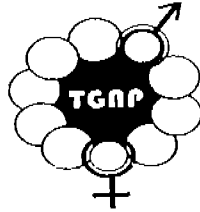


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**GENDER BALANCING INITIATIVES IN ZANZIBAR:**

**NO POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT WITHOUT POLITICAL WILL**

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## GENDER BALANCING INITIATIVES IN ZANZIBAR:

### No political empowerment without political will

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#### *Introduction*

Zanzibar is made up of two main islands of Unguja and Pemba with a total area of 2,654 square kilometres, and has an estimated population of 839,243 and will stand at 900,000 souls by the turn of the millennium. During the 1988 National Census Zanzibar population was pegged at 642,578 and has since grown at the average growth rate of 3 percent.

From the 1988 National Census Zanzibaris were packed at 275 per square kilometre and by the turn of the millennium they would be 358 per square kilometre and by Year 2006 when Zanzibar population is expected to be 1,090,341 Zanzibar will be using a square kilometre for 468 people.

Zanzibar is part of the United Republic of Tanzania as of April 26, 1964. It is a full partner to the Union of Tanzania achieved after the signing of the Articles of Union under the President of Zanzibar Abeid Amani Karume and Julius Nyerere of Tanganyika. Zanzibar was a sovereign state with a seat at the United Nations after gaining her independence on December 10, 1963 and staged a Revolution on January 12, 1964.

The islands have had a long history of people who visited it. Being strategically placed it was an ideal place for those who were in the business of acquiring slaves, spices and ivory to those who were after acquiring areas of influence for colonisation. It was also to become the trekking station for those who wanted to go to the hinterland to spread Christianity.

While history has evidenced that most of the journeys inland Africa made by missionaries were organised in Zanzibar, little effort was made to christianise the islanders. All who became Christians were ex slaves who came from mainland Africa though the lands to build churches were provided by the Sultan. The first group of ex slaves was given a huge tract of land at Mbweni, West of Zanzibar Town, where residency and a place of worship were built.

On the other side, the Arabs, running from religious persecution in modern day Iran, and those who came over for the sole purpose of establishing an empire from the modern day

Oman, found haven in Zanzibar. In between them they brought Islam as religion which was easily embraced.

The first Muslim convoy from Iran was recorded to have arrived at South East of Unguja Island at Kizimkazi village about 900 years ago as evidenced by archaeological findings and was led by Sheikh Hassan Bin Ali. He introduced the Sunni sect. The Ibaadh sect was brought to Zanzibar with the coming of the First Sultan, Seyyid Said in 1854. However, the Oman Arabs had been here prior to the coming of Seyyid Said.

With that background Islam as religion has easily moved into becoming de facto national religion. We wish not to speculate the percentage of Muslims to the Zanzibar population but suffice it for us to say that Zanzibar and Zanzibari have known nothing but Muslim tradition. However, the fact of being minority religion has never interfered in the appointment of non-Muslim in high government positions

When the British, following the Berlin Partition Conference, came to Zanzibar and the Order in Council promulgated in 1890, Zanzibar was already following Islamic law. The Common law was then introduced as parallel system to that of Islam and Zanzibar maintained that system ever since.

The Zanzibar court system is provided in two basic laws, the Magistrate Court Act of 1985, the High Court Act of 1985, the Islamic system is provided under the Kadhis Court Act of 1985. Under the Zanzibar Constitution of 1984 the legal system in Zanzibar is provided under Chapter 6.

Under Articles 98 and 99 the Zanzibar Constitution also takes cognisance of the Tanzania Court of Appeal as the most apex appellate court in the land. However, because of the special situation of Islamic issues in Zanzibar, the Court of Appeal has no jurisdiction over Islamic matters arising out Zanzibar.

The High Court of Zanzibar is the final appellate court on any Islamic matter. Two other issues which find their final appellate under the High Court of Zanzibar are Zanzibari constitutional contentions and any matter legislated for by the Zanzibar House of Representatives. This is provided under Article 99 (2) (a), (b) and (c).

Every intervention made in Zanzibar has to ascribe to Muslim way of life. We wish though to state as well that this would not necessarily mean that Zanzibar is Islamic country. But it is true as well that no Zanzibari would wish to distance her or himself from Islamic guidance however less detached she or he may be from observing this religion.

### *Zanzibar Political background*

Zanzibar has had very interesting political background. The people of Zanzibar had gone through a lot and have been strengthened by several struggles. There was a struggle for

economical empowerment, there was a struggle for political empowerment and there was a struggle for agrarian reforms.

To understand Zanzibar political background one should appreciate the fact that the islands had gone through slave and plantation economies. Zanzibar was the centre for slave transportation. All slaves who were transported through Zanzibar came from hinterland Africa.

The demise of slavery as an economic system was caused by the introduction of the capitalist system. It was no longer viable to engage labour with people on the bondage. The key concept for capitalism was free labour and hence slavery had no place.

To replace slavery the plantation system involving coconut and cloves was introduced. This called for labour importation from hinterland Africa to beef the available labour from ex slaves. Like during the slave system, also during the plantation economy large number of people from hinterland came over to Zanzibar only this time on their own accord.

After being freed, though they were absorbed in the plantation system, the ex slaves continued to stay on the lands owned by the former masters. This kind of arrangement made them is known as squatters. The squatter system was considered as humiliation and it became the springboard for political activists. The land issue became the focal point for political struggle.

With time both the two became very active in politics. However because the colonial government would not allow political activities the irate population converged in social groups to camouflage their real desires.

The formation of Shirazi Association and African Association in 1930's as groups for social purposes was to become the springboard for formation of a political party in the name of Afro Shirazi in 1954. This party was to stage a Revolution in 1964 and to lead Zanzibar until 1977.

However, to many the instances involving farmers in West of Zanzibar who were protesting against unexplained government action to inoculate their cattle, which led to bitter and bloody protest in 1954, were the first political action.

The first political party was thus born. The protesting Africans led by Miraji Shehlabi and Maalim Zaid were the source for the formation of Zanzibar Nationalist Party later to be bitter rivals with Afro Shirazi Party. The Africans invited Arabs with nationalist ideas and educational exposure to manage that party.

The Africans began to be invited in the law making body The Legislative Council in the late 1940's and people like Ameer Tajo, Abeid Karume became members. But also a

woman by the name of Christabella Majaliwa managed to become a member of this august body.

The Colonial government organised several elections from 1958 to 1963 that were contested by the main – Afro Shirazi and Zanzibar Nationalist – parties. There were also a splinter group from Afro Shirazi, which was called the Zanzibar and Pemba Peoples Party (ZPPP), and a splinter from Zanzibar Nationalist Party (ZNP) which was

The final elections that were held under the Colonial rule allowed the alliance of ZNP and ZPPP to win majority seats. This was bitterly disputed by Afro Shirazi Party who argued that the constituencies were crookedly demarcated to deny them victory. Their main thrust was that they had high number of voters but less seats. And it was to be the number of seats, which separated winners and losers.

This was a reason enough to spark the staging of the Revolution. It was executed on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1964 deposing the government led by Muhammad Shamte and removing the Sultanate at the same time. For the next 13 years ASP were at the helm until when it merged with CCM in 1977.

Zanzibar under Abeid Amani Karume was ruled by decree, one of them very infamous. This was to legalise the forced marriage of Zanzibaris of Persian origin to Zanzibari of African origin most of whom were members of the ruling Zanzibar Revolutionary Council.

Second President Aboud Jumbe introduced the first Constitution after the Revolution in 1979 and the current Constitution, which for the first time guaranteed basic rights, was introduced during the tenure of Ali Hassan Mwinyi as President and Seif Shariff Hamad as Chief Minister.

### ***Muslim women's position***

Zanzibar has never had an Islamic government. The only time there was a real effort to do so was in 1983 when the second President Aboud Jumbe was known to have prepared to secede Zanzibar from the United Republic of Tanzania and turn Zanzibar into an Islamic Republic. This discovery led to what was in 1984 known as “political pollution” and which culminated to his sacking.

But as we have earlier stated the islands were steered into accepting and practising Islam and hence it is a fact that it the Islamic law. The main areas that Zanzibar is committed to are the marriage and divorce, inheritance. But these are no mean areas because they tend to cover the whole concept of Islam.

Thus to many, Islam is not only religion but also a tradition and their culture. This augur well with the way people has chosen to fuse them. In return it has helped to alley fears

that Islam is a religion calling for trampling of the women lot and that under Islam women rights are not well catered for.

This has been one of the many stark differences of how women in Tanzania Mainland and women in Zanzibar have been tackling the issue of their rights. While Zanzibari women have their tradition and culture entwined with Islam those from Mainland very strong African cultural and traditional practices that rise above their Islamic faith.

This prompted woman activist Umuni Alley Mahfoudha in a paper presented at the recently held Tanzania Muslim Women Conference that, “ Along side the fact that women in societies which are also following African culture and tradition, being denied their right to inherit some tribes, such women are also denied the right to decent burial when they die. They are buried in a corner of a shamba of a the father or a brother.”

To the Zanzibari woman the Islamic law is a perfect tool to ensure her rights. The Principle Secretary in the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs Rahma Mshangama confirmed this in her paper presented in the same occasion as above. “ Because of the failure to abide by the teachings and direction of the Qoran it has led many to believe that Islamic women are being subjected to ill treated while all women’s rights have been fully provided under the Koran.”

The Islamic law is built around strong societal values. A Muslim is supposed to remain forever close to his family and most of the time it is an extended family. It was after the introduction of Islam that the value of newborn Islamic girls was protected [81: 8,9] against the habit prevalent during the pre Islamic period.

Jill Grine in her commissioned study for the Zanzibar government says, “ Islamic law take the view that women have equal but different rights from those of men.” A Muslim cleric Asaa Kheri confirms the equality but expounds the thrust behind this philosophy.” Islam has given a woman equality as compared to man, though we understand that the equality so provided is like the equality of a coin which has two different sides , but together making one common value for the same coin.”

To support this argument Muslim scholars would quote Holy Koran, “ And they ( women) have (rights) similar to those (of men) over them in an honourable fashion, but men have a degree over them” [ 2:228]. Muslims are supposed read the Koran cover to cover and fully understand what therein is provided.

However, a long-term programme for Women and Gender Advancement 1997-2003 takes a view that even if there are ample of rights provided under the auspices of the Koran. “ The problem with this legislation is that it not known to all women due to their low levels of education and because they are written in the Arabic language, knowledge of which is mainly a privilege for men.”

While we do not subscribe to this view we also think the problem is not only with Arabic as a language but also English and Kiswahili as languages which are also used to write our national laws. Thus it is now the aspect of education that we would like to tackle next.

### *Girls' education in Zanzibar*

We will all here tend to agree that, as a process to balance gender relationships, it is important that we start from the grassroots. The grassroots here will mean from the position where such relationship appear to be nurtured into both sexes believing that they have come to the world to live as partners and adversaries.

We are fortunate that we are living at a time when the world has made bigger strides in this area and what we have to do is to emulate the others. We are a society under change not waiting for change and hence we have an important role to play as observed by Mathe Monko writing in the Courier Magazine had this to say. "There is now need to re-appraise the female role and give its value, taking account of the new requirements thrown up by a society undergoing change."

A lot has been spoken that lauds the fact that education is power or education is liberation. And to the gender cause those two catchwords mean even more. The Women's and Gender Advancement Programme had this to say on the benefits of education in relation to the gender balancing in Tanzania: "It breaks the vicious circle of poverty, ignorance, early marriages, high fertility rates, high mortality, poor school attendance and performance, high morbidity rate, low life expectancy as well as lack of access and control of economic assets."

Zanzibar can not expect to make way for the gender balancing in the political and decision making bodies if no deliberate steps are taken to mend her present education system and offer more weight in the way of correcting this situation. After all, striving to survive on her own as an island economy, which basically is service oriented, Zanzibar can not escape but provide the best in education.

Without wanting to compare with any other economy, Zanzibar has not been allocating enough for the educational sector. Though we would agree that the education sector has gone through a lot of changes but we still believe that the burden relieved because of increased privatisation of schools is not reflected positively in the educational budget.

This is to say that while more private institutions are opening up the government has reduced the educational budget meaning that those who attend public school are having less distributed between them. The question general policy watch means is also negatively effected. The following is the graph that indicates how government allocation has been steadily declining:

Source: Ministry of Education Budget 1999/2000

While lip service is provided that educational approach is aimed at bridging the gender aspect, the statistics do not bear that evidence. The table below taking 8 Institutes and covering a period from 1991 to 1997 indicates that the boys intake is greater in almost all cases but one. The exception is the last three years at the Tumekuja Business School.

Institute		1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Mikunguni	Male	23	25	99	24	27	106	100
	Female	12	9	55	18	13	58	52
Islamic	Male	35	19	107	20	26	78	93
	Female	7	22	60	20	14	62	62
Science	Male	27	26	23	20	25	106	54
	Female	8	9	16	15	11	39	19
French	Male	30	26	24	20	20	93	96
	Female	9	12	15	19	15	63	57
Tumekuja Business	Male	-	-	-	23	17	97	55
	Female	-	-	-	17	24	72	73
Utaani Business	Male	-	-	-	35	30	66	126
	Female	-	-	-	4	10	23	32
Kengeja Technical	Male	-	-	-	23	26	36	73
	Female	-	-	-	15	11	23	34

Source: Zanzibar Statistical Abstract 1997

The government of Zanzibar has introduced such schools known to be biased ones. The bias is for certain subjects, which the government believes they are of importance now or in the near future. But such bias is not made in favour of the girls and this makes us wonder if there is any form of positive discrimination.

Aside of biased education, entrance at college levels does not seem to favour girls. The following table sets to provide statistics of the four main colleges in Zanzibar between the years 1993-1997 and which overwhelmingly prove two things.

One is that girls are always making the bulk of teaching profession making them continue with the "traditional role". Secondly, is that girls form very little of the bulk of students who go into technical studies.



Both these facts have continued for all the years in question.

COLLEGE	1993			1994			1995			1996			1997		
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
T.T.C	293	330	623	257	339	596	257	339	596	260	389	649	319	453	772
Technical	118	76	194	130	45	175	130	45	175	158	40	198	169	51	220
Muslim	85	50	135	218	142	360	218	142	360	208	170	378	193	195	388
Total	496	456	952	605	526	1131	605	526	1131	626	599	1225	681	699	1380

Key: F-Female  
M-male

Source: Zanzibar Statistical Abstract 1997.

Figures just made available from the Budget presentation of the Ministry of Education indicate that in 1999 indicate that out of 25 private and government owned secondary schools there were 1275 boys as compared to 1065 girls registered for Form Three. And there were 1285 boys as compared to 1077 girls registered for Form IV.

As for registration for technical studies at the Karume College, the school took a total of 219 students divided into 154 boys and 65 girls.

A look at the statistics on Enrolment in Secondary Schools gives us a picture of how tough the girls have to fight to catch in education. Or alternatively, it gives us a picture to show how the government should be determined to make up for the widening gap.

FORM	1993			1994			1995			1996			1997		
OSC	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5,488	5,747	11,235
I	3,993	4,052	8,045	4,459	4,602	9,061	4,456	4,252	8,708	4,611	4,310	8,921	4,502	4,210	8,712
II	2,564	2,847	5,411	3,168	3,422	6,590	3,769	3,858	7,627	3,410	3,399	6,809	3,727	3,832	7,559
III	1,204	1,398	2,602	872	761	1,633	984	823	1,807	1,078	1,063	2,141	1,132	892	2,024
IV	195	118	313	1,378	1,420	2,798	871	751	1,622	712	656	1,368	1,036	1,132	2,168
V	93	42	135	94	36	130	99	35	134	42	52	94	55	91	146
VI	73	24	97	86	41	127	94	45	139	71	27	98	65	32	97
Total	8,122	8,481	16,603	10,057	10,282	20,339	10,273	9,764	20,037	9,924	9,507	19,431	16,005	15,936	31,941

Source: Zanzibar Statistical Abstract

While the table above provides us with rosy picture of more girls entering secondary schools than boys but their number is either not steady or dwindles as they move on into higher forms. And finally a look at students entering Form IV tells it all.

The decisive class for one to be able to enter higher education is Form IV and it is at this stage where the girl's representation dwindles to its lowest ebb. In the period stipulated in the table 1993-1997 boys students who were likely to have had opportunity to take "A" level examination were 369 as compared to 169 girls.

The final effect of this is of course lesser girls who would have chances to enter higher education and certainly the outcome need not over emphasised. Because of that Zanzibari women make a meagre 15 per cent of highly educated people in Zanzibar and make up 60 per cent of the illiterate lot in Zanzibar.

Their entrance to job market is limited to stenography and clerical position they make only 20 percent of the civil service in Zanzibar and 27 per cent of private investment employment. The trend is showing that most of these women have been absorbed in the hospitality sector which has had booming time in Zanzibar since the start of economic liberalisation in 1984.

Studies have indicated that school dropouts are higher among girls than boys. There is also lower girls' school attendance in rural areas as compared to urban areas and this has in turn made Zanzibari women to be 70 percent of the peasants who sadly only possess only 20 per cent of the land.

Another study has indicated that because of lower level of education the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is more in the women sector as to men. This particular study found out that 60 per cent of women had their sexuality controlled by husbands or partners, 48 per cent could say no to husband or partners and 7.7 per cent were able to ask their partners to use condoms.

In all, we would like to conclude this section by saying the lack of education has not only affected the chances of women ascending to higher political positions but also this has negative effect to their economic well being as well as their health situation. Economically weaker women and diseases ridden women would never attain equality.

### *Women and Political power*

Some authors, like Hilde Arnsten have written that gender is not an old phenomenon. "Only recently that the gender has come to mean for both female and male." Here we would pose a question as to what time frame should we consider the gender issue to have been entrenched in the society?

Women have been getting a raw deal since time immemorial and it should be considered as unfair to state that this was realised only recently. In fact men have known about this all along and various impediments have been put on the way of women who wanted to effect changes.

Specioza Kazibwe, the Ugandan Vice President, herself a very vocal on the gender issue, told African meeting for peace in Zanzibar that there was no hiding that women wanted more power and that they will struggle to obtain this power. But she said it is not for the reason of destruction that men wanted power for. "We want power not for the sake of power itself, but in order to improve the human condition."

Many have realised that. That is way it is with the trend of the time that the question of gender equality is not consider as a right only but as well as fundamental right.

Confrontation where necessary, wisdom where is called for but also alliance where it would strategic.

Improvements on all fronts have to be achieved and that is why the struggle is multi faceted. It is not easy to repossess the power from men and even harder to keep it if the women lot is not prepared. Satta Niang has written, " They [women] are waging their campaign on all fronts: equality of rights in terms of access to employment, working conditions, social protection and fair distribution of power."

While men take 96 per cent of decisions, it would not continue to be easy for issues effecting women as well as gender issues to be properly addressed. Special effort should be made to uplift the women into decision- making bodies.

It can be evidenced by women who have managed to ascend to the reign of power that they dynamics of the undergoing society badly needs the contribution of the woman up there. While the educated and urban woman talks about power devolution from men to gender, do we have the women lot prepared for that?

Because of that, we would take seriously the statement made by Josephine Marte Manko, which is calling for self-evaluation. " There is now need to reapprciate the female role and give its value, taking account of the new requirements thrown up by a society undergoing changes."

With, for example, the African continent now going through democratic changes, it becomes more opportune for giving prominence the gender issue. If would take the example of Senegal, the multi party elections held in 1988 the number of women nominated on electoral lists was 30 per cent for opposition parties and 20 per cent for the party in power.

The same country, which has had relative tranquillity and stable democratic system has held 8 five-year parliaments and has recorded notable increase of women legislators. While the first parliament had no women representation the last three have recorded 13,18 and 14 women legislators consecutively out of the Parliament of 120 members.

While the Asian countries which we could say sail in the same boat as Africa have managed to produce women leaders like in Pakistan, Israel, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka, the highest Africa has been able to attain is Vice Presidency. The big question is how long do we have to wait in Africa to get a woman President? Are not we ready for that?

No, we are not. The table below is self-indicative of how unprepared the African continent is.

Numbers of Women in Executive and legislative posts  
In selected African countries.

Country	Proportion of women in government (%)		Proportion of women in Parliament (%)	
	1993	1997	1993	1997
Senegal	7	5.3	8	7.7
Burkina Faso	17	12	6	3.7
Togo	5	4.3	6.4	1.2
Benin	6	5.3	6	4.6
Côte d'Ivoire	8	9.6	5	8.3
Cameroon	3	4.5	12.2	12.2
Guinea	9	14.8	-	8.8

Source: UNDP 1995, Women and decision – making power in Africa

We are all aware that no right is given on a silver platter and this being a struggle full commitment and sacrifices have to be made. The approach for this struggle should be that “ it is past the time now.” Thibault Gregoire has written, “ Women should be aware of the role they have to play and their strength should no longer be ignored.”

It is up to the women to make it clear that they know their role and to make it very much understood that they have strength in number and resolve and they are now ripe for action.

*Women's Political empowerment in Zanzibar*

It is my contention that there has never been political will to empower women in Zanzibar. On the other side there has been only rhetoric on the question of women's rights. Women themselves have not come out very strong fighting for their rights. Several times division has been noticed.

Zanzibar does not have any law defining discrimination on basis of sex and this has been suggested to be requiring urgent attention. However, the lack of political will to ascend women to position of power has nothing to do with that.

The question of women empowerment says Makuwi Mwegiru, “ should not depend on the whims of the governments”. Such empowerment should rather the democratic principle that decisions involving all should be taken by all interested parties with considerations of those components in the society.

Zanzibar has had interesting political history. Women involvement has been very strong since the days of independence struggle. Women worked shoulder to shoulder with men and even at that time there appeared so many women who took political rostrums.

The women that history would remember them include for the Afro Shirazi Party – Mwanaidi Dai, Bi Mwanaasa, Bi Mwanajuma Koja and others. Those from the Zanzibar Nationalist Party include Asha Amour Zahor, Asha Mtumbatu, Nyomo bint Majid, Sharifa Ahmed and Asha Salim Seif.

However, none of them took or had a meaningful political post. There was also no single candidate in all four elections that were held before the 1964 Revolution. Consequently there was no representation in the first Zanzibar Cabinet and the Revolutionary Council.

The first women representation in the Legislative body in Zanzibar occurred after the coming of the second President Aboud Jumbe. And this could come about after the introduction of the first constitution since the 1964 Revolution. This was introduced in 1979.

The women whom history will record them are Mpaji Khamis Juma, Theresa Olban Ali and Mastura Salim. They all went into the House through Tanzania Women Organisation and Youth Organisation. No one was elected and no one was a presidential appointment.

The lack of political will to uplift the women lot has continued in 1990-1995 Cabinet under Dr Salmin Amour. The President under the powers conferred to him under the Constitution is to elect 10 people to join the Zanzibar House of Representatives. He used his chances to appoint 9 men and only one woman.

In the 1995-2000, under the same powers, Dr Salmin Amour appointed 10 men out of 10 despite speaking very rosily in favour of women. We would provide me to prove that the presidency in Zanzibar is not rendering sensitive.

Under the powers provided in the Constitution the President is empowered to appoint almost every one. Out of 7 commissioners in the Zanzibar Electoral Commission only one is a woman; out of seven members of the Zanzibar Civil Service Commission only one is a woman.

The presidency also appoints board members for various state corporations. For one of the People's Bank of Zanzibar there is no women representation and the same applies for the one for the State Fuel and Power Corporation as well as the Zanzibar Harbours Corporation.

Recently the presidency appointed two ad hoc committees designated for special tasks. One was for clove picking exercise made of 10 men out 10 and the other was for the millennium celebrations made of 10 men and two women.

An even sadder picture is provided hereunder where the table would clearly show that unless there is the will on the top nothing would change in favour of the political empowerment of women and placing them at decision making positions.

No.	Decision making position	Total	Women	%
1.	Shehas	237	0	0
2.	District Commissioners	10	0	0
3.	Regional Commissioners	5	0	0
4.	Directors	70	7	9
5.	Deputy Principal Secretaries	13	1	15
6.	Principle Secretaries	13	1	12
7.	Deputy Ministers	5	0	0
8.	Ministers	14	2	14
9.	House of Representatives Members	75	13	17.3

### *Conclusion*

We believe that not enough has been done to effect the gender-mainstreaming notion. This is not an administrative matter. It requires very high level of political commitment. This is what has been lacking in Zanzibar.

Frankly speaking more has been said than done. The Zanzibar Women Policy has yet to come out. This has greatly effected the chances of women being organised under a guiding policy and hence every activity is haphazard.

The most leading women NGOs include Catalyst Organisation of Women Progress in Zanzibar (COWPZ) and Zanzibar Women Development Organisation (ZAWDO) which both only focus on economic empowerment of women.

But with lack of policy we contend this could not be effectively implemented. Aside marked economic development seen in the Zanzibar coastal belts where women toil to farm sea weed, other so called activities to empower women are merely a joke.

The so-called small-scale projects funded by donor money are mostly to do with weaving, batik making, cooking of maandazi and the like. Very little money is provided and hardly good paybacks have been recorded.

We contend such projects and the amount of funds so provided would never push out the women out of economic doldrums let alone economically liberate them. Unless we

provide big loans to few women with approved good projects, the women would remain economically weak and hence marginalised.

We suggest that liberal economic policies should be used to uplift the status of the women. A good production idea should focus on an individual who would in turn get a loan with condition that she makes the best of it instead of giving loans to a group.

Another women group now is Women Development for All led by the wife of President of Zanzibar, Mrs. Salma Salmin. We do not consider this group would do anything positive to “jump leap” the women lot in Zanzibar. We think its populist.

The activists so far carried out by this group include street cleaning and again encouraging women to group themselves for “smaller productions.” However, Mama Salma herself and the elite women surrounding her are not doing “small productions”, but they are rather into big businesses and some of these “small productions” are source of materials to their enterprises.

There is a lot to be done to instil political struggle into the women. Time is ripe now to create political lobbying groups. Women should now form NGOs with specific aims of advocating for their rights and not to wait for alms to be handed down to them.

Women should stand up and fight tooth and nail for changes in the educational system. Those a few who have managed to escape “the drag net” should strive to uplift the standards of the young ones who will take over the reigns after them.

Conditions should be made suitable, with their help, to encourage more women into politics. They should not let this be created by men because they would not and if they do it will be only to serve their purposes by manipulating the women population for votes.

It is of outmost importance that there should be a political will to change the gender imbalance in as far as political empowerment is concerned. If the presidency does not do enough to improve the gender balance what can be expected of other institutions?

This calls for only one decision and Sata Niang has provided this, “A single alternative is therefore available to women if they are to solve the problem their marginalisation: a democratic struggle. If they do no fight, there will be no change.”

Zanzibar women wake up, take the challenge, go fight and you will never be alone.

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