

Women in Kenya's Diplomatic Service Since the 1960s

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There can be no national development in Kenya, like in any other country in the world, without the crucial role and involvement of women. However, many scholars have mostly researched on the role of women and rural development thus giving no attention to women in Kenya's diplomatic service. This chapter analyses gender relations in Kenya's diplomatic service and finds out how the perceptions of gender affect employment, postings and diplomatic decisions made in this male dominated service. The methods used in handling gender issues are discussed and how this has led to gender marginalisation is stated.

Since independence, government policy papers have stressed the need to integrate women in national development. However, the many government policy papers emphasise the need to integrate women as active participants in agriculture and rural development while avoiding to mention and/or discuss women in Kenya's diplomatic service. Therefore, it is important to state here that,

Women have the right to equal treatment with men including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities. Any law, culture or tradition that undermines the dignity, welfare, interests or status of women, fails to embrace a bright future. Government(s) therefore, should protect women and their rights, taking into account their unique and many faceted roles in society and provide them reasonable facilities and opportunities to enhance their welfare to enable them realise their full potential and advancement.

Furthermore the existing literature by Kenyans and "Kenyansists" on Kenya's foreign policy and diplomacy have not attempted to give a gender dimension to their works.¹ Therefore, when it comes to gender mainstreaming in general, one

¹ Steans Jill (1988) "Gender and International Relations - An introduction", Polity Press, Cambridge UK, pp.151-152.

of the most grey areas is that of diplomatic service. Up to now, foreign policy depicts mainly men to handling issues, including serving in diplomatic missions. Shaped by male definitions and decisions, female gender specific needs were as excluded as female participation in the decision-making process. This was also the case in the scientific discipline of international relations taught in higher institutions of learning where females were not encouraged or asked to take up the challenge.

As it has been pointed out by many feminist researchers, in a theoretical world, mainly constructed of male-governed states acting in their own best interest within an anarchic system, women do not exist.² Towards the end of the 20th century, however, the objectives for foreign policy issues had begun to change, thus affecting its structure. This has made possible a more open gender integration and/or mainstreaming of diplomatic missions to make them gender sensitive.

It was not until the 1990s that questions of gender mainstreaming became closely interconnected with the question of women's representation in general, and with participation of female Members of Parliament in decision-making procedures of the state (government) in particular. This led to the introduction of an affirmative action bill in Parliament as the country entered the 21st century. This is expected to have an impact on the diplomatic service (i.e. the number of women should be increased both in the decision-making and placement organs of foreign affairs and that women are given access to education and training to enable them compete equally in this male dominated service).

Before delving into a detailed analysis, it is important to define a few concepts for the easy understanding of this work.

² See for example, D. K. Orwa (1994) "Continuity and Change: Kenya's foreign policy from Kenyatta to Moi" in W. O. Oyugi ed, *Politics and Administration in East Africa*. Nairobi: East Africa Educational Publishers, D. K. Orwa (1987), "Foreign Policy, 1963 - 1986" in W. Ochieng (ed); *A Modern History of Kenya*, Evans Brothers Ltd, Ibadan; J. J. Okumu, (1979) "Foreign Relations: Dilemmas of Independence and Development" in J. D. Barkan and J. J. Okumu (eds) *Politics and Public Policy in Kenya and Tanzania*. Praeger; J. Howell, (1968), Analysis of Kenya's foreign policy". *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 6; P.G. Okoth (1998) "Historiography of Kenya's Foreign Policy," paper presented at the Historical Association of Kenya Conference, Asis Hotel, Eldoret; July 2-4; Kurgat Paul K.; (2000), "Kenya's Foreign Policy and Africa's Conflict Management" in P.G. Okoth and B.A Ogot (eds) *Conflict in Contemporary Africa*. Jomo Kenyatta Foundation, Nairobi; Kurgat Paul K.; "The Foreign Policies of East African States and Regional Co-operation since independence" in (ed) P. Godfrey Okoth, *Government and Development in East Africa from Independence to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*. University of Nairobi Press, Nairobi; M. Mwagi (2000), "The Elusive Quest: Conflict, Diplomacy and Foreign policy in Kenya" in P.G. Okoth and B.A. Ogot (eds), *Conflict in Contemporary Africa*, Jomo Kenyatta Foundation, Nairobi.

Key concepts

Different sources tend to vary their treatment of concepts. Therefore, there is need to explain four central concepts that will frequently be used in this chapter. The three concepts are Gender, Mainstreaming, Diplomacy and Foreign Policy.

Feminists who were concerned about the overly biological overtones of the word "sex" originally developed the term 'gender'.³ Sex is a biological concept used to identify what is biologically important, but different between men and women. Gender is a social concept used to identify the differences between men and women as social beings and the social meaning of what is important to being men or women. Therefore, gender refers to men and women not as 'natural' sexual categories, but to the relationships, which are socially constructed.

Women and men play different roles in society with gender differences shaped by ideological, historical, religious, ethnic, cultural and economic determinants. Applying a gender perspective in policy decisions has over the years become a very politicised subject. The 1995 Beijing Women Conference stressed the need to put emphasis on both genders instead of focusing exclusively on women, which has led many to fear that such focus will divert attention from the needs of men.⁴ However, appreciating gender does not mean that the centre of attention will shift from men to women. It only means that gender issues have to be set in relation to the rest of the society. Women are in the position they are because they interact with men in a given, but not unchangeable, environment.⁵

Mainstreaming refers to placing an issue within the existing framework, both in policy and in research:

It involves the placing of an issue within the pre-existing institutional academic and discursive framework. It is the opposite of marginalisation and as such is an appropriate way to characterise the objective of gender-perspective integration."⁶

Mainstreaming gender implicates that the structures of society, which form and/or influence gender differences need to be examined in order to remove discrimination and to assess how our behaviour is influenced by gender construction.

³ Whitehead, A (1979). "Some Preliminary Notes on the Subordination of Women", bulletin of the Institute of Development Studies, University of East Anglia.

⁴ Baden, Sally & Goetz, Ann Marie (1997) "Who Needs [Sex] When You Can Have [Gender] Conflicting Discourse on Gender at Beijing", *Feminist Review*, No. 56, Summer 1997, London, U.K. pp. 3-25.

⁵ Enloe, Cynthia (1993) "The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War", University of California Press, Berkley, London, U.K. p. 21.

⁶ The Question of Integrating the Human Rights of Women Throughout the United Nations system. "Report of the Secretary General" (1998), p. 3.

tions. According to the Commission on Human Rights, "Gender mainstreaming is thus the process of bringing an awareness of the status of women into the public arena."⁷

Gender mainstreaming in policy terms means that focus is directed on women in relation to men, or vice versa. It is a solvable problem, often perceived as being remedied by increasing the number of women (most often) and taking women's needs into consideration.

The concept of gender does include both male and female roles. Because of the male domination of the diplomatic service, this chapter's focus will be directed towards training, placement and postings of women in Kenya's diplomatic service since the 1960s. However, it is important to note that the enhancement of women's role in the diplomatic service is one long leap towards gender mainstreaming of Kenya's foreign policy and diplomatic service.

Diplomacy is the official international activity of the state and its agencies.⁸ Diplomacy functions through a chain of command. It encompasses foreign offices, embassies/high commissions, legations, consulates and special missions all over the world. It embraces a multitude of interests from a tiny issue of importance to serious issues of war and peace. Diplomacy is therefore part and parcel of foreign policy.

Foreign policy is defined as "the range of actions taken by varying sections of the government of a state in its relations with other bodies similarly acting on the international stage,"⁹ For the management and implementation of these relations, countries (states) send official representatives abroad, career diplomats and other personnel from the private sector. This chapter will refer to both cadres and diplomats working in the foreign diplomatic service.

For the clear understanding of women's role in the diplomatic service, there is need to examine some of the theories that will guide the analysis, and hence examine several theoretical underpinnings relating to gender issues.

Theoretical perspective

In analysing Kenya's diplomatic service, several gender theories could be used to shed some light as to why there are few women in the diplomatic service, especially in high ranking positions. For a long time, there existed assumptions

⁷ Ibid. p. 3.

⁸ Dictionary of Diplomacy (1971), "Diplomacy", Politstat Press, Moscow, Vol.1. pg.479.

⁹ Reynolds P.A. (1994) "Foreign Policy as the Pursuit of the National Interest" in *An Introduction to International Relations*, Third Edition, Longman, London, pp.38-39.

that organisational structures were gender neutral, but later studies have come to the conclusion that the structures themselves contributed to gender separation.¹⁰

A theory on gender and organisation based on these assumptions has been developed, for instance, by Ellen Levande and Bente Rasmussens.¹¹ According to them, contemporary research assumes that hierarchy is as gendered as patriarchy. The two researchers, thus, consider hierarchy a gender-political system that affects the possibilities of women to advance.¹² It is not a static system. When women try to advance in a male dominated organisation, they are not helpless victims, but rather a part of the process of change.¹³ Whether the organisational structure is static or dynamic, it affects the advancement of women in a particular organisation. The static structure, which is more hierarchical than the dynamic organisations proved to be more difficult for women to advance in it. According to the researchers, this is due to the fact that leadership is very important for the advancement in a hierarchical structure. The more static (and therefore the more hierarchical) the structure of the organisation, the more women seem to have difficulty proving themselves through their work. The result is that female employees become visible as women per se, rather than as fellow employees.¹⁴

Nevertheless, the culture of the organisation is also important, since values as well as underlying assumptions of what women are believed to be able to accomplish in relation to organisational expectations, affect women's opportunities to advance.¹⁵ According to studies by Catherine Cassell and Sue Walsh, if the general culture holds that this is a job really intended only for men, then women will not be expected to fulfil the work in a satisfactory way.¹⁶ Christine Roman argues that it is not only organisations that are gendered, this is also a characteristic of many world societies, which has resulted in women and men being treated as two separate forces of labour. Roman asserts that, "... individuals are given assignments by other criteria than their abilities".¹⁷

¹⁰ Rothchild, Joyce & Davies, Cecilia (1994) "Organizations Through the Lens of Gender: Introduction to the Special Issue," *Human Relations*, Vol. 47, No.6. Plenum Publishing Corporation, New York, pp. 583-584.

¹¹ Levande, Ellen & Rasmussens Bente (1995) "Women's Careers in Static and Dynamic Organizations," *Acta Sociologica*, vol. 38 Scandinavia University Press, Oslo, Norway p.118.

¹² *Ibid*; pp. 124-129.

¹³ *Ibid*; p. 11.

¹⁴ *Ibid*; p. 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid*; pg.11.

¹⁶ Cassell, Catherine & Walsh, Sue (1997) "Organizational Psychology: Research/Practice Organizational Cultures, Gender Management Strategies and Women's Experience of Work" *Feminism & Psychology*, SAGE publications Ltd, London, p. 224.

¹⁷ Roman, Christine (1994) "Lika pa Oluka Viilkor; Konseegreering: Kunskapsforetag" Symposium Graduate, Stockholm Sweden; quoted in Louise Olsson (1999) (ed), "Gendering UN Peacekeeping: Mainstreaming, a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peacekeeping Operations, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University Report No. 53. p. 12.

Two types of gender segregation in the labour market can be observed, namely a horizontal segregation as well as a vertical segregation. Horizontal segregation entails categories of work that are considered typically female or typically male. Vertical segregation means that women and men can be found in the same profession, but that one of the groups, usually the male one, is found in higher positions than the other. Here some obstacles become visible. This means that women seem to be able to advance to a certain level on their own merit but not beyond because there is an invisible obstacle blocking their way.

Other views are held by the essentialist and constructionist theories on gender differences. These gender theories affect the way we expect individuals to act. In the essentialist's view, there might be advantages as well as disadvantages with the inclusion of women or adding their numbers in a particular organisation or mission just because they are women. According to the theory, the social environment has only a very limited effect and biology is the main source of influence. Gilligan and Ruddick, for example, have analysed women's activities in terms of an "ethic of care" and "maternal thinking", arguing in positive and perhaps rather romantic terms that women bring to activities in the public sphere supposedly 'female' values of caring, mothering and peacefulness.¹⁸

The constructionist theory concerning gender identity claims that it is the social environment that creates the identity of the motive thus not predetermined by biological factors. This does not mean that a person's sex is unimportant but that the expectations of the role of an individual originate in his/her sex. Gender is culturally determined; indeed 'culture' is made up of an ensemble of gender stereotypes.¹⁹ If one tries to translate these more or less abstract theories above into historical and every day practice, one perceives immediately that the basic concepts around which everyday life is organised are formidable obstacles in the realisation of states policy principles.

A critical analysis of Kenya's institutions entrusted with the formulation and implementation of foreign policy and diplomatic service indicates that there are jobs meant for female and those for male. A larger percentage of the few women employed in the Foreign Service are assigned secretarial, clerical, cleaning and culinary duties, while men dominate the high ranking positions (heads of divisions, special delegates to regional/international issues, representatives to missions, chargé d'affaires, consuls, ambassadors/high commissioners, perma-

¹⁸ Gilligan, C (1983) *In a Different Voice*, Cambridge MA; City Press; Ruddick, S (1989) *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace*, London: the Women's Press.

¹⁹ Elam Diane (1994) *Feminism and Deconstruction Ms en abyme*, Routledge, London and New York, p. 43.

ment secretaries, ministers in charge of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation). A vertical segregation of the postings to missions abroad as well as the headquarters can also be detected because women are rarely appointed to the decision-making positions. This begs us to ask the question, where did justice or more rightly injustice begin? Is it in education, leadership (decision-making process) or both that causes Kenyan women to be weighed down?

Gendered justice or gendered culture?

In historical terms, the idea that justice is a matter of people getting what they deserve is perhaps the most common and tenacious conceptualisation. The concept justice is taken to provide the meaning of justice, while the conception enunciates the evaluative criteria variously deployed to determine certain types of situations that are just or unjust. Thus, the concept of justice may be analysed as a set of principles for assessing social and political institutions while conception of justice represent differing views on the proper content of these principles.²⁰

According to Rawls, justice is a set of principles for 'assigning rights and duties in the basic institutions of society' and defining 'the appropriate distribution of the benefits and burdens of social cooperation. In this context, the concept of justice means "a proper balance between competing claims", while a conception of justice is a set of related principles for identifying the relevant considerations which determine this balance.²¹ In a more traditional approach, justice as viewed by Miller is the just state of affairs in that which each individual has exactly those benefits and burdens which are due to him. He elaborates further that "the important questions about justice emerge when we try to settle what a person's "due" actually means.²² For instance, among the Nandi people most traditional settings were based on a patriarchal system, which enhanced insubordination of women thereby creating inequalities between men and women. In education, girls were trained to be good housekeepers while boys were encouraged to be good outgoing career seekers. Education for girls received less attention due to the belief that a girl's place is in the kitchen.

According to both the views, Kenyan society (state) has something to learn in handling distributive justice that impacts on an individual citizen's career development and general social participation of it. If justice has something to do

²⁰ Campbell, Tom (1988) "Justice" Issues in Political Theory, Peter Jones and Albert Weale (series Editors) Macmillan Educational Limited, London, pp.3-4.

²¹ Rawls, J (1971) *A Theory of Justice*, Oxford University Press. pp.4, 10

²² Miller, D (1976) *Social Justice*, Clarendon Press, Oxford. pp. 20-24.

with distribution of benefits and burdens and particularly in the distribution of scarce resources and/or talents, then injustice may be regarded as a situation in which one person or group of persons wrongly receives less or more than other persons or groups. In Kenya, the educational system (educational justice) and (political justice) have tilted unfavourably on the side of women.

The level and type of education which women have been exposed to have determined the place they occupy in the Kenyan society. Women have been introduced to their 'place' through the division of labour in their homes and at school. Education has therefore been a major factor in defining their status and roles in society. It is therefore important to focus on the education of women and rectify the negative effects that it has had on them within wider cultural and governmental policies. The way society distributes available resources among members will reflect not only power and authority relations but also the moral basis of the society and its consensus on the distribution of justice and its implicit priorities.²³ Many a times, children have been exposed very early in life to negative distribution of justice through gendered differences. This is when some get more food on their plates and others less, or when some are sent to school and others not, the glaring differences between boys and girls in society is depicted.

The sexism and sex stereotypes, which were a part of the British colonial system, had been transmitted to the Kenya colony by the various crown ordinances. The image of the male as the head of the household and as the breadwinner with economic responsibilities for the family, and of the 'ideal women' as a housewife and mother, frail and feminine, helpless and genteel reflected the type of education offered to either gender. Education prepared boys for commercial life and for the civil service while girls were being trained to be good mothers, wives and companions worthy of educated husbands. In most Kenyan communities education for girls has not been deemed and/or accorded priority.

At independence, the Kenyan Government sought to redress the problem. Education opportunities were opened to all boys and girls, and as a result enrolment rose.²⁴ But the question that emerges is whether these figures were a representation of actual eligible female population. To date, female representation with regard to education enrolment remains lower than that of men. Parental and familial assessments about the short and long-term returns on their children in

²³ Papanek, H (1990), "To Each Less Than She Needs from Each More Than She Can Do: Allocations Entitlements and Values" in Irene Tinker (ed) *Persistent Inequalities- Women and World Development*, Oxford University Press, p. 163.

²⁴ Central Bureau of Statistics, 1990. *Economic Survey*. Ministry of Planning and National Development, Republic of Kenya, Nairobi. Government Printer.

education help explain the continuing gaps in school attendance, achievement and literacy between men and women. Cultural patterns indeed tied girls to early marriage while boys served as house servants and livestock herders and attending school. The situation greatly disadvantaged girls.

According to Mukundi, men also appear to have had a historical advantage in the sense that the infrastructure, right from the pre-independence period, was developed in their favour. Not only were there more boys' schools, but there were also more better equipped boys' schools than girls' school at independence.²⁵ Equally, average performance of girls in relation to boys has been lower in both primary and secondary national examinations. At the university level, although female enrolment has been increasing over the years, it suffices to note that there are some discrepancies that still hinder women's academic advancement. Indeed, girls under participation and achievement consequently contribute to their under representation in positions of power and authority in public life.

Apart from access, the type of curriculum offered has been gender stereotyped. Schools perpetuate gender inequalities by regulating access to knowledge and by teaching worldviews that justify the status quo. Science and development studies in the early days were hostile territories for women. As observed by Godfrey Okoth, academic gatekeepers often strongly resist feminist scholarship because it reveals the partial and gendered nature of intellectual work which is constructed on elite men's experience.²⁶ He cites the study of international relations as a discipline which is male-dominated and is therefore more likely to reflect men's interests and fears, and the way the discipline constructs its subject matter to make women shun it. High political-treaties, power, war and peace, not to mention the institutional politics of party executives, are accepted to be male domains. These limit the development of women as career diplomats.

Furthermore, education in the 21st century has not drastically changed its gender outlook and the problem cited more than two hundred years ago still persist considering what Mary Wollstone-Craft wrote:

I may be accused of arrogance still I must believe, that all the writers who have written on the subject of female education and manners . . . have contributed to render women more artificial, weaker characters, than they would otherwise have been; and consequently more useless members of

²⁵ Mukundi Edith (1993), "Women and Education" in Kabira, W.M. Oduol, A.J.; and Nzomo, M. (eds.) *Democratic Change in Africa-Women's Perspective*, Acts press, Nairobi p. 87.

²⁶ Okoth P.G (2002), "Gender Issues in International Relations during the Era of Globalization", in Okoth P.G (ed) *Africa at the Beginning of the 21st Century*, Nairobi University Press, p. 390.

society . . . it is first necessary to observe that my objection extends to the whole purport of those books, which tend, in my opinion to degrade one half of the human species and render women pleasing at the expense of every solid virtue.²⁷

Women, according to Wollstone-Craft, are not weaker characters. Society must seek to promote equal opportunities starting from the education sector if we are to have fair representation of women in disciplines and professions that have remained the preserve of men.

The culture of gendering labour

The question of how many women reach the highest positions in the diplomatic service is in many ways closely connected to a number of things, namely political allegiance, ethnic favour/links or balancing, merit or sheer luck. But before that an individual needs to overcome many social obstacles. Personnel serving in the diplomatic service are often recruited from higher institutions of learning, government, the private sectors and political parties. The number of women serving in high diplomatic ranks also depends on women in top government organs or how close they are to the top in government. This means that to acquire a top diplomatic job one has to go through the political system and rarely do politically "active" women land such jobs. In Kenya, therefore, the political system is the more influential.

The degree of women's political participation has a direct relationship to their appointments as diplomats. This brings into focus the question of how level is the political field between men and women in our society to allow for a fair competition for such assignments. This again traces its roots to the culture of Kenyan/African society where jobs and division of labour are gendered and, therefore, pre-determined.

Though in society (most African communities) high respect is given to women and especially mothers, social norms accord them little power, authority and resources. An analysis of gender relations and politics in Kenya reveals a split between the public and the private spheres of influence. The traditional African norms seem to be in agreement with most of the political theories, which underlie Western liberal democracy. The private domestic sphere was seen as lying outside of the proper realms of investigation and interference by the state or

²⁷ Mary Wollstone-Craft (1792) "A Vindication of the Rights of Women", quoted in *an Anthology of Women's Work on Peace and War - My Country is the Whole World*. Cambridge Women's Peace Collective, Pandora Press. London, p. 30.

others. The public sphere was seen as an arena where everyone was incorporated as an individual citizen in the political world.

From the aforementioned and analysed theories, individual citizens active in the public sphere were assumed to be male heads of households and women were relegated analytically to the private sphere (reproductive roles) subsumed within the household headed by the individual male. The political sphere is, therefore, defined as masculine in a very profound sense, which makes it hard to incorporate women on the same terms as men, and excludes many of those activities that women are involved in as not political. Many women are therefore constrained by their roles in the private sphere, which prevents them from participating in the public sphere on the same terms as men, and gaining the experience deemed necessary for a career in a political field.

Scholars have ably proved that since independence, Kenyan women have not significantly participated in the political leadership and/or in high public decision-making positions. It is possible to count often on one hand the number of women Members of Parliament, Permanent Secretaries, Ambassadors/High commissioners among others. This indeed justifies Cynthia Enloe's multifaceted question, "where are the women?"²⁸

To answer this question one needs to analyse states policy formulation in Kenya. However, policies are supposed to be sex neutral but unfortunately, they have equally different impact on men and women. These are policy areas linked to the public sphere and somehow seen as masculine, such as state-defined politics, war, foreign policy, international trade, resource extraction, long distance communication and those connected with welfare and reproduction. Very few women have been included in the so-called states masculine areas of policy. The culture of gendering labour was and continues to be extended even to the military sector as a male domain.

In Kenya, historians have documented proof that women participated significantly in the Mau Mau struggle for independence. The liberation struggle had incorporated women and men as fighters, but where are the women now among the rank and file? The military being one of the instruments of diplomacy and foreign policy can be stated clearly to have effectively closed doors to Kenyan women to serve in this highly important area that is concerned with war and peace. Women and men have equal opportunities in contributing to international peace enforcement, peace keeping and peace building. Their full participation

²⁸ Cynthia Enloe (1990) "Gender Makes the World Go Round", in *Making Feminist Sense of International Politics: Bananas, Beaches & Bases*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, p. 7.

will depend on a balanced and equitable distribution of roles between men and women in the family and in society as a whole. It is crucial therefore to increase their role in decision-making organs with regard to conflict prevention and resolution. Kofi Annan, former United Nations Secretary-General, for instance, argues that,

Women, who know the price of conflict so well, are also better equipped than men to prevent or resolve it. For generations, women have served as peace-educators, both in their families and in their societies. They have proved instrumental in building bridges rather than walls. They have been crucial in preserving social order when communities collapse.²⁹

Kenya has carved herself a place in peacekeeping operations around the world under the auspices of OAU/African Union and the United Nations, yet women's participation is unheard of. None of the women are being sent as special envoys/representatives to mediate and/or negotiate in the regional conflicts when there are a high number of able women. This is an indication that women's participation in foreign policy decisions for peace at all levels is totally missing. This is why, whenever a woman is appointed into an executive position in government, it becomes 'news' and sounds just like a "lonely woman" is joining a men's club.

Women in the diplomatic service since 1963

An evaluation of staff placement and performance in Kenya's diplomatic service attest to the fact that hardly do women serve abroad as Ambassadors/High Commissioners, permanent representatives, special envoys, consuls, secretaries, clerks and/or other support staff. The same applies to duties back in Kenya, (i.e. the positions of permanent secretaries, chiefs of protocol, and/or heads of divisions/departments at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Why are the numbers and ranks held by women gender biased in the diplomatic service? Do their relative numbers count in Kenya's diplomatic service?

In the traditional conception, international relations are conducted by political units treated almost as personalities. The domestic structure is taken as given; foreign policy begins where domestic policy ends. If the domestic structures are based on commensurable positions of what is just regarding gender differentiation then the same will be reflected in assignments in the diplomatic service.

²⁹ United Nations, Resolution 1325 (2000), adopted by the Security Council at its 4313th meeting, on 31 October 2000. New York.

On joining the community of sovereign nation-states, Kenya established the department responsible for foreign affairs in the office of the Prime Minister (later Office of the President), with Joseph Murumbi becoming the first Minister of State in the Office of the President in-charge of External Affairs. All his successors have been men who include: CMG Argwings-Kodhek, Dr Njoroge Mungai, Dr Munyua Waiyaki in the Kenyatta era. Again Dr Munyua Wayaki, Dr Robert Ouko, Mr Elijah Mwangale, Mr Kalonzo Musyoka, Dr Bonaya Godana, Major (Rtd.) Masden Madoka in the Moi era, and Mr Kalonzo Musyoka, Mr Ali Makwere and Mr Raphael Tuju in Kibaki's NARC era. To date, all the Foreign Affairs Ministers and their Assistants have been men with a dominant male Permanent Secretaries, except 1991 and 2002 when the first women Permanent Secretaries Dr Sally Kosgey and Rebecca Nabutola, were appointed respectively. Amb. Amina Mohamed, appointed in 2013 as Cabinet Secretary for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has elevated women participation in diplomacy. However, for the first three decades of the independence years, men mainly filled the posts of ambassadors/high commissioners, and attaches, while women were relegated to culinary cleaning, secretarial/typing duties, while the highest women were kept below First and Second Secretaries and/or Attachés.

However, as the 20th century came to a close, women started making in-roads into the diplomatic service as they have done in their increased participation in the political and the socio-economical mainstream. Gender issues arose in the women movements in the 1970s. These movements pressured governments including Kenya to take affirmative action to integrate and promote women participation in national development. During the UN women's decade in 1975, for example, women's issues were solely legitimatised as subjects for government policy making. A number of women's demands for emancipation directed at governments are found in the UN documents which were prepared in the following contexts: *the World Plan of Action* (Mexico, 1975); *the Programme of Action for the Second Half of the United Nations Decade for Women* (Copenhagen, 1980) *the Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women* (Nairobi, 1985); and the celebrated *Beijing Platform for Action* (1995). These documents emphasize government initiatives; the phrase "Governments should . . ." appears with great frequency. The Kenyan Government, though not very drastically, seems to be responding to some of the raised issues. (Appendix ix 2)

Gender issues are getting more and more globalised and Kenya has not been an exception. Worldwide, women have taken up challenging positions in national and world politics. Indira Gandhi, Margaret Thatcher and Kirkpatrick headed

governments and directed their foreign policies not less pragmatic than their male counterparts. Women too, including and not limited to Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit (Indian diplomat), Graca Machel, Mary Robinson, and Sadako Ogata, have successfully led international organisations. The Kenyan environment must start to nurture such a move by supporting and posting their able women to the many missions and world organisations.

An analysis of foreign affairs staff lists from 1965-2001 indicates that female representation in the diplomatic service started trickling in from the late 1980s, and the majority of them continued to serve at junior and middle level positions, and quite a few on the senior level scale. Women who have served and/or continue to serve as special envoys, permanent representatives, ambassadors and/or high commissioners are counted a miserable fifteen persons. They are Dr Sally Koskey, who served both as a High Commissioner to the United Kingdom and Permanent Secretary (Foreign Affairs, and later Secretary to the Cabinet); Ms Esther Tolle, High Commissioner to Zambia; Ms Mary Wambua, High Commissioner to Uganda; Ms Nancy Kirui, High Commissioner to the UK; Prof. Ciarunji Chesaina, High Commissioner to South Africa; Ms Mary Odinga, Ambassador to Japan and Egypt; and Ms Amina Mohammed Ambassador to Switzerland. Among those who served as Permanent Representatives were Ms Pamela Mboya to UNEP, and Ms Margaret Kenyatta to Habitat. One other important woman personality in the Ministry is Ms Rebecca Nabutola, who was the Chief of Protocol before being elevated to the position of Permanent Secretary in the same ministry.³⁰

The NARC (National Rainbow Coalition) Government that came into power in 2002 general election saw the appointment of Ms Tabitha Seii as Ambassador to South Africa, and Professor Judith Bahemuka as Permanent Representative to the United Nations.³¹ Also appointed on the third diplomatic reshuffle in the first year of the NARC government were the following: Ms Mary Nyambura Kamau as Consul General to the Kenya Consulate in Los Angeles, USA; Ms Kalimi Mugambi Mworira, Ambassador to the Netherlands; Ms Felistus Vunoro Khayumbi, Ambassador to Israel; Ms Ruth Sereti Solitei, High Commissioner to Canada; and Mishi Masikha Mwatsakhu, as High Commissioner to Pakistan.

It is also noted that those who have risen to their present positions have done so after long years of service at the Foreign Affairs Ministry. They are, therefore, the same women who were serving in the lower ranks earlier. For instance Ms Mary Odinga served as first secretary in London in 1975, and Ms Esther Tolle as Third

³⁰ *Daily Nation*, 28 March 2002, p. 24.

³¹ *Daily Nation*, 19 June 2003; *East African Standard*, 19 June 2003.

Secretary the same year in Paris. Dr Sally Koskey served as head of economics division before taking up the post of Kenya's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom. In its first diplomatic appointments/reshuffle, the NARC government that took over from KANU that had been in power since independence (1963-2002), did not appoint its diplomats with departure from the past. Out of the six diplomatic appointments made in the first reshuffle, only two positions were given to women. The two appointments did not add to the number of women in the diplomatic service because Ms Tabitha Seii and Professor Judith Mbula Bahemuka replaced Prof. Ciarunji Chesaina and Ms Nancy Kirui respectively since they were simply recalled and/or redeployed to other ministries.³² Fewer women's names are actually entering the diplomatic staff lists. What mainly transpires is that a new woman appointed displaces another woman.

President Kibaki's second appointments and/or reshuffle of diplomats that followed again did not make any drastic departure from the past. Only two new women were actually added to the diplomatic service list and one was on reshuffle out of the eight appointed Ambassadors/High Commissioners. They were Ms Raychelle Omamo and Prof. Maria Nzomo. The third NARC diplomatic appointments and/or reshuffle January 2004 witnessed gender imbalance with the appearance of three ladies as High Commissioners/Ambassadors and one Consul-General. The males dominated the remaining seven postings. Indeed, gender inequality is confirmed in the total overall of Kenyan missions abroad, which has over 40 missions, and only 11 represented by women High Commissioners/Ambassadors. It therefore leaves some questions: For how long will Kenyan leaders pay lip service to equal gender opportunities in all sectors of national concern and especially the diplomatic service? When will the government make steady and deliberate moves to encourage women to take up the challenge of representing their country?

Having pointed out the fact that women in the diplomatic service are negligible, the question arises: What is their impact then on the country's foreign service? Do they bring any 'women outlook' to the contact of foreign policy and diplomatic service?

As long as women continue to constitute less than 30 percent of the total workforce in the diplomatic service, they do not constitute a critical mass as argued by Dahlerup.³³ They will not be in a position to bring change to the

³² Daily Nation, 19 June 2003; East African Standard, 25 June 2003.

³³ Dahlerup, Drude, 1988. "From a small to a large minority: women in Scandinavian Politics' Scandinavian," Political Studies, Vol. 11, No.4, pp 275-298.

diplomatic service; indeed, the character and conduct of foreign policy is strongly 'masculine'. An increase in size of women diplomats³⁴ is likely to improve this country's foreign policy conduct because then women will inject new ideas and assist the few women diplomats fight situations that are caused by status of the small minority that Dahlerup refers to as being characterised by high visibility, role conflicts, stereotyping and discomfort, etc.³⁵ An increase in number and quality will be the starting point of the legitimising processes.

As new entrants into the diplomatic service, women have been anxious to show that they can deliver just like men and in the end they use the same 'shrewd' men's tactics losing on the way those talents and traits that distinguish them as women and through which the conduct of diplomacy could be enriched. Women diplomats would also like to be seen as a diplomat first with a job to do, and second as a woman. This means that gender makes no difference in the way in which diplomacy and foreign policy of the country is conducted. Though an increase in numbers may in certain ways change the diplomatic culture, for example, how discussions are carried out, and even the behaviour of the group. A person is known to behave differently in front of a woman and differently in front of a man. The higher the proportion of women in diplomacy, the more social (ethical) conventions will change. Such changes do occur even if the diplomats themselves and the wider community may not be aware of it.

Way forward in gender mainstreaming of the diplomatic service

Convincingly, no serious impact will be made on the problems of gender inequalities in the diplomatic service in the future without taking measures that not only empower individual women, but women in general. One such a measure is through gender sensitive platforms involving important questions of policy content, of ideas, visions and strategies for change. Society should avail all opportunities for girl-child education by removing all obstacles such as discrimination in resource allocation according to gender. It is common knowledge that advantaged individuals will get the best and therefore be more competitive in future. Therefore, one way to balance is to put in place mechanisms to bring justice in places where injustice prevails. This can be accomplished for instance through positive action (affirmative action) in the form of fifty-fifty

³⁴ Daily Nation, 24 June 2003; in Sunday Nation, 13 July 2003; East African Standard, 5 August 2003; East African Standard, 3 October 2003; East African Standard, 4 December 2003, p. 3.

³⁵ Dahlerup, Drude, 2001, "Women in political decision making: from critical mass to critical Acts in Scandinavia," in Sktelsback, I and Smith D (eds) *Gender Peace and Conflict*, Sage Publications, London, California, New Delhi, p. 108.

recruitment of both genders. The state policies should be designed to eliminate invisible as well as visible discrimination and to favour and promote the interests of all disadvantaged (women) based on gender. Such an action will lead to more women achieving high positions and thus help break down stereotyped assumptions that tend to relegate women to lower positions.

One of the strategies of affirmative action is reverse discrimination and justification for this is to make up for past systemic discrimination against women. Therefore, it is a kind of remedy for past deprivation of opportunities. But it should be pointed out that it should not be abused through indiscriminate application, like filling up demanding positions with unqualified candidates. Affirmative action should be taken by government as a means of improving the representation of disadvantaged groups in the sectors of training and employment to which they have traditionally been denied access which they merit. Power is fuelled increasingly by knowledge in the present world. These can be technical, scientific or professional training. Those who generate and transmit such knowledge and/or impede its communication shape this power hierarchy. Setting quotas in training institutions will lead to breaching the wide gender gap.

There is need to introduce laws that encourage women to take up public employment (a just distribution across sectors and positions) as part of government policy of affirmative action through the introduction of legally binding quotas. Laws will give legal substance to pious statement of intent about the inadequate representation of women in certain sectors of employment and at the higher levels in all sectors. In such an arrangement, diplomatic service, which is highly masculine, becomes gender sensitive in the longer run. This objective is achievable through the promotion of an equitable representation of women in governmental and non-governmental functions, and the appointment and/or nomination of women on an equal basis with men as members of delegations to national, regional and/or international meetings. Government should make equal and deliberate opportunities for women to enter diplomatic service.

Conclusion

From the discussions and analyses that emerged from gender and diplomatic service in Kenya since 1960s, it is clear that women are not only under-represented in the diplomatic service, but they are also not facilitated to reach the apex. Cultural engendering of siblings in Kenya puts the girl-child at a disadvantageous position in accessing education, which is core to future career development. Marginalisation is further entrenched in institutions of higher

learning and career development, where women are not encouraged to take up diplomacy viewed as 'masculine'.

Apart from education, other factors like social stereotypes on women's roles acts as obstacles to the incorporation of women into this predominantly 'men's' profession. There is therefore need to insert new efforts and introduce new platforms in all government policies in order to provide room for women's potentiality in this area. Better gender relations are crucial because the alternative would be a waste of talent and gender injustice. However, the NARC appointments to diplomatic service and especially the higher rank of Ambassadors/High Commissioners portrayed a reflection of the past two regimes of Kenyatta and Moi because close relatives, political allies, inter-party and/or inter-ethnic considerations dominated the appointments. The gender-ethnic issues and/or considerations (own) continue to weigh down female appointments to Kenyan foreign missions. For those who have developed a career by specialising in diplomacy through education, training, active contribution/participation through conferences, workshops and scholarly works, but have no political links, still have to wait longer.

The challenges facing Kenya's foreign ministry and the Kenyan state as a whole in the 21st century is the identification of astute diplomats, trained in the field of diplomacy/international relations, who would take Kenya through the challenges of globalisation, economic prosperity, sound security for citizens and investors so as to be at par with other international diplomats in various forums. In this case, a pool of troika (i.e. the foreign affairs ministry, parliamentary committee on foreign affairs and academia) should join hands to form Kenya's foreign affairs council and/or commission for this country's prestige and prosperity. It is important to note that a good diplomat never loses without the strategy for the next move. The government should therefore come up with innovative and creative ways to generate interest and promote the training and placement of women; thus gender mainstreaming in the diplomatic service, which would lead to an introduction of new traits in the conduct of Kenya's foreign policy.

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