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WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN THE TRANSITION FROM THE MOVEMENT SYSTEM TO MULTIPARTY SYSTEM OF GOVERNANCE:

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"No one knows African governance, its strengths, and weaknesses, better than those who are governed, but excluded from governance, and those who work in governing institutions in a disempowered way. That is why it is important that African women generate the strategies for increasing their effective participation, in decision making, in governance and in leadership"[1]

INTRODUCTION:

Now that the February 206 election fever is over, the 8th Parliament has been sworn in and a new Cabinet appointed, it is prudent to look back over the last three years to assess how Uganda's transition from the Movement System to Multiparty System went. It is critical to examine what was supposed to change, what actually changed, the role of women in that change, and the opportunities that women must seize in order to maximise the change.

The present paper is divided into three major sections. The first section provides a brief overview of the context in terms of describing what the Movement System was, what precipitated the change to Multiparty and the process for that change. The second section will examine in depth what women's and women's organisations experiences were in attempting to influence the change. The Last section will probe into what opportunities present themselves in the newly adopted system of governance.

SECTION I: BACKGROUND

Few contemporary political and socioeconomic transitions on the African continent have been as dramatic or as contradictory as Uganda's.[2] Since the time of independence in 1962, the democratization project seems to have eluded Ugandans again and again. Each passing phase of our political life seems to take us both two steps forward and one step back and thus we are a country in constant transition. During the period from independence to date Uganda has experienced not only civil strife, but also virtually every form of governance imaginable to the modern human kind – multi-party democracy, one party dictatorship, military fascism, the recent current NRM government characterized as a 'no-party' system and now we have gone full circle to the beginning- to the multiparty system of governance.

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[1] Dr. Amina Mama at the African Women and Governance Training Workshop organized by Abantu for **Development**, Entebbe, July 1994.
[2] J. Oloka-Onyango, *Uganda's "Benevolent" Dictatorship* (a paper available on the world wide web)

One can say that each system of governance has been bitter-sweet experience to Ugandans with some forms being more bitter than sweet. Indeed many Ugandan's question whether we have ever truly experienced a multiparty form of governance or whether what we have had (and may be in danger or reproducing) is many parties without democratic pluralism.[3] The Late Professor Mugaju calls Uganda's first attempt at multipartyism 'pseudo multiparty politics' and argues that:

> The rise of political parties in the 1950's and 1960's did not automatically lead to the practice of multiparty democracy. In the first place, the political parties were more interested in issues that had nothing to do with democracy. The UNC was more interested in 'self governance now', with or without multipartyism. The main concern of DP what the Roman Catholics saw as decades of Protestant hegemony and to contain the spread of communism in Uganda. The UPC which started as an anti-Buganda platform was determined to gain power at any cost and the KY which represented the forces of neo-traditionalism did not conceal its hostility to any manifestation of multipartyism in Uganda. Despite democratic sloganeering, their [parties] prime inspiration was the pursuit of power as an end, rather than a means to an end.[4]

Enter the Movement System:

Uganda's first experiment with multipartyism somehow turned into a one-party state under the first UPC government. This then gave birth to one of the most brutal military dictatorships on the African continent under the late Idi Amin. When the dictatorship was over thrown, Uganda tried the multiparty experiment again in 1980, this time maybe with worse results and with the culmination of five year bush war by the National Resistance Movement.

When it finally took power in 1986, the National Resistance Movement introduced a 'new' form of political governance called the 'No-Party' or 'Movement' system. The main tenets of the system were based on the fact that:

- Uganda had gone through a conflictual and turbulent history mainly caused by political party competition and therefore the country needed sufficient time to reconcile the people of Uganda, heal old wounds and bring about national unity.

- The Movement political system was one based on consensus rather than confrontation and would be closer to typically African values of solidarity, reconciliation, seeking general consensus of all and keeping peace and togetherness without fragmentation

- Parties in Africa tended to be based not on class interests and differences, but on ethnicity and religion and were thus sectarian in nature and not good for the country. In contrast the Movement system was all inclusive, elections would

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[3] Sara Mukasa, Addressing Women's Demands in the Transition Process [A Paper Presented at the Launch of "Women's Demands to Political Parties and Political Organisations"], Oct 2004
[4] Justus Mugaju, An Historical Background to Uganda's No-Party Democracy, in No Party Democracy in Uganda, Myths and Realities (Eds: Justus Mugaju and J. Oloka Onyango). 2000 at pg 16 and 18

be carried out on 'individual merit' rather than party affiliation, and thus promote democracy more and avoid divisionism and other ills associated with multipartyism.[5]

On this basis, Uganda operated under the Movement system of governance from 1986 to 2005 July and during that period political parties existed in form but not in substance and were declared by the 1995 Constitution to be in abeyance during the existence of the Movement System. In July 2000 Uganda held a referendum to decide the system of governance they preferred and the main choice was between the Movement, Multipartyism. Ugandans decided to retain the Movement System and thus parties were sent back to the freezer, so to speak. The referendum though did not pass without contest by the Parties for the right to associate and indeed they chose to boycott the referendum arguing that the right to association was a fundamental human right which could not be granted and taken away whether at the wish of the people or the whims of government.

The Return to Multiparty System of Governance:

In July 2005, Ugandans voted in a second referendum to determine whether to return to multiparty governance or to retain the Movement system. This time round, almost overnight, President Yoweri Museveni became the 'chief campaigner' for a system he had abhorred for nearly three decades and indeed many wondered whether this was out of a paradigm shift or other pressures all together. The reasons he gave for urging Ugandan's to vote the multiparty system were: (i)To get rid of opponents within the Movement system (baleke bagende), and (ii) to allow the Movement to cleanse itself and move on with those who were truly loyal to the Movement and (iii) Donor pressure to open up.

As Oloka writes,

> What becomes very clear is that none of the reasons given for transition to a multiparty political system related to the belief that it was a better political system, even with all its imperfections. The President did not even have the courtesy to acknowledge the internal (non-Movement) which pushed for a return of political parties virtually from 1986. The lack of acknowledgement, and the president's utter contempt for political opposition makes it clear that President Museveni has not made the conversion to genuine multiparty competition.[6]

And so in February 2006, Ugandans went to the polls under a multiparty system of Governance for the first time since 1986. Foundation for Human rights Initiative in its report on the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections 2006 surmises that "The return to multipartyism was received with a lot of excitement but not much preparation or understanding. Most people were registered as members of one political party or the other without a clear understanding of what party membership entailed. The vast

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[5] John-Jean Barya, Political Parties, the Movement and the referendum on Political Systems in Uganda: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, Supra pg 29 to 31.

[6] J. Oloka Onyango, The Socio-Political Context of the 2006 Elections, Presentation at the East African Law Society Symposium on Elections Law, Conduct and Dispute Resolution. Kampala, February 2th 2006

majority of Ugandans went to the polls and voted not out of party loyalty, but they voted for individuals, which is explained by the fact that most Ugandans still only understand the principle of individual merit."[7]

SECTION II: WHITHER UGANDAN WOMEN?

The participation of Ugandan women in the transition is a mixed bag between inaction and some action. On the one hand there was active organising and engaging by a few women's rights organisations, and on the other there was passivity at best and complete apathy at worst. As one report states:

> Women were so oblivious….that they did not appreciate the issue of political transition as a direct concern of women. The absence of women's participation is orchestrated by the fact that almost 90% of respondents did not directly participate in the political transition debate and were not knowledgeable of the issues of debate, with the exception of what was reported in the media. To many respondents, the process *just passed*, with little or no interest in it.[8]

However, those women who were more politically attuned were revolted by the acrimonious nature of the debate, as well as the sheer lack of interest in women's issues by the key players who were mostly men. As Tamale aptly states:

> Regardless of what political system is in control of the state, and regardless of the lofty rhetoric, when Ugandan women lift the veil off the face of the state, they see nothing but deeply entrenched norms of male privilege and power embedded therein. We see a patriarchal state whose number one agenda is to sustain and defend such power; an institution by men and for men.

> Ugandan women are more interested in taking the state to task to account for its soft-peddling on actualising women's democratic rights as enshrined in the constitution. We are more interested, for example, in quick explanations from the state as to why it is meddling with the land co-ownership clause; why it is sitting on the domestic relations bill; why it is deferring the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Commission?

> Ugandan women are acutely aware that the majority of men agitating for political power, whether clothed in movement or party colours, have traditional patriarchal mind-sets that readily justify women's subordination and exploitation. In rhetoric, they include issues of democracy and even gender equality in their political manifestos, but in practice they have come up with contradictory practices. Indeed, most do not practice democracy in their own homes and families. They are not willing to address issues of sex

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[7] Foundation for Human rights Initiative (FHRI) Uganda, Presidential and Parliamentary Elections 2006: Counting the Gains, at pg vii
[8] Maria Nassali and Edith Kibalama, Dissecting The Political Transition in Uganda: Women's Voices, March 2004 at pg 8 (research done under the auspices of Kituo Cha Katiba's Gender and Democratisation Programme)

discrimination, domestic violence, sexual violence, gender equity and often dismiss out of hand all that women say.[9]

Women's Organising: What Did Those Who Were Active Do?

The following is only a brief list of the varied things that women's organisations did to participate in the transition process and is thus not an all inclusive list.

1. For starters, women submitted a memorandum to the Constitutional Review Commission (otherwise known as the Sempebwa Commission) on the need to lift the restrictions on party activities in Uganda and they also strongly urged that this should go hand in hand with a consistent civic education program in order to help ordinary people participate meaningfully in a multi party system.

2. After the Movement Meeting in Kyankwanzi, women along with other human rights organizations responded to the several recommendations made at that meeting. While applauding the decision to open up to multi party politics, women urged that government show good faith and level the playing field through among others, repealing obnoxious legislation that made it impossible for parties to be equal players in politics.

3. In July 2003 women hosted a breakfast meeting with leaders of the main opposition parties to challenge them on their party gender agendas. Unsurprisingly, women found that very few of the parties had even addressed their minds to women's issues.

4. When the parties constituted their team to meet the government over talks on the transition, women challenged the parties on their lack of including women at the table when crucial decisions for the countries direction were being made.[10]

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[9] Sylvia Tamale, Gender Implications for Opening Up Political Parties in Uganda (available on the worldwide web)

[10] Regarding this process, I noted in one paper that I wrote that: "Once the talks between the government and the G7 started, again we (civil society and women parliamentarians) raised the concern over of the lack of women on the G7 team and to my great disappointment; an insider told me that when this point was made to the G7 they did not see the merit of the argument. They did not see the place or need to involve women in the talks. This is a clear manifestation of the politics of social exclusion, which should not characterize the transition process.[10] We should in no way have allowed a process that excluded women and other marginalized and vulnerable groups from proceeding. Instead we looked on and again missed the chance to be proactive in demanding our rightful space. We must at all times remain vigilant in organizing and challenging patriarchal and undemocratic institutions and processes." Jacqueline Asiimwe, A Feminist Analysis of the Roadmap to Uganda's Transition, Paper presented at a Joint meeting on the theme: "The Transition Road Map: What is in it for Women?" organized by Isis – WICCE and UWONET, Kampala 14th July 2004

5. Women consulted widely in 27 of the 56 districts of Uganda and put together a document dubbed "Women's Demands to Political Parties and Organizations" The purpose of the document was to give voice to and highlight the needs and aspirations of Ugandan women as well as highlight the centrality of women to any *meaningful* process of governance in Uganda transitions to pluralism. The document also aimed at ensuring that those who wished to steer Uganda forward through the transition and beyond take on board these needs and aspirations both in principle and in practice. The document addressed 8 key areas which included true and meaningful democracy, integration of the principle of affirmative action, people-centred/people-focused development, commitment to obligations under international human rights instruments peace and security: environment, land and natural resources: law and administration of justice, and health and reproductive rights.

6. Women held round table meetings with each of the major political parties to discuss how parties will concretely address the issues raised in the document. We are yet to see what results this process will yield, but at least for now is provides an avenue for dialogue between political parties and organizations on the one hand, and women as a critical stakeholder in the democratisation process on the other. [11]

7. Women, again under UWONET appeared before the Legal and Parliamentary Affairs Committee and presented their views on the White Paper where again, they defended the return to multi party politics but with the caution that parties must ensure representation of women in key leadership positions within the party (and not just through women's wings) as well as ensuring that parties take cognizance of and address women's special needs and uphold and protect their rights.[12]

8. Women undertook research on and made a case for proportional representation as an electoral mode and made concrete recommendations for use in their dialogues with the various political parties and organisations as well as with the legislature for the purposes of promoting women's effective participation in governance.

9. Women conducted an in-depth analysis of the manifestoes of the major political parties to determine their gender compliance. These results were shared with the political parties just before elections and work continues post elections to ensure that the parties make the necessary changes so as to make parties attractive for women to join.

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[11] See UWONET Report titled 'Gender Balance in Electoral Systems : The Case For Proportional Representation'

[12] See UWONET Report titled 'The Women's position paper on the government White Paper on the report of the Commission of Inquiry (Constitutional Review) ,The White Paper and Women's participation in the political transition in Uganda: Assessing the implications of the white paper on women's political participation in Uganda.'

10. There were many women and women's organizations that were involved in providing civic education as well as monitoring the transition process to ensure that women remained a central focus on Uganda's pathway to democracy. Other organisations were active in developing IEC materials, as well as skills training for women candidates to for the 2006 elections

Looking Ahead:

The enduring challenge for women is that many of the interventions were ad hoc, not many of their suggestions were taken on board either by government or the other political parties: and so in this new era it is important that women re-assess their strengths and capacities, and transform themselves into a force which would be politically risky to ignore. As Tamale advises:

> We should embrace radical strategies in our struggles. We must reject the arguments that Africa or Uganda is not ready for radical feminism. What such arguments are saying in essence is that we are not ready for *transformation*. In fact, the majority of people that espouse the "women-should-take-it-nice-and-slow" line are those that have never directly experienced gender discrimination. As we embrace radical feminism, we should not completely discard the mainstream moderate methods that have dominated our struggle. Indeed, history has taught us that all successful social movements adopted a range of approaches in dismantling the structures of oppression that they were fighting. The undeniable benefit of the aggressive, radical method of advocating for women's rights in Africa is that it has strengthened the bargaining position of moderate feminists. The radicals provide a militant edge against which moderates' strategies and demands are regarded as "reasonable."[13]

SECTION III: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN WITHIN THE NEW POLITICAL DISPENSATION

Many Ugandan's are aware that while Uganda has gone through the business of elections under a multiparty system, a lot more needs to be done to consolidate that system. The consolidation should lead to the establishment of a viable democratic state. For the avoidance of doubt, the fundamental features of a democratic state include the following:

- The respect for and protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms as well as removal of all unnecessary restrictions to those rights beyond what is acceptable and demonstrably justifiable in a free and democratic society

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[13] Sylvia Tamale, FANNING THE FLAME OF FEMINISM IN UGANDA, Paper presented on the occasion of celebrating ACFODE's 18th Anniversary, November 17, 2003 at the International Conference Centre, Kampala.

- The space for citizens to exercise their sovereignty and power to determine who shall govern them and how they shall be governed without any undue political manipulation
- Responsible use and management of public power and resources evidenced by strong, efficient, transparent and accountable public institutions as well as the sound management of the socio-economic and political affairs of the state.
- Strong international collaboration and partnership for development[14]

It is absolutely imperative that women be part and parcel of the multiparty democracy consolidation process.

Suggestions for What Women Should Do:

On the whole, the ruling party needs to consciously learn to behave like a political party and shake any Movement stands that go against the grain of multiparty politics. The other parties need to consolidate themselves and their party positions throughout the country.

At Party Level Women Need To:

- Help parties move way from being 'boy's clubs' to making political parties work for women
How?
- Confront the system of institutional incentives and disincentives at the level of the party that impact on women's effective involvement

- Encourage institutionalisation, transparency in decision making, building and documentation of rules so that everyone is clear about them making it easier for members to demand accountability

- Promote and encourage political behaviour and skills that enable both genders to participate effectively

- Ensure that issues such as internal functioning and culture need to address women's needs

- Revisit party policies to ensure that they are gender responsive. Already some great work has been done under the auspices of the International Republican Institute (IRI). IRI is currency running a Gender Mainstreaming Process Intervention with the major political parties in Uganda. Through party gender Mainstreaming Groups, IRI has been working to ensure that parties become more gender responsive and purposeful right from the level of their constitutive documents such as manifestoes and party constitutions, to programme documents and party activities. The highlights of the gender mainstreaming in each party are as follows:

UYD/DP

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[14] Benson Ekwee, The Transition to Multiparty Democracy and Legal Changes: Impact on Civil Society Work Activism and Networking At Sub-National Level, Paper Presented at a Roundtable for District Networks in Eastern Uganda, Mbale July 13 2006

Their gender working group proposed in its memorandum, a 40% representation of women at all levels of leadership in the party and youth wing. In its memorandum, the DP explicitly aims at emancipation of women, combating sexism and promoting women and youth; as well as using gender sensitive language in its constitution and other party documents. Furthermore, the DP Gender Working Group proposes capacity building in gender for the party members and leadership alike, a nationwide gender unit and is re-thinking the establishment of a women's wing. Campaign messages and the vision of UYD have been reviewed and re-drafted in a more gender inclusive manner.

NRM-O

The memorandum of NRM includes a specific paragraph recognising women's part in the development of the country, and a commitment of the party to accord equal opportunities for women. It contains a specific objective to ensure gender responsiveness in structures, programmes, processes and activities of the party. The memorandum proposes a quota of 1/3 for women at all party levels, a recognition of the women's league to make it more sustainable, manageable and equipped with clear links to the mainstream as well as a clear rule against discrimination in the code of conduct. Furthermore, an action plan was developed which aims at inclusion of women in decision-making committees and a gender responsive party manifesto.

CP

The memorandum states the need for gender responsiveness and proposes amendments in that respect in the preamble and in other articles as well as to add on a gender responsive slogan to the party emblem. It underlines that some traditional practices are discriminatory and proposes that Cp promotes traditions which do not perpetuate gender imbalances and disparities. The memorandum proposes a separate goal for gender equity and equality, a change of the language with regard to gender responsiveness, a specific gender mainstreaming strategy that monitors and enhances gender within the party. Furthermore the group emphasises the need for continuous gender awareness measures and training in gender for the whole party. The action plan of CP focuses on gender awareness and training.

UPC

The memorandum explicitly recognises the importance of women to the development of the country and the need to ensure full participation of women as indispensable for democratic society. It proposes the amendment of the constitution in its principles where UPC states its commitments towards gender equity and equality as basic human rights and commits itself to enhance the role of women particularly in decision-making. It further proposes a specific goal on gender and the change of language to be gender inclusive. A quota of 1/3 at all levels is proposed in the structures of the party as well as improved incorporation of women and youth officials into the mainstream. The memorandum also proposes a review of the party election procedures and resource allocation in a gender responsive manner. The code of conduct for the party should include prohibition of discrimination. The working group has furthermore started work on a gender analysis in preparation for the review

of the party platform and plans to hold a sensitisation and capacity building events on gender at various party levels.[15]

Women should take advantage of the opportunities created by this process to further consolidate the gender agenda in their parties and help turn these proposals into concrete actions.

At Civil Society/ Women's Organisation Level

Women need to:

- Continue (or start) civic education on the multiparty system and how citizens can participate effectively within the system

- Work with all parties to increase their gender responsiveness

- Work with women politicians on ensuring passage of critical gender legislation

SECTION IV: CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that women have been instrumental to creating positive change in the ongoing transition to multiparty democracy in Uganda. Their efforts and energy are applauded.

However, women need to ensure that now that the contest for political power is over (does it really end?), the country does not go back to business as usual. Women must contribute to consolidating multiparty democracy in Uganda which among other things means working towards enabling our society to be transformed in order to end discrimination and subordination of women, the poor and marginalized. Women's struggle must continue to ensure that democracy will have true meaning not only at state level, but also right from the home. And women's struggle too must consist of repeatedly showing the connection between women's marginalization and economic and political stagnation.

Women MUST now develop a more sustained and protracted engagement with power and politics. There are no two ways about it.

To borrow the slogan of Makerere University: The Struggle Continues!

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[15] Final Report, 1st August to 27th September 2005: Gender Mainstreaming Process Intervention With Political Parties in Uganda (final Process Report, October 2005, available at IRI Offices in Kampala)