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## Time for Harvest

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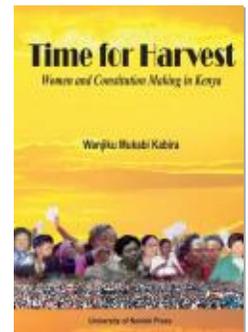
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## *Conclusion*

“For the great river starts its journey as a little stream which at first meanders around without any apparent direction, sometimes disappearing underground altogether, but always there, always moving towards the sea” (*Ogola, M. 1994:71*).

The story of Kenyan women on the path towards a new constitutional dispensation has been like the great river referred to by Mrs Margaret Ogola above. The journey has sometimes been fast and steady, at other times, the women’s voice has been faint, underground but always there. This has been their path since 1992 when the focus was to reclaim their space in society. The women of Kenya had, like the old woman in the poem “*Grandma Remembers,*” worked very hard and explained themselves to everyone who was willing to listen and even those not so willing to listen.

Many times, Kenyan women felt the need to influence political institutions in order to operate from the centre, from where decisions are made. We agreed that 33 per cent critical mass was the necessary percentage of women’s representation both for visibility purposes and to have their voices heard effectively. We believed that this percentage would make a difference in all decision making positions in the country’s institutions.

For close to twenty years, we tried to expand the boundaries of democracy and political practice. We tried to negotiate opening up of democratic spaces in the institutions that are exclusive and hierarchical in the way they practice and handle power. We proposed an Affirmative Action policy for political participation many times, but this concept challenged the male view of power and use of the same. We argued that the legitimacy of the current institutions such as those sanctioned by electoral processes and universal suffrage have perpetuated the exclusion of women, and that institutions that lock out fifty percent of the population cannot be called legitimate by any standards.

For close to twenty years, the women of Kenya have challenged both the theory and practice of the so called democracy. The river of resistance to these exclusive political institutions flowed. Sometimes, the river would be in narrow streams and meandering towards the sea as in the case of the post 2005

referendum. Other times, as in the case of the 1992–1997 period, the river would be underground, quiet but moving, but in the 1997–2005 period, the Women’s Movement moved with unparalleled force like a swollen river and made its impact on the nation as is clearly demonstrated in the five constitution drafts, that is, 2002 CKRC Draft; Bomas Draft 2004; Wako/Kilifi Draft 2005 and referendum 2005; CoE’s Harmonised Draft 2009; and the Naivasha Parliamentary Committee 2010 Draft that was taken to the referendum and became the new Constitution of Kenya on August 27<sup>th</sup> 2010.

Some people claimed that the Women’s Movement had died during the 2005–2009 period but contrary to these obituaries, the movement continued its journey towards its destination, protecting and nurturing what others had planted and ensuring that when the time of harvest came, women would fill their granary.

Women of Kenya have said the centre of gravity would have to shift to enable institutions become more inclusive, more accommodating and more appreciative of views and perspectives of women and other socially excluded groups. This is indeed a season of harvest. Many of these institutions will now be required to open up space for women and other marginalised groups. In 2011, we have witnessed the appointment of twenty eight judges of whom fifty percent were women; even men and women from minority communities and physically challenged persons found their place. Truly, it is *Time for Harvest*. The concept of democracy has been re-defined to take onboard women, minorities and other marginalised groups. The centre of gravity is indeed shifting. The tide cannot be stopped. The river of resistance will continue to flow and seeds will continue to be watered and nurtured and we shall have many seasons of harvest.

Women appreciate the need to deal with institutional and structural changes in our societies and, therefore, have the will, the ability and the vision to inform our future. We need to create institutions that will transform our societies. It is not enough to get into these institutions; we must transform them by inculcating within them new values, new vision and new democratic, all inclusive structures and practices. This Season of Harvest has made it possible for us to be in the institutions, e.g., the County Assemblies, the National Assembly, and the Senate, among other institutions. That is why women have responded with furry to the idea of progressive implementation of the two-thirds principle and have insisted that 33 per cent is the baseline. The path towards ensuring new values, a vision that is informed by Women’s experiences, perspectives and world view should begin. We must continue to travel the path not often travelled.

We must, like the great river, continue to move towards our destination. We have walked together purposefully, with a common agenda, a national women’s agenda, our people’s agenda. We have been result oriented,

interested in consensus, willing to listen to each other; all the time searching for more common ground. Our national politics which have been divisive, ethnic based, and dominated by ethnic kingpins should learn from the women's road to constitution making. If we borrowed women's strategies of negotiations, the give and take strategies, we would be a less violent people. We would have created a philosophy that binds us together as a people. Our politics would help us create more harmonious and peaceful communities. We would resolve conflicts without machetes, (pangas), spears, arrows and other weapons of destruction. We would have a more peaceful culture, be less violent, more accommodating, more people friendly and less greedy.

Our new constitution, with a very comprehensive Bill of Rights, shows the way to this destination. As in the case of the women's struggle, the river must continue to a more friendly political/social economic culture. In order for us to move forward towards a better society, we need to acknowledge our ethnic diversities and build on those values and interests that bind us together as a Nation. We can identify what binds and promotes the strategic needs and interests of each community and develop strategic interventions around them. This is why our national anthem is a masterpiece. This season of harvest takes us a step closer to our collective prayer—our national anthem. In it, we ask God to *bless this land*, the whole of it, and our *nation*, the whole nation, *Justice to be our shield and defender*. We want to  *dwell in Unity, Peace and Liberty*. We also pray that  *plenty be found within our borders*.

Creating communities of prosperity and love must be our goal and not power and control of those around us. We should learn from existing women's structures such as women's *vikundi/chamas* (women groups) and other structures whose collateral is their neighbour, their friend; women groups whose governing structures are based on mutual agreement and trust; structures other than hierarchical ones; structures we can use in governing our own institutions and our nation.<sup>23</sup> For us women, looking at our history and acknowledging the struggles of many of us, we can plant the necessary consciousness that will make us understand and harness our struggle towards a

<sup>23</sup> This refers to rotational loaning by fellow group members. At each meeting, weekly, fortnightly or monthly, each member contributes a certain amount of money which is pooled to be given to one member or more in what members term their "merry-go-round" as they draw lots to determine the order of receiving the money. It is an ingenious homegrown micro-finance structure originally practised by disadvantaged women in Kenya but later spread across social stratum. Among the Gikūyū community, it progressed from traditional *ng'watio*, a manual labour activity, where women groups would get together to complete tasks for fellow group members in turns—usually weeding shamba portions. Destitute women whose husbands/sons were either in concentration camps, in the forests as Mau Mau freedom fighters, or were killed during the State of Emergency in Kenya would later apply the concept to perform tasks previously undertaken by men e.g. building houses and generally turning into household heads overnight to fill the vacuum. Joined together by common problems – absence of men in their lives and sheer poverty— these women's *Ng'watio* soon evolved into monetary 'merry-go-rounds' to meet increasing household financial demands that later extended to burdensome school fees for their children and property ownership (*For a fuller account of the State of Emergency in Kenya, see Caroline Elkins: Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya published in 2005 by Jonathan Cape: London*).

better social economic order. We must, as the saying goes; remember our roots because as Darryn John Murphy, 1987 says, “they will give you courage to chase your dreams, wisdom to choose your path, and wings to fly.”

That is why Women’s Movement must keep remembering its roots and those who have planted the seeds of freedom, which we must continue to water. As we water the seeds of freedom, we must cultivate a sense of homecoming, of integratedness, of oneness that allows us to pursue our dream for a better social, political and economic order in which men and women equally share in the development of the nation and the fruits of their labour, and in which both men and women can develop their full potential. As we celebrate this season of harvest, we must know how to retrace our footsteps; celebrating women’s resistance and continuing to water the seeds of freedom will give us the power and energy we need to continue with the journey.

Women will have to be part of a more inclusive network of people who, having rejected patriarchy as a system and finding their own voice, begin to build a new world, a world of communities of love, where true justice prevails. We have to move with our issues, to negotiate institutional structures that promote fairness, democracy, equality and equity and justice for all.

We must nurture memories that we will preserve for our children, our future generations, giving them a history of a proud people and not one of ethnic war/clashes. A history that focuses on the ecstasy of our great forefathers and mothers who fought for independence and continue to sow the seeds of freedom, a history that promotes collective memory, collective struggles for Kenyans and unrelenting efforts by women of this country and Africa, our continent. As we harvest, we shall celebrate our deed of emerging from the shadows, walking in the light, and challenging systems that have relegated us to the status of children of a lesser God. We shall also keep history, the symbols of our struggle, the force of history, and the principles of freedom, alive.

This is what we have tried to do by telling the story of women’s struggle that has led to this harvest. We have reflected on the stories of many women who have from 1992–2011 held on to the struggle and remembered those who have stood on the line of duty. The next generation of women has already received the baton as evidenced by the central role they are playing in the battle for implementation of the two-thirds rule and in recovering the gender commission. These women are young, energetic and ready to continue with the race. The struggle will continue *for we must prepare for the next rainy season even as we fill the granary.*

As the process of implementation of the new constitution takes shape, we have seen that it is not going to be easy. The court cases related to implementation of Article 27 on not more than two-thirds of elective and appointive positions

of either gender is a pointer to the hurdles in the implementation process. The road to nurturing our dreams of a new social political and economic order will have its challenges. Our dreams of a society where the wellbeing of individuals and communities is the primary focus of our leaders must be nurtured. The river of resistance will never dry up for there will always be those watering the seeds of freedom. *Other seasons of harvest will come* but we must be ready to ensure eternal vigilance for that, as the saying goes, is the price of liberty.

