

## Feature Article

### Regional Networking as Transnational Feminism: African Experiences

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#### Introduction

The term “transnational feminism” is sometimes used as shorthand for Western involvement in and influence on feminist movements globally. This is only one element of transnational linkages, and one that is increasingly diminishing in importance as movements in the South have begun to claim much of the momentum of feminist and women's rights organising globally. In particular, their mobilisation at the regional or continental level highlights another dimension of transnational mobilisation that does not always receive adequate attention. Non-Western movements have always actively defined women's rights agendas, priorities and directions in their own countries, but what we are witnessing today is that much of the new transnational mobilisation around women's issues in the early 21st century appears to be happening in the global South in regional forums. This article therefore treats Africa-wide networks and sub-regions (East, West, and Southern Africa) as a subset of transnational networking.

In Africa, many of the influences on women's organising have emerged from global forums; funding from the North also carries concomitant influences. Global movements and the adoption of international treaties, conventions and UN Plans of Action have been essential in laying the basis for further changes at the regional and national levels (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Important international networking takes place around particular issues, such as violence against women, reproductive rights, micro-credit and political leadership. Significant global connections have also arisen around women's advocacy through religiously-based networks (Women Living Under Muslim Laws and World Young Women's Christian Association, for example) and professional organisations (International Association of Women Judges and Zonta, for example), as well as academic linkages and conferences (such as the Women's World Congress held in 2002 in Kampala, Uganda).

As significant as these global transnational influences are, this article shows that the most important transnational dialogues influencing domestic movements and national policy within Africa are regional discussions and regional diffusions of ideas, norms, practices and strategies. Some of the most immediate and important transnational influences have come from other African countries through Africa-wide and sub-regional networks, meetings and media influences. Similar regional influences are evident within Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, between the Baltics and the Nordic countries, and within Latin America, the Middle East to an increasing extent, and Asia.

These regional flows of ideas and norms are also critical in influencing global transnational initiatives. For example, one of the six organisations involved in drafting the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), together with representatives of member states, was the All African Women's Conference, which was the only regional organisation involved (Zwingel, 2004: 12). Moreover, African contributions to transnational women's rights activism have been especially important concerning those issues that have been the subject of considerable debate and discussion within Africa: violence against women, women and conflict, the girl child, financing women's entrepreneurship, resistance against female genital cutting, the role of government versus NGOs in service provision and, increasingly, in discussions about women and political decision-making (Madunagu, 2001; Snyder, 2003; Tripp, forthcoming).

African women's movements have participated in forging an international consensus on the rights-based approach to women's rights that has emerged in the past two decades. This

rights-based consensus – which has combined development and human rights interests within transnational women's mobilisation – has been very much a product of global dialogue and interaction, which are increasingly being shaped by the global South. This has been especially apparent, for example, in advocacy concerning home-based workers, gender mainstreaming, gender budgeting, electoral quotas for women, sex-trafficking and violence against women. In Africa, the movements around customary law, as well as land and property rights, have been particularly important in advancing these rights-based approaches (Tripp, 2004).

This article explores key mechanisms through which regional influences spread and are diffused. It does so by focusing on an arena in which these regional linkages and influences have been most visible: in encouraging women to claim political leadership positions. These mechanisms include:

- 1) direct diffusion between NGOs and NGO coalitions from one country to the next;
- 2) the promotion of gender balance within sub-regional organisations;
- 3) sub-regional pressures for improved gender representation in government and parliament;
- 4) pressures for gender balance at the pan-African level;
- 5) sub-regional advocacy networks for female representation;
- 6) pressures from national networks on sub-regional organisations; and
- 7) Africa-wide advocacy and networking to promote women's leadership.

These various influences and diffusions of norms between NGO domestic coalitions, transnational, continental and sub-regional NGO networks, states, and African inter-governmental forums at the regional and sub-regional levels are depicted in Figure 1.

This article shows how important these continental and sub-regional influences are for domestic politics, serving as a critical conduit for changing international norms. In this sense, they are perhaps more important than global transnational influences as a vehicle for changing the status of women. Prior to the emergence of these continental and sub-regional alliances in the 1990s, African leaders frequently disparaged women's activism as a product of corrupting Western feminist influences. Today, most of the impetus for change comes from within Africa and from regional-level networks. This may explain why there is greater openness to these changing norms at present, even as resistance to advancing women's rights continues. Africa has, for example, emerged as a world leader in promoting women's leadership in politics; the fact that the external influences are now primarily African has contributed in no small measure to the willingness on the part of Africa's leaders to embrace these new norms.

### **Reasons for growth of continental and sub-regional networks**

The growth of the new continental and sub-regional networks, especially after 2000, followed the rise of the new domestic women's movements. From the mid-1980s onwards, and especially after the early 1990s, women's organisations increased greatly throughout Africa, as did the arenas in which women were able to assert their varied concerns. During the 1990s, as single-party rule was replaced by multi-party systems and political space expanded, autonomous women's mobilisation increased. Simultaneously, the old depoliticised mass women's organisations, which had been tied to the ruling party or state and run by relatives of party leaders, diminished in importance. A cadre of better-educated women emerged with new leadership and organisational skills, further facilitating the growth of the NGOs. Changing donor strategies targeted NGOs and women's NGOs in particular, as states appeared increasingly corrupt and unaccountable. New funding was directed both towards domestic NGOs and towards regional networks. While women's mobilisation became less and less dependent on the ruling party or state for resources, external donor funding created new dependencies and new bases for patronage. Some NGOs were created

by former wives and relatives of party leaders in order to procure donor funds (see, for example, Ibrahim, 2004). Nevertheless, the new NGOs of the 1990s were characterised by their independence from party and government patronage, which meant that they could select their own leaders, form their own agendas and seek independent sources of support.

Transnational influences became apparent as large numbers of women attended global conferences, such as the 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing. Although the forces driving many of the demands for changes in women's status were domestic, international pressures and norms clearly gave added impetus to these new demands (Mbire-Barungi, 1999: 435). As in Latin America, the Beijing conference legitimised key elements of feminist discourse in African NGOs, parties, states, international development agencies and other forums (Alvarez, 1998: 295).

The new access to cell phones and e-mail speeded up communication between women's organisations within Africa and beyond, facilitating their growth and ability to network, as well as their capacity to carry out advocacy. In the last decade, women in many countries have aggressively used the media to demand their rights in ways that were not evident in the early 1980s. In some countries, they have taken their claims to land, inheritance, and associational autonomy to court, also something rarely seen in the past. Women have been challenging laws and constitutions that do not uphold gender equality. In addition, they have increasingly moved into government, legislative, party, NGO and other leadership positions that were previously almost exclusively the domain of men.

### **Diffusion of norms regionally**

There is no doubt that the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and other international treaties and conventions have been essential in shaping the norms driving the women's movements in Africa, as have the various international conferences – such as the UN conferences on women in Mexico City (1975), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995), as well as the UN conferences on population, the environment, education, human rights and others. Nevertheless, much of the actual mobilisation and diffusion of ideas, norms, and strategies took place at the regional level in Africa, especially after the 1990s. But as recently as 2000, Chidi Anselm Odinkalu, a senior legal officer at Interights, observed that “[t]he successes of the women's movement in international policy-making have not been exactly replicated for regional African institutions.” Five years later, this statement no longer holds true with respect to women's political representation, as key continental and sub-regional bodies in Africa have begun to implement quotas for female representation and to encourage member states to promote women leaders. Women's political participation is one of the clearest examples by which to gauge the spread of regional norms more generally.

Africa has some of the highest rates of female representation in the world today. Rwanda became the country with the largest percentage of women parliamentarians in the world after women claimed almost 49% of the seats in the country's 2003 parliamentary elections. Women held 46% of parliamentary seats in Seychelles between 1991 and 1993. Today, women in South Africa, Mozambique, and Seychelles hold one-third of parliamentary seats; women in Swaziland hold one-third of the seats in the upper house of parliament; in Namibia, women hold 42% of seats in local government; and in Uganda, they hold one-third.

Over the past four decades, the average number of women legislators in Africa has jumped from one per cent of all legislators in 1960 to 14.6% in 2004, with the biggest increase occurring between 1990 and 2004. Moreover, the one-third goal is no longer considered sufficient in many parts of Africa. Today, active “50/50” movements are pushing for full equality in gender representation in the legislature in countries as diverse as South Africa,

Namibia, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia and Senegal. It appears that these “50/50” campaigns are most prominent in Africa compared with other world regions, with only a handful found in the North (Slovenia and Bulgaria, for example). [1] One reason for this insistence on quotas is the widespread perception among activists that unless drastic steps are taken to address women's marginalisation from politics, women's political presence will increase at far too slow a pace as to result in meaningful representation.

These changes are occurring within a broader context of women making bids for power in a number of arenas. Since the 1990s, women in Africa have been forming and heading up political parties in increasing numbers, running for the presidency, and becoming active in local politics. Since the mid-1990s, there have been three women vice-presidents (in Uganda, The Gambia and South Africa), one female head of state (Ruth Perry served as chair of the six-member collective presidency of Liberia), several prime ministers (Rwanda, Burundi and Senegal), and several speakers of the house (Lesotho, South Africa and Ethiopia). Many constitutions were rewritten with the onset of political liberalisation in the 1990s, with gender equality provisions and clauses prohibiting gender discrimination being incorporated (Uganda, South Africa, Namibia and Mozambique, among others). These changes, especially the introduction of quotas, have not come about easily, and their sustainability is always in doubt because they can so easily be reversed. Women's capacity to take advantage of these new openings depends on the extent to which other measures are taken to facilitate women's participation, as well as the general willingness of society to take women leaders seriously.

As mentioned above, this diffusion of norms to increase women's political representation has occurred through several mechanisms in Africa, each of which will be described below (see Figure 1: the letters below correspond to the arrows in the diagram).

#### 1) Direct diffusion between NGOs and NGO coalitions

The South African Women's Charter, developed by the Women's National Coalition of 81 groups, was replicated by women's manifestos elsewhere in the continent. For example, manifestos were drawn up by Botswana's Emang Basadi in 1994, the Uganda Women's Network in 1996, and Ghanaian women's organisations in 2004. The Women's Manifesto for Ghana was developed specifically to press the government to implement a comprehensive national gender policy by 2005 (Selolwane, 2004; Otu, 2004). (See influences from NGOs in one country to another, Figure 1, A.)

#### 2) Promoting greater gender balance within sub-regional organisations

Women's organisations pressed for gender representation within sub-regional inter-governmental organisations, and in turn, these institutions became mechanisms through which to promote gender representation in member countries.

The East African Community (EAC) has been one arena for such negotiations. The EAC involves the gradual unification of Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, first through the establishment of a customs union, then a common market and a monetary union, and ultimately a political federation of the East African states. Each of the three country members of the EAC were required to include at least three women within the nine members representing each country in the Legislative Assembly (EALA). [2]

Tanzania duly appointed three women and Uganda four. However, in a breach of the EAC treaty, Kenya included only two women representatives among its nine EALA parliamentarians. However, the fact that this was a regional organisation with an external demand for gender balance gave women in Kenya added impetus to push for better gender representation (Figure 1, B). Kenyan members of parliament had voted against an affirmative action motion, requiring that a third of EALA members be women, which had

been put to the house by Beth Mugo (MP, Dagoretti, Nairobi). President at the time, Daniel arap Moi came out openly against affirmative action for women, infuriating women politicians and activists (Teyie, 2001). Hundreds of women demanding fair representation demonstrated for six hours at parliament, and tried to block a presidential motorcade. They also demonstrated at the Arusha International Conference Center in Tanzania at the opening of the EALA meetings. Women's organisations also began planning to file a suit in the East African Court of Law regarding Kenya's violation of the treaty.

Prior to these events, Moi had opened the East African Women Parliamentarians' Conference in March 2001, saying to the women present, "You can achieve more, can get more, but because of your little minds, you cannot get what you expect to get" (Onyinge and Njue, 2001). These comments, coming only a few years ago from Kenya's President, are a salutary reminder of the uphill battle African women face in advocating for greater representation. His remarks aroused widespread outrage from women delegates from East Africa, and from members of Kenyan women's organisations. They also took exception to his advice to women not to mix their pursuit of advancement with politics. [3]

This struggle concerning women's representation in the EALA had an impact on the 2002 parliamentary elections in Kenya. In the elections, women won 16 out of 224 seats (7,1%), double the number in the previous parliament. Seven women were appointed to the cabinet, three as full ministers, and four as permanent secretaries (chief executives of the ministries). The previous government had had only two female permanent secretaries and no female ministers at all. In October 2003, the Kenyan parliament passed a bill to establish an autonomous National Commission on Gender and Development to co-ordinate and facilitate gender mainstreaming in national development. In spite of these gains, Kenyan women parliamentarians continued to feel sidelined, and the Kenya Women Parliamentarians Association (KEWOPA) met with President Kibaki in April 2004 to complain that not enough women had been considered for parastatal, cabinet and ambassadorial appointments. [4] This example shows how the national and sub-regional women's movements reinforced one another with respect to gender representation within the sub-regional governmental body and within the state in Kenya.

3) Sub-regional pressures for improved gender representation in government and parliament  
As a result of pressures from women's movements, sub-regional organisations such as the above-mentioned EAC, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) with 14 member states, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) with 16 member states have begun to encourage gender equality in political representation (Figure 1, C). ECOWAS, for example, has set targets to improve gender representation in government and has put pressure on countries lagging behind.

SADC has been especially aggressive in promoting gender balance in governing institutions within its member states. In January 1997, government representatives and NGOs held a gender strategy workshop that put forward recommendations for a gender policy and institutional framework in SADC. The recommendations advanced in the "Declaration on Gender and Development" were adopted in November 1997 in Blantyre by the SADC Heads of Government. The Declaration included a commitment to a 30% quota of women in political decision-making bodies by 2005. SADC also established a Gender Unit, which has adopted a far-reaching programme for achieving gender parity in political representation in the SADC countries (Morna, 2004). On average, the 14 SADC countries have 17.75% female representation in the lower or single house, which is higher than the overall average of 14.6% female legislative representation in sub-Saharan Africa. Some countries have among the highest figures for representation of women in the world.

A SADC Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus was formed in April 2002 in Luanda,

Angola, to advocate and lobby support for the minimum 30% representation of women in SADC parliaments. This body helped form women's parliamentary caucuses in Zambia, Lesotho, and Zimbabwe (Morna, 2004: 111). These caucuses are non-partisan and are aimed at bringing women parliamentarians together across party lines to address issues of common concern. Similar caucuses are found throughout Africa, in South Africa, the Seychelles, Tanzania, Uganda and Sierra Leone.

These sub-regional networks have been particularly effective in pushing for electoral quotas for women, which is one of the main ways women are coming into legislatures and into local governments in Africa. By 2005, approximately 23 African countries had adopted some form of legislative quotas for women and some, like Angola, had plans to adopt quotas, while others, like the Gambia, Kenya and Nigeria, were engaged in ongoing debates on quotas. [5]

#### 4) Pan-African pressures for gender equality in political representation

Similar dynamics to those found at the sub-regional level in Africa have been at work at the pan-African level. For example, NGOs and networks have been pressing for changes within the African Union (Figure 1, C), which in turn has implications for policy and movements to advance women's status at the national level (Figure 1, D). This signals a significant change from the days of the African Union's predecessor, the Organisation for African Unity; the latter castigated feminism as a Western concept and had little interest in promoting women's leadership or women's concerns.

As a result of pressure from women activists, the Pan-African Parliament of the African Union now has a woman president, Gertrude Mongella – a first in the history of such a pan-African body. Mongella became internationally known for her role as chair of the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The African Union has also elected another woman, Loum N. Ne'loumsei Elise from Chad, as one of its four vice-presidents. In addition, half the members of the ten-person commission are women. By comparison, only one-third of the members (nominees) of the European Union Commission are women (eight out of 24). Moreover, women on the African Union Commission head up key portfolios, including political affairs, trade and industry, human and people's rights, human resources, science and technology, and the rural economy and agriculture.

In 2003, when African Union diplomats attempted to reduce the number of women commissioners in a bid to improve regional representativeness, the women resisted and were able to hang on to their positions and maintain parity in this institution. Thus, the new measures to increase female political representation were by no means “gifts” to women, who fought every step of the way for these seats.

These developments in the African Union were the outcome of a long process of mobilisation, starting with a Regional Conference on Peace and Development in Kampala in 1993 that adopted the Kampala Action Plan, which promoted women's political representation in all representative bodies at national and regional levels. This eventually led to the formation of the African Women's Committee on Peace and Development (AWCPD), which was established by the Organisation of African Unity and the Economic Commission for Africa in 1998. The AWCPD itself included government representatives, prominent African women leaders and representatives of leading NGOs in various countries. [6]

The AWCPD was instrumental in getting gender issues placed on the table during the formation of the African Union (Figure 1, C). It was also the driving force behind the “50/50” requirement stipulating that half of the African Union Commission members be women. It had lobbied for this provision at the African Union summit in Durban in 2002, and brought it to fruition at the Maputo conference in 2003. At the latter conference, its members also

campaigned successfully to have Mongella elected to the presidency of the African Union parliament. The organisation has also lobbied vigorously for women to be included in peace processes around the continent.

The AWCPD, together with African women's networks [7] throughout the continent, successfully pushed for key protocols recognising women's rights, the most important one of which was the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. [8] After years of lobbying, the protocol was adopted on 11 July 2003 by the Assembly of the African Union's second summit in Maputo, Mozambique. This protocol calls for equal representation for women in political office and a broad range of economic and social rights for women. [9] For the first time in international law, the protocol specifically calls for the reproductive right of women to medical abortion in cases where pregnancy is the result of rape or incest, or when the continuation of the pregnancy threatens the mother's life. Also for the first time, the protocol endorses the legal prohibition of female genital cutting. [10]

These national efforts were replicated at the regional level (Figure 1, E). A Pan-African Parliament Women's Caucus was formed at the Sixth African Regional Conference on Women held in Addis Ababa, which adopted the regional Plan of Action to accelerate the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing platforms for action regarding the advancement of women in the period 2000–2004. This caucus sought to find ways to create mechanisms to monitor the progress made by individual countries, which had drawn up comprehensive national plans of action that they had begun implementing. Their goals generally included efforts to mainstream gender in government policies and programmes, promote women's decision-making endeavours, expand pro-women legislation, and help women parliamentarians learn more about Pan-African institutions to ensure greater participation by women in politics and decision-making. It has generally been recognised that actual progress has often fallen short of planned goals.

##### 5) Sub-regional advocacy networks for female representation

On the face of it, it appears that the 1995 Beijing conference spurred considerable activity in women's mobilisation. One finds, for example, the majority of electoral quotas for women being adopted in countries after 1995, along with efforts to train leaders and promote greater political participation on the part of women. But a closer scrutiny of some of these processes shows that it was not always the actual event that influenced national policies, but rather the processes surrounding the conference that gave impetus to various policy changes. Much of the discussion around the expansion of women's roles in political decision-making had been going on long before the conference, and then as part of the sub-regional and regional conferences held prior to the Beijing conference.

In East Africa, for example, a preparatory meeting in Kampala in 1993 brought together 120 leaders of women's organisations from Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya (Figure 1, E) to plan for the Africa-wide United Nations Women's Conference to be held in Dakar in 1994, and the subsequent international conference in Beijing in 1995 (Figure 1, F). Women delegates from all three countries placed access to power as their top priority on the agenda when asked to rank their preferences to determine overall strategic goals in the region.

These agendas, articulated in the process of preparing for the Dakar and Beijing conferences, subsequently became the blueprint for activism in the years ahead in these three countries. New sub-regional networks were formed to advance these goals. For example, the Eastern African Sub-Regional Support Initiative (EASSI) was created explicitly to facilitate linkage, collaboration, networking and information-sharing between the different actors and stakeholders in the Fourth World Conference on Women. One of their main goals was to promote the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the African and Global

Platforms for Action within the East African sub-region (Figure 1, F).

6) The role of national networks within the sub-regional context

National plans drawn up at the sub-regional levels were also taken to the 1994 All-Africa Dakar meeting to prepare for the 1995 Beijing meeting. It was out of these efforts that major networks were formed at the national level. In Uganda, the Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) was established in 1993 to promote networking and collective goal formation and action among women's organisations working for gender equity. The Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP), formed in 1992, played much the same role in the neighbouring country.

7) Africa-wide advocacy organisations

In addition to the national and sub-regional networks, there has been an explosion of Africa-wide advocacy and networking. The majority of such women's rights organisations and networks were formed after 1990, with a large number created after 2000. Only a handful were established prior to 1990, and most of these were religious, academic or focused on women in development. Some networks were formed to promote women's role in development and politics. The East African seminar, "East African Women Look Ahead", held in April 1964 at the Kenya Institute of Administration, was one of the first post-independence attempts to create a dialogue around redefining women's roles. The Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) sponsored five such seminars, from which emerged its own programme relating to women in development (Snyder, 2004).

The majority of these Africa-wide organisations are based in Uganda, the UK, South Africa, Senegal and Kenya. Unlike the main transnational women's organisations formed during the colonial period (Young Women's Christian Association, Girl Guides, Mothers' Union, International Council of Women, and so on), many of which are still functioning today, these new organisations are largely based in Africa and are founded and run by African women. Their locations are determined by a combination of factors, including relative stability of the country, the strength of its women's movement, and development of communications facilities. Most of the UK- and US-based organisations are run by Africans in the diaspora, creating possible tensions between diaspora-driven agendas and those emanating from Africa itself. The diaspora-based associations also contribute to competition for resources and the ear of key UN agencies.

Some of the very first Africa-wide networks of women were academic ones, such as the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD), which was formed in 1977. AAWORD was one of the first autonomous pan-African networks which, according to Amina Mama, "reaffirm[ed] intellectual traditions that challenge[d] imperial legacies, encourage[d] trans-disciplinary research and value[d] independent publication. As the established academic institutions deteriorated, these independent networks gained in importance, ensuring the survival of a vibrant intellectual culture closely attuned to the challenges facing Africans at all levels of their diverse and complex societies" (Mama, 2004: 5).

The Africa-wide networks generally focus on issues such as women's education, development, information communications technologies, media, peace, political participation and leadership, reproductive rights and women's health (Figure 1, C). Women's peacebuilding efforts have become an increasingly important area of sub-regional advocacy networking, and have implications for the promotion of female leadership in peace processes, as well as in future governments. Women have been very active, especially since the 1990s, in peacebuilding initiatives throughout Africa: from Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo-Brazzaville, Mali, Senegal, Somalia and Uganda to Sudan and other countries that have been wracked by civil war or conflict. Female political

representation in the peace efforts and post-conflict governance arrangements has been a central theme of women's mobilisation.

Women are also involved in numerous continental organisations, such as the Federation of African Women's Peace Networks (FERFAP). This was formed in 1997 [11] and today includes 16 countries (Manuh, 1998). Its goal is to ensure that women in these countries are brought into peacemaking initiatives. FERFAP is involved in activities ranging from petitions and peace marches to local alliance-building and national reconciliation conferences.

One important West African regional network is the Mano River Union Women Peace Network (MARWOPNET) of women activists from Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea. This network was able to mediate an intense conflict between Liberia and Guinea in 2001, in spite of minimal resources and being excluded from the formal peace process. They managed to get the feuding heads of state to a regional peace summit. As a result of their actions, these women were given delegate status at the 24th ECOWAS summit in December 2001, where they were able to make an appeal for African leaders to support women's peacemaking initiatives. Thus, when tensions arose in 2001 between Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, hundreds of women marched through the streets of Monrovia, Liberia, and Freetown, Sierra Leone, to demand peace.

## **Conclusions**

This overview of the influence of transnational advocacy on African states to increase female political representation suggests that the most important locus of transnational diffusion occurs at the continental and sub-regional level. There are several mechanisms through which diffusion occurs. At times the influences can be direct, where key women's organisations or coalitions in one country serve as an example, or provide strategies to their counterparts in another country. Women's organisations and networks have also sought to realise a better gender balance within African sub-regional intergovernmental organisations such as EAC, SADC and ECOWAS. These organisations in turn have set targets and put pressure on their member states to improve the political representation of women at various levels of government. SADC has been more active in this regard than other sub-regional organisations. One of the ways in which this type of diffusion is occurring is through the introduction of electoral quotas of various kinds. Similar efforts have been made to influence pan-African bodies like the African Union; as a result of the lobbying efforts of women's organisations and networks, it has a 50% representation of women in the Pan-African Parliament and a woman has been elected as president of the organisation.

In addition to these efforts, various sub-regional organisations and networks, such as the Eastern African Sub-Regional Support Initiative (EASSI), have formed to advance women's political representation. This type of mobilisation was particularly important during the years of preparation leading up to the UN Beijing conference in 1995, when regional meetings of women's NGOs came together and, as in the East African case, identified women's political advancement as their primary goal. One outcome of these continental and sub-regional efforts was the creation of national networks that came together before and after the Beijing conference to formulate and advance collaborative agendas relating to the national plans of action.

Still another form of mobilisation has involved individual organisations or networks of women from countries throughout Africa or from particular regions, who come together for specific purposes, one of which has been to advance women politically in their respective countries. The African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), for example, monitored the advancement of women in Africa after the 1985 Nairobi conference and in preparation for Beijing in 1995 and afterwards. All of these multiple strategies, many of which

overlap, demonstrate the overall importance of continent-wide and sub-regional mobilisation as a way of understanding how transnational norms, practices and strategies are diffused.

Women activists often encounter fierce resistance to their efforts to advance women politically, economically, socially, and in a variety of other arenas. However, the fact that varied regional influences, from the African Union and the sub-regional SADC to African women's networks, are putting pressure on governments to advance women's rights has created greater openness to change on the part of governments. The veil of transnational feminism has been lifted to reveal the local scene, thereby eliminating the dubious yet all too frequent charge that the advancement of women's rights must be equated with "alien" Western influences. The regional pressures for women's rights described here are emanating from Africa, and are eliciting new and important African responses.

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## Footnotes

[1] <http://www.wedo.org/balance2.htm>

[2] One might contrast this one-third representation of women in the East African Legislative Assembly with the Central American Parliament, which has only 18% female representation.

[3] "Women Express Anger at President's Remark", *The Nation* (Nairobi), 8 March 2001.

[4] "Women MPs Visit President", *The East African Standard*, 20 April 2004.

[5] Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Morocco, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda all have some form of constitutionally-mandated quota system for women's representation in parliament, either in the form of reserved or special seats that only women can run for, or appointed seats. Others have legally-mandated quota systems for women, such as Niger (nominated and elected), the transitional government in Somalia (women-only lists), Sudan (reserved) and Swaziland (appointed). Finally, there are party-mandated quotas for women in Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia.

[6] These included Pro-Femmes (Rwanda), Federation of African Women's Peace Networks (Zambia), Femmes Africa Solidarité (Senegal), Ethiopian Women's Lawyers Association (Ethiopia), and Save Somali Women and Children (Somalia).

[7] These include Foundation for Community Development (FCD) in collaboration with UNIFEM (Southern Africa Regional Office), Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS), African Centre for Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria, Southern African Development Community (SADC) Gender Unit, Forum Mulher, Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) in Mozambique, and the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET).

[8] The new protocol builds on the Durban Declaration on Gender and Mainstreaming and

the Effective Participation of Women in the African Union (30 June 2003); and the Dakar Strategy on Mainstreaming Gender and Women's Effective Participation in the African Union (26 April 2003). <http://www.africaaction.org/docs03/wom0307.htm>.

[9]

[http://www.hrea.org/erc/Library/display.php?doc\\_id=806&category\\_id=31&category\\_type=3](http://www.hrea.org/erc/Library/display.php?doc_id=806&category_id=31&category_type=3).

[10] "African Union adopts protocol on the rights of African women", *Equality Now*, 14 July 2003. <http://www.africaaction.org/docs03/wom0307.htm>.

[11] The Congo, Angola, Liberia, South Africa, Burkina Faso, Sudan, Somalia, Mozambique, Mali, Burundi and Rwanda were represented.

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