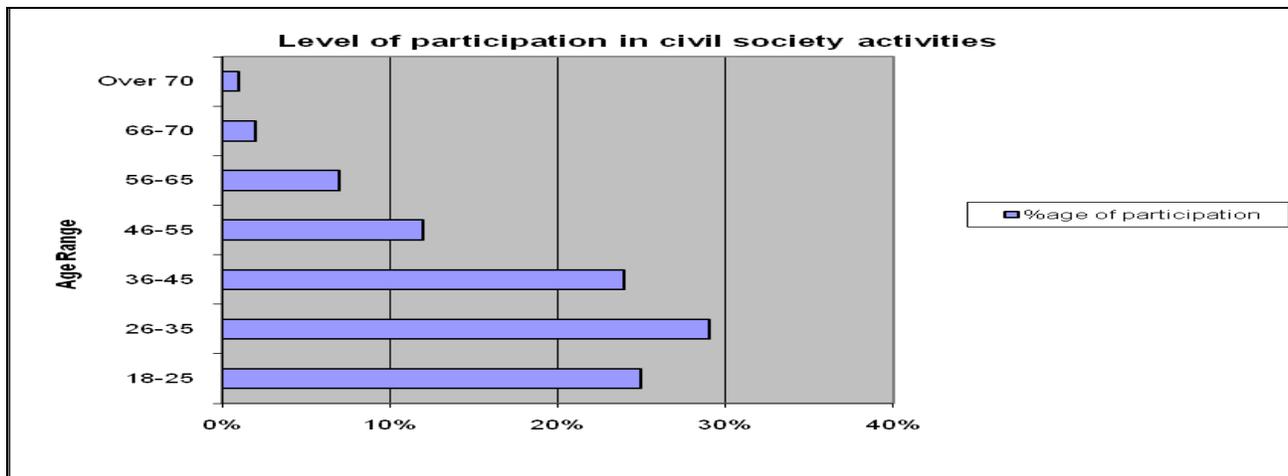


Figure 1. Level of participation in civil society activities.

Table 2. Factors that affect women's participation in politics.

Factors influencing political participation [n=196]	Residential Location	
	Rural	Urban
Freedom of expression	No	No
Youth Militia	Yes	Yes
Intimidation and Harassment	Yes	No
Traditional Chiefs	Yes	No
Physical Assault	Yes	Yes
Voting Closely Monitored	Yes	Yes
Eviction From Homestead	Yes	Yes
Confiscation of Property and Livestock	Yes	No

events on the ground that one would expect a meaningful contribution to the democratic discourse' (Feminist Respondent 3, 25 March, 2010).

However, one respondent was particular about women domiciled in rural areas and responded that:

'The rural/urban divide has been deliberately destroyed by the state through its skewed policies on land redistribution and informal settlements where many people were displaced and forced into rural areas and vice versa' (WOZA activist, 21 March 2010).

Impact of restrictive legislation women participation in public affairs

In addition to the key drivers mentioned above, it was also noted that legislation tended to curtail women's participation in public affairs, moreso in political activities.

Most women are fearful of the wrath law-enforcement agents and cannot withstand breaking the law and ending up in police cells.

Members of the National and Regional Council structures interviewed expressed the view that their operations have been derailed by repressive legal requirements that require police clearance for any gathering, including report-back meetings. In response to the question *'How has existing legislation affected mobilisation of your members?'* one respondent stated that:

'Existing legislation has adversely affected our interaction with our members. One cannot seek police clearance to meet with people in your constituency. Also one cannot seek for clearance to embark on demonstrations and protests against deteriorating democratic institutions. You cannot expect an authoritarian state to allow you to expose its misdeeds in the streets. And I don't know if proceeding to protest would be regarded as taking the law in our hands' (NCA respondent 4, 22 December 2009).

The above perceptions were reinforced by a WOZA activist who pointed out that:

'Fighting for democracy calls for sacrifice and for there to

be democracy in the country, citizens have got to sacrifice their lives in the face of a brutal regime that is not prepared to share and widen political space. This is not an easy task' (WOZA activist 5, 22 December 2009).

'Do you mobilise your members to participate in elections and the constitution-making process?' a respondent maintained that:

'WOZA realizes that citizens should not continue to complain about human rights and democratic decay without doing anything about it. Firstly we encourage our members to be part of the constitution that they want to see [sic]. On elections, since 2009 we have mobilised Zimbabweans to continue with the action that they took in March 2008 of voting for a political party of their choice' (WOZA chief respondent, 20 January, 2011).

Access to information and citizen empowerment

Information as a citizen empowerment tool featured prominently among various respondents. Responding to the question:

'To what extent does information empower citizens?' One member of the NCA information department asserted that:

'Making information available to citizens is a prerequisite for empowering them to make informed political decisions and be able to engage in fruitful decisions on issues that affect them and their families' (NCA respondent 15, 27 April, 2010).

Women and participation in public life

It has been argued that women have been denied access to decision-making due to the view that societies define women's space as being private rather than public (Morna, 2004:31). Of all decision-making processes, politics is the most notable public space which has been the most hostile about granting access to women (Morna, 2004:31). This is the premise on which the researcher interacted with respondents seeking to explore opportunities available for women to participate. Closely associated with women's level of attendance at public workshops is their propensity to participate in politics. Interviews carried out with the WOZA participants indicated that women still shy away from public spaces and leave such rigorous spaces to men. Even literature in this regard confirms the same (Mc Fadden, 1992).

However, despite these challenges, the researchers, through snowballing and referrals, were able to interview WOZA activists. Issues such as fear and intimidation against women were cited by the majority of female respondents as some of the challenges to participation

faced by them. One respondent cited violence and intimidation of women, noting that:

'Most women are overcome by fear and become victims of rape, torture and intimidation, usually perpetrated as a punitive measure for taking part in protests or being married to civil society activists or active politicians belonging to different political organisations. This has impacted negatively on women's capacity to participate in politics, but most have endured' (CSO respondent 24, 25 April, 2010).

The researchers observed that women are intimidated by serious accusations such as those of treason. In some cases, women activists have been intimidated by accusations of a sensitive nature from politicians and state security agents accusing them of engaging in subversive activities. One respondent, a Midlands provincial member of a CSO Coordinating Committee, pointed out that a regular accusation against women activists that had frightened most women activists has been:

'You will be charged with "engaging in subversive activities" which presents a threat to state security and which attracts a long stretch in prison' (WOZA activist 1, 19 December, 2009).

They noted that such allegations attract lengthy custodial sentences, hence the fear of leaving behind children tended to overwhelm most women activists with fear. The same respondent elaborated that most women activists have children and other dependents hence they are fearful of leaving them behind once they are arrested. Responding to the question:

'What role have female politicians played in promoting the rights of women and children, and, if any, have they been able to adequately represent the interests of women and children?'

The majority of WOZA respondents accused female politicians of being insensitive to the plight of their women counterparts with some women parliamentarians having supported the enactment of repressive laws like POSA and AIPPA, which action:

'...has shown the magnitude of insensitivity of government officials to the plight of the general public, especially the deterioration of the economy, shortage of basic commodities, the collapse of education and health delivery systems in the country and the failure by government to repeal restrictive legislation' (WOZA Respondent 2, 19 December 2009).

Conclusion

If the constitutional developments in Zimbabwe with

regards to the constitutional provisions on women's rights are anything to go by, then one can safely say the campaign by feminist groups in including WOZA had not been in vein. The new Constitution of Zimbabwe reflects heavily on the rights of women as the various democratic provisions from which women and children would benefit. This is in recognition of calls for national constitutions and legislation to be redesigned to cater for the accommodation of women in public policy formulation and implementation. 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 has been able to influence policy decisions in both nation states as well as in the globe.

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