How effective is gender mainstreaming at the national level? 
A comparative study of Nigeria and South Africa

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Introduction

The notion of gender mainstreaming gained international attention during the 1990s, particularly after deliberations at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo 1994 and at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Significant attention was given at these conferences to issues affecting women's health, economic development and wellbeing. In particular, the international community agreed at Beijing to mainstream gender in all activities and programmes of governments. This is more or less a reinforcement of the provisions of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which came into force in 1981. The Convention urges states to take adequate measures with a view to addressing cultural and religious practices that perpetuate the subordination of women and deny them the enjoyment of their fundamental rights and freedoms.


The African Women’s Protocol remains one of the most radical human rights instruments that address gender inequality and the subordination of women in all spheres of life (Banda 2005; Durojaye 2006). It contains a number of groundbreaking provisions relating to women’s sexual and reproductive health, inheritance rights, political participation, economic empowerment, elimination of harmful cultural practices and equal rights in marriage and social lives. More importantly, it urges African government to enact laws and adopt policies that will advance gender equality and protect women from human rights abuses

Although the notion of gender mainstreaming does not imply favouring women, given the patriarchal nature of most societies (particularly African societies) and the historically disadvantaged position of women, it is meant to ensure equal participation by and opportunities for women in all spheres of life. Gender mainstreaming refers to the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies, at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making (Council of Europe 1998). According to Mukopadhyaya (2004), gender mainstreaming should aim to achieve the following:

- make policy makers pay more attention to resources available to men and women;
- make policy makers look at the differences that occur in men and women’s experiences in their daily lives; and
- make policy makers examine the representation of men and women in decision-making positions in all areas.

To determine the extent to which a country has mainstreamed gender into its political, economic and social lives, attention should be given to how existing laws and policies accommodate the differences that exist between men and women and how women’s specific concerns have been addressed with the integrationist and transformative approaches (Mukhopadhyay 2004). More importantly, gender mainstreaming must be integrated into all aspects of human endeavour, particularly political representation and public management policies.

Implementation of national action plans on gender in Nigeria and South Africa

To determine whether a country is committed to advancing gender equality within its area of jurisdiction, one must
examine whether existing laws and policies recognise gender inequality and aim to redress it. This section examines the legal framework for advancing gender equality in Nigeria and South Africa. The choice of these countries is based on the dynamics which they represent. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with about 150 million people (National Population Commission 2006) made up of about 200 ethnic groups, and is regarded as one of the leading oil exporting countries in the world. On the other hand, South Africa, which recently emerged from the apartheid era, has one of the most buoyant economies in Africa. Its population is estimated at 50 million and is made up of diverse groups and people (often referred to as the ‘rainbow nation’), speaking 11 official languages (Statistics South Africa 2011).

The discussion that follows will assess whether the actions and measures taken by these countries in addressing gender inequality are consistent with their obligations under national and international laws. This analysis is carried out by focusing on issues such as gender and governance regimes, political representation and public management policy.

**Gender and governance regimes**

In an attempt to address gender inequality in Nigeria and South Africa, the governments of these countries have adopted important governance regimes. For instance, Nigeria has adopted a number of measures, including the National Gender Policy (the Policy) of 2006, in response to the prevailing gender inequality in the country. The Policy aims at complementing the provision of section 42 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria, which prohibits discrimination on different grounds, including sex. One of its goals is to:

- build a just society devoid of discrimination, harness the full potentials of all social groups regardless of sex or circumstance, promote the enjoyment of fundamental human rights and protect the health, social, economic and political well being of all citizens in order to achieve equitable rapid economic growth.

The Policy is a commitment to gender mainstreaming as a developmental approach and tool for achieving the economic reform agenda. It also recognises that gender issues are critical to the achievement of national development.

South Africa has one of the most progressive constitutions in the world. The 1996 Constitution of South Africa contains copious provisions on equality and respect for the fundamental rights of all, particularly disadvantaged groups such as women. Section 9 is regarded as the ‘equality clause’ and prohibits discrimination on various grounds including gender, sex and pregnancy. In addition, the Gender Policy of 2000 has among others the objectives of improving the status of women, promotion of their economic empowerment, the development and implementation of affirmative action targeting women and the setting up of effective machinery at national and provincial levels to implement the Policy’s provisions. The Gender Policy aligns itself with other international affirmations on women’s rights and gender equality. Additionally, the South African government has enacted laws such as the Employment Equity Act (EEA) of 1998 and Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (PEPUDA) of 2000 in order to address all forms of discrimination within the country, particularly the employment sector (Hassim et al 2007).

From the foregoing it is evident that the two countries have adopted gender-specific governance regimes. However, whether or not these legal frameworks have impacted positively on the lives of women in these countries is the basis of the discussion below. Addressing gender inequality in any society goes beyond merely enacting laws and adopting policies, and requires a commitment to implementing the laws.

**Political representation**

Although the Nigerian Policy on Gender of 2006 contains lofty goals (such as achieving ‘minimum threshold of representation for women in order to promote equal opportunity in all areas of political, social, economic life of the country’), neither the Policy nor the Constitution contain specific provisions on affirmative action. Therefore, the situation on the ground does not seem to reflect the Nigerian government’s commitment to eliminate gender inequality. The result is that women are still under-represented in key political positions. For instance, women only account for four of about 109 Members of Senate (less than five per cent) and a mere 13 of 352 Members of the House of Representatives (less than five per cent) (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2011).

Nigeria is currently ranked number 127 on the list of countries that have achieved gender parity in the parliamentary sphere (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2011). With regard to the executive arm, women only account for 12 out of 41 ministers (representing about 12 per cent) and none of the state governors is a woman. It should be noted that article 9 of the Women’s Protocol enjoins African governments to actively promote women’s participation in government, including ensuring that women are equally represented in all levels of decision-making. The low representation of women in politics in Nigeria is an indication that the government is failing in its obligation under the Women’s Protocol. Women should no longer be viewed as inferior or less qualified as men. Rather they should be treated as equal partners with men in developing and implementing government’s policies and decisions.

With regard to South Africa, the Gender Policy of 2000 provides that women and men will be given equal oppor-
tunity to participate in the country’s political, social, economic and cultural development. It further aims to achieve equality for women as active citizens, decision makers and beneficiaries in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres of life. The Gender Policy equally upholds the principle of affirmative action. In addition, the ruling African National Congress (ANC) recognises the principle of gender equality and has agreed to allocate 50 per cent of all political positions to women at branch, district, provincial and national levels (Mukasa 2008). This is quite commendable and in line with the spirit of article 9 of the Women’s Protocol. It will undoubtedly go a long way in promoting the rights of women in the country.

When South Africa returned to democratic rule in 1994, about 111 women were elected to the legislature, representing 28 per cent of the 400 Members of Parliament. By 2009, this number had increased to 178, representing about 45 per cent of the total. In the National Provincial Assembly, 16 women represented about 29 per cent of its 56 members (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2011). A similar trend is noticed at the provincial level. In 1994, women only made up 23 per cent of the 428 seats available for the provincial legislatures. By 2009, this number had increased to 170 (about 45 per cent) of the 430 seats then available at the provincial level (Statistics South Africa 2011). This development has put South Africa at number five on the list of countries that have achieved gender parity in the legislature. In Africa it is second only to Rwanda regarding the number of women represented in the parliament (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2011).

In 2009, when President Zuma’s government was inaugurated, 14 ministers and 12 deputy ministers were women, representing about 42 per cent of the total. This is a remarkable improvement from 1994, when only two women were appointed as ministers and another three as deputy ministers. At the provincial level, five of the nine provincial premiers (approximately 60 per cent) are women (South Africa Institute of Race Relations 2011). This undoubtedly shows South Africa’s commitment to meeting the target set by the South African Development Community (SADC) of 50 per cent representation of women in political decision-making by 2015. It further shows that the South African government is alive to its obligation under article 9 of the Women’s Protocol, which requires African governments to ensure women’s equal participation in decision-making. The South African experience serves as a best practice for other African countries to emulate. No society can achieve greatness and economic development where gender inequality remains the norm.

Public management/economic opportunities
Women are often assigned menial or low paying jobs and would need to work twice as much as men in order to occupy top positions in many establishments. In some cases, women are paid less than men for doing the same job. The National Gender Policies in Nigeria and South Africa contain important provisions to address these challenges. One of the objectives of the National Gender Policy in Nigeria is undertaking women- and men-specific projects as a means of developing the capabilities of both women and men, to enable them take advantage of economic and political opportunities. However, women have continued to occupy the lower levels of the civil service and private sectors and have relatively few opportunities to secure employment. For instance, it is estimated that women constitute 65 per cent of the poorest 70 per cent of the population (UN Statistics Division 2011).

Moreover, women constitute only 24 per cent of the total workforce for the Federal Civil Service. In addition, they only occupy 14 per cent of the overall management positions (National Bureau of Statistics 2010). On average, it is estimated that women account for 35 per cent of people in active employment in the country (UN Statistics Division 2011). This is more or less a reflection of social relations of gender in the Nigerian society, which are often perpetuated by gender ideologies.

In the case of South Africa, while women account for 51 per cent of the total population, about 45 per cent of them are actively engaged in the employment sector. On the other hand, unemployment rates among women are around 27 per cent compared with 20 per cent for men (United Nations Statistics Division 2011). A more recent report shows that women occupy 27 per cent of top management positions, thus surpassing the global average of 20 per cent (Grant Thornton International 2011). While this is an important milestone for women in South Africa, there remain some challenges with regard to their roles in the private sector. For instance, a survey carried out by the Business Women’s Association reveals that only three per cent of South African companies have women as the chief executive officers (Limpopo Provincial Government 2011).

This clearly shows that there is room for improvement with regard to women’s representation in the top management positions of big private corporations. Mathur-Helm (2005) has argued that due probably to patriarchy and stereotypical beliefs, South African organisations are still

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Lower legislative house</th>
<th>Upper legislative house</th>
<th>Cabinet</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of women</td>
<td>Percentage of women</td>
<td>Number of women</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>represented (out of)</td>
<td>represented</td>
<td>represented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>13 (out of 352)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4 (out of 109)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>178 (out of 400)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>16 (out of 56)</td>
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Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union Report 2011.
reluctant to entrust crucial positions to women. It has been argued that under-representation or under-utilisation of women in the work force may exacerbate poverty and under-development (Bridges and Lawson 2008).

This shows that South Africa is faring better than Nigeria regarding women’s involvement in political and economic situations.

Conclusion

Although Nigeria and South Africa have initiated measures towards realising gender equality in all spheres of life, these measures have not wholly improved the position of women in these countries. While the South African government deserves commendation for the high representation of women in the legislature, much more is still required to be done with regard to the numbers of women actively engaged in employment and occupying the top positions in private companies. Due to the half-hearted implementation of laws and policies in Nigeria, women have not fared better in the political, social and economic spheres. This shows that the existence of a promising legal and policy framework may not necessarily guarantee improvements in women’s status (Bauer 2008; Morgan 2009). Therefore, the two countries would need to intensify programmes such as education awareness and micro-credit that will lead to the empowerment of women so as to ensure them better access to economic or financial resources (Chant 2008).

Table 2: Global Gender Gap Report 2010, showing women’s participation in four areas (economic development, health, education and political empowerment) in Nigeria and South Africa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Overall rank and score</th>
<th>Economic participation opportunity</th>
<th>Education attainments</th>
<th>Health and survival</th>
<th>Political empowerment</th>
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<td>Rank</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>0.6055</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>0.6044</td>
<td>124</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
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<td>0.7535</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0.6727</td>
<td>43</td>
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