

The Structure and Role of a Women's Wing in a Political Party:

a Case study from Uganda

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MULTI-PARTY SYSTEMS IN UGANDA: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Uganda was governed under the movement system of democracy for 21 years (1985 – 2005) and prior to the national and local government elections in February and March 2006 respectively, the last multi-party elections had been held in 1980. The debate on political transition in Uganda from the movement political system to the multi-party system gained momentum in 2003. During the movement national conference in 2003, it was proposed and agreed that the political space be opened for political parties to operate.

Multi-Party Systems in Uganda (Continued)

However this decision could only be made through a national referendum. Consequently a referendum was held in July 2005 and the citizens through a vote decided that the country returns to multi-party politics. Because elections were due in February/March 2006, this did not give political parties enough time within which to organize both at the local and national levels. Various political parties were registered and some were able to elect party organs. These Political parties included among others; the NRM-O, FDC, DP, UPC and PPP. Political parties are guided by their constitutions, manifestos, strategic plans and budgets.

Population and women representation

- Uganda's population is < 33 million people
- Women are over 59% (almost 20m Ugandans are women)
- Since the 1950's to date, the no. of women representation - from the local to national level has increased from 3 – 40%
- While the 1995 Constitution of Uganda provides for at least 30% women's representation, the women's minimum agenda to Political parties and organizations in the women's manifesto calls for at least 40% representation.

Population and women representation (contd)

- The reality is that all political parties fail short of women's representation in their governance structures: **Why?**
 - No deliberate measures were put in place to realize this;
 - Political party structures tend to remain highly patriarchal with few women in concrete leadership positions that yield power to enable them pursue gender issues;
 - Some parties still think women are a weaker sex, so they make it difficult for women to become leaders.

What should be done?

- ❑ Political parties should consider women as an important voting bloc that can make a difference because of their numbers and also because there are certain tasks which women are more apt at handling than men (e.g women development groups in rural areas are more effective than men's groups)
- ❑ Political parties should sufficiently reflect gender concerns in their policies, structures and programmes (e.g in Education and Employment benefits, Economic empowerment);
- ❑ The creation of more districts in Uganda has also increased the no. of women in parliamentary politics which is an opportunity for women's engagement in multi-party governance

Why a Women's Wing/League in a Political Party?

- ❑ Because often times there is limited space for women in male dominated political party structures and processes;
- ❑ Men tend to dominate the influential decision making structures (NEC) and in most cases women's concerns are not adequately addressed (such as women domestic demands, illiteracy, poverty, patriarchy and negative cultural, religious and traditional practices);
- ❑ Male-oriented norms and structures to a great extent mitigate against women's participation;

Why Women's wing is important to a political Party (contd)

- ❑ Multi-party systems give women the opportunity to rely on alternative power centers (Women Leagues) which can provide a more robust gender equality lobby for them to raise their issues instead of engaging one space, the government as it is always the case;
- ❑ Women leagues can beef-up/strengthen the Party's numerical strength through recruitment and mobilization of more women to the party;
- ❑ The women wing acts as a platform for women's democracy

Structure of the Women's League

(case study FDC –WL, Uganda)

- ❑ Pursuant to Article 22(ii) of the FDC Constitution, the women league is empowered to form this organ of the party by all female members of the party constituted at the polling area branch, parish, sub-county, constituency, district and national levels;
- ❑ The name of this special organ of the party is Forum for Democratic Change Women League(FDC-WL);
- ❑ The Women League has a Constitution to manage its affairs approved by the National Executive Committee and in alignment with and subordinate to the Party Constitution.

Structures of the FDC- Women League

- **National Delegates Conference (convenes every after 4 years and each district is represented by 2 women)**
- **Extra-ordinary Conference (can sit anytime when there is a major issue to address)**
- **Secretary (Chairman of FDCWL who represents women on the FDC NEC)**
- **National Executive Committee (21 members and holds office for 2 terms (4yrs))**
- **District Council (consists of all chair persons of the CEC and 3 delegates elected democratically from and by constituencies)**

FDCWL Structures Contd.

- **Constituency Council**(consists of all chairpersons of the sub-county committees and 3 delegated elected democratically from and by the sub-counties)
- **Sub-county Council** (consists of all members of the Parish committee and 3 delegates elected democratically from and by parishes)
- **Parish Council** (attended by members of PAB committees in good standing , delegates elected democratically by and from PAB committees and all executive members of the PABs in the parish)
- **Polling Area Branch (PAB) Council**(Every member of the FDC shall belong to a PAB)

Functions of the 3 main structures

1. National Delegates Conference

- It is the highest authority of the FDCWL.
- It is constituted with 2 members/women from every district of Uganda.
- It convenes after every four (4) for the main object of electing new office bearers (NEC) of the FDCWL

2. National Executive Committee

- It is the management committee of the FDCWL.
- It is constituted with a committee of 21 women elected according to the national regions of the country;
- It holds office for 2 terms (4 years)

3. Polling Area Branch (PAB)

- This is the basic unit of the FDCWL;
- It is constituted with every member of the FDC from the grassroots/village/Polling area;
- It's main object is to recruit all women/members above 18 years to the FDC.

Relationship of the Women's League with the Party

- The FDC-WL is a voluntary women/ organ of the FDC;
- The colours, symbols, logo and motto are those of Forum for Democratic Change (Party);
- The slogan of this organ is “*No woman left behind, no man left out*”;
- The FDC-WL operates on a national, district, sub-county, parish and village level in line with the Party's constitution;
- Membership of the FDC-WL is open to all FDC Women who accept its policy guidelines, aims and objectives

Role of FDC - Women league in the Party

- Recruit continuously more women to the party;
- Mobilize women members for party activities;
- Identify, groom and nurture potential women leaders for the party;
- Identify and prepare women candidates for elections;
- Champion the general interests and rights of the Ugandan women in the socio-economic and political life of the country;
- Ensure that the party considers and implements the women's agenda.

How effective is the women's assembly in representing women constituents:

Note: It is worth noting that the FDCWL through its nine (9) structures has made tremendous strides in selling the Party and women's constitution, party platform and its manifesto through out Uganda.

- It is on record that FDC and its organs, is the only opposition party in Uganda which has nation-wide representation of all structures and members.

Effective Representation cont.

- The FDC-WL in collaboration with the FDC-YL has managed to reach every district and constituency of Uganda and, in so doing it has not only registered new members but also identified both women and youths candidates;
- Through their action plan at Regional and District level, a number of constituents have been reached physically and others through social networking: this is a very important platform where a number of issues of concern are raised by both leaders and members of the party purposes of coming up with the best practices to develop the party.

Effective representation contd.

- Basing on the “No woman left behind, and no man left out” has yielded a lot in terms of identifying candidates (both male and female) for all leadership positions within and outside the party should a vacancy falls;
- The Women’s assembly utilizes the opportunity of traditional public holidays such as the International women’s day to reach out to more women and share different information and experiences;

Effective representation contd.

- The FDC-WL NEC is tasked with the responsibility of communicating with the structures at different levels of all the party instruments and current affairs of the party/league.

Challenges involved:

- ❑ Not all women leaders are committed to their leadership assignments in their structures;
- ❑ Limited and inadequate funding at times affects the timelines in which the Action plan should have been implemented;
- ❑ Some PABS(which are the smallest units of the FDC/WL structure in some regions of the country are not fully constituted: this makes it difficult for the WL to have the first constituents to build on.

Conclusion

Although the FDC-WL has made a few successes here and there, there is still more to be done under Uganda's Multi-party democracy where some members (women) of society still believe in *individual merit politics* of the former Movement system of government.