

# Gender & Development Bulletin

Banúlacht  
www.banulacht.ie

Women in Ireland in Global Solidarity

## Editorial

Banúlacht's work centres on facilitating women's organisations in Ireland to make connections between the local and the global, between the lives, experiences and struggles of women in Ireland and those of women in the South. This work focuses on a number of diverse aspects of making such connections and includes perspectives from Ireland, Tanzania, Nicaragua and South Africa. A report on an economic literacy course run in April this year in Wexford highlights that, given the opportunity to exchange and dialogue about their experiences and political analyses, women working in community development in different parts of the world can overcome differences and make genuine connections.

In our feature on economic literacy, Pauline Ennis gives the perspective of a participant in a Banúlacht workshop. Nicaraguan activists Sandra Ramos and Gladys Urtecho, and Julie Porter of the Central America Women's Network in the UK, who co-facilitated this workshop, share their experiences of working to empower women in export processing zones to claim their rights, using the framework of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

**"Our feminist identity is not qualified with 'Ifs,' 'Buts,' or 'Howevers.' We are Feminists. Full stop."**

(CEDAW). They explain how the export processing zones, created to attract foreign investment in order to foster economic growth and job creation, do little to challenge women's poverty and gender inequality.

Marjorie Mbilinyi, writing about gender and neoliberalism, raises critical questions about the impact of policies designed to increase growth on the lives of poor women in Tanzania. She also describes the demands of civil society organisations in Tanzania for an alternative, more

equitable development model that would serve the interests of the poorest and most marginalised people. Like other writers in this issue, she highlights the central role of women's and feminist organisations in challenging the prevailing economic order and empowering women in grassroots communities to engage in advocacy—that is, taking action locally to challenge the economic policies imposed by international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Her conclusion is that such policies have benefited the more affluent and deepened the gulf between what she describes as the new tribes—the "haves" and the "have-nots."

In an article called "Where Are We Now? New Feminist Perspectives on Women in Contemporary Ireland," which focuses on a new book of the same name, Ursula Barry raises questions and highlights issues in the Irish context that resonate with the points raised in articles from writers based in the South. Among the topics the book explores is how economic and social inequalities combined with gender differences contribute to the failures of our health system and to women's vulnerability to poverty and debt. The feminist vision reflected in this book is one of greater equality between women and men, respect for gender and sexual diversity within a system of enhanced economic and social justice, and better human and reproductive rights.

Claiming and reinvigorating the word feminism is an aim that links this new Irish publication with a new pan-African initiative, the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists. The Charter is unequivocal: "Our feminist identity is not qualified with 'Ifs,' 'Buts,' or 'Howevers.' We are Feminists. Full stop." Lebohang Pheko, in her article about the Charter, emphasises that feminism calls for a refusal of oppression and a commitment to struggling for women's liberation from all forms of oppression. What she says of African feminism is equally true of Irish feminism: It is a transformative and radical expression of our essence. It dares all women to expect more from our menfolk, our fellow women, our communities, our governments and ourselves.



Pauline Ennis



Sandra Ramos



Marjorie Mbilinyi



Lebohang Pheko



Ursula Barry



Julie Porter

# About Banúlacht

Banúlacht is a feminist organisation that is part of a global women's movement and, as such, is committed to political action. Banúlacht believes in justice and equality for all women and men and in relationships of solidarity between women North and South. (We use the terms North and South rather than "First World/Third World" or "Developed World/Developing World," which imply superiority and inferiority.) Through our policy and development education work, we explore such issues as poverty, alienation, disadvantage and injustice through a global lens and from a gender perspective.

## Development Education

We carry out workshops and short courses with women's organisations in Ireland on such topics as gender and development, women and the economy, and women's human rights locally and globally.

## Joining Banúlacht

Banúlacht's members include community-based women's groups, women's networks, development education organisations and national women's organisations, as well as individual feminists, activists and others interested in development issues from a gender perspective. Members receive regular briefings and updates by e-mail on issues relating to gender and development, women's human rights and economic factors. Members can also avail of special rates for Banúlacht conferences. A membership application form can be downloaded from our website.

## Company Details

Banúlacht is a company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital. It is registered in Dublin, Ireland No. 284753. Directors are the Executive Committee: Margaret Tumelty (Chair), Nessa Ni Chasaide, Niamh Farren (Company Secretary) and Grainne Begley. Coordinator: Eileen Smith; Policy and Training Project Leader: Maeve Taylor

## Website

Banúlacht's website address is [www.banulacht.ie](http://www.banulacht.ie). The website includes all of Banúlacht's policy documents and publications, including its Feminist Principles and Anti-Racist Policy. Copies of all Banúlacht's policy documents, briefings and submissions to government, as well as updates on our work and back issues of the Gender and Development Bulletin, are available on the website. The website has links to the websites of other feminist and development organisations worldwide, and to publications on gender, development and human rights issues by other international organisations.

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# Banúlacht Updates

## Annual Conference

Stimulating, inspiring, energising and challenging were the most common words in the evaluations of the 2008 International Women's Day Conference, "Reimagining Women's Human Rights", held in March. The day was notable for the sense of solidarity and mutual learning—of connections being made. For the second year in a row, we held the conference at the Axis Centre in Ballymun, where once again, the creative energy of the venue inspired participants: Feedback from the workshops took many creative forms, including drama and chanting, as well as a human rights manifesto. The final word goes to the participants' responses to the question of what they took away from the conference:

- ◆ *"The need to continue to lobby companies in regard to the source of their products and to realise that even one voice can make a difference"*
- ◆ *"The importance of nurturing and building links between local, national and international policy"*
- ◆ *"How to use consumer power more effectively by, for example, focusing on common ground rather than difference"*
- ◆ *"The need to raise awareness as much as one can"*
- ◆ *"The power of the language of rights, the need to make the language of rights accessible, the need to challenge powerful male interests"*

The keynote speeches at the conference, and an interview with Sarah Mukasa of the African Women's Development Fund, who was one of the keynote speakers, were recorded by Sally Galiana of Near 90fm community radio and are now available on the website of both Near 90fm and Banúlacht.



Participants at Banúlacht's International Women's Day Conference 2008.

## Exchange with Tanzania

As a follow-up to the highly successful exchange visit held in 2007, Banúlacht is organising another visit to Tanzania in September 2008. In addition to working with the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme, we will spend a week in the rural area of Mwanza and deepen the links with women's organisations that work on a range of issues, links we made last year with the help of the Kivulini Women's Rights Organisation. The deadline for applications is May 7th. See our website for details and to download an application form.

We are fortunate to be able to welcome Maimuna Kanyamala of Kivulini to Ireland once again in May and June. While she is here, Maimuna will facilitate sessions in our upcoming foundation level development education course and in the orientation course for the participants in the 2008 exchange, as well as facilitating workshops with a number of the participants from the 2007 exchange visit.

A radio documentary, *Voices from Tanzania*, made by Niamh Farren, who participated in the 2007 exchange, was broadcast by Near 90fm community radio on March 8th and can be accessed from Banúlacht's website.

## Economic Literacy Course

Over the spring this year, we have been running an extended economic literacy course with a group of women community development workers who are involved with the County Wexford Community Women's Collective (CWCWC). The course was the brainchild of Sarah-Beth Watkins, the coordinator of Templeshannon Community Development Project. As one of the participants in Banúlacht's 2007 Exchange to Tanzania, Sarah-Beth was looking for a way to deepen the engagement with gender and development issues within the member organisations of the collective. The result was a seven-week course that included gender analysis, social analysis, analysis of economic growth and development and of women's human rights. The course was designed to have a particular focus on trade issues.

We were fortunate to have the opportunity to facilitate a connection between the Wexford women's collective and both the "Maria Elena Cuadra" (MEC) women workers' movement from Nicaragua and the Central America Women's Network (CAWN) in the UK. A daylong workshop provided a powerful opportunity to discuss solidarity and explore the perennial question of what actions women in Ireland can take in solidarity with women in the South. The workshop did not provide one simple answer to this question but gave food for thought and further critical engagement. Equally important, the dialogue reaffirmed the common values of working for the empowerment of grassroots women. The final session of the course is to be co-facilitated by Kate Byron of Women Working Worldwide in the UK. The focus will once again be on taking action in solidarity with women in the South.

See pages 4 and 5 of this issue for perspectives from MEC, CAWN and the CWCWC.

# Looking at the Economy Through Women's Eyes

## Exchanging Experiences: Similarities and Differences

The "Maria Elena Cuadra" (MEC) Working and Unemployed Women's Movement is a women's organisation whose work includes the defence and promotion of women's human rights, women's empowerment and participation as citizens, and the development of women's leadership. MEC was established in May 1994 and works with adult and young women employed in a range of sectors, including workers in the "maquilas" (i.e. sweatshops in export processing zones), women working in the tobacco exporting sector, women miners, domestic workers and small-scale agricultural producers. We have a membership of approximately 30,000 women workers from these sectors.

For MEC, exchanging experiences with other women's organisations is critical to mutual learning. The economic literacy workshop in which we participated with a group of women from community development organisations in Wexford was an invaluable opportunity for such exchange. It was a space that allowed us to reaffirm some of our key values as women's organisations—for example, that women's demands for human rights continue to be valid and that we must work in strategic alliances to advance the collective creation by women of a more just society, a society without violence.

The main similarity between our organisations is that working with grassroots women is a priority for women's organisations in Ireland as well as in Nicaragua. This involves processes of community development, leadership development and capacity building with women activists, economic literacy work, and the construction of an economic agenda from women's perspectives.

During the workshop in Templeshannon, we talked about the deepening religious fundamentalism in the political and governmental culture in Nicaragua. We were able to draw parallels with aspects of women's experience in Ireland, particularly in relation to sexual and reproductive health and rights. For MEC, it is clear: If we don't work with grassroots women to raise their awareness and build their capacity to defend their human rights, we risk the rollback of women's human rights.

by Sandra Ramos and Gladys Urtecho, MEC



*Looking at the Economy through Women's Eyes: Economic Literacy course, Templeshannon CDP, February 2008*

## Nicaragua and Export Processing Zones

The Republic of Nicaragua is located in Central America and has a population of over 5 million. Nicaragua is the second poorest country in Latin America and faces low per capita income, massive unemployment, and huge external debt. In order to enter the global market, the Nicaraguan Government, encouraged by global financial institutions, has adopted an economic model that is largely dependent on attracting foreign investment and on the incorporation of women into the labour market as cheap, unskilled workers. Tax breaks, low wages and weak labour rights regulation in the "export processing zones" (EPZs) are the incentives or "pull factors" for foreign companies to come to Nicaragua with their production lines.

It is estimated that 70 percent of the workers in the EPZs are young women with a low educational level, with about 50 percent being heads of households. The reality is that there are no jobs in other sectors in Nicaragua. Moreover, women tend to be hired for the unskilled production jobs that are the poorest paid. Lacking access to on-the-job training, women do not have opportunities to move up the job ladder and so are not acquiring social and political power. Working conditions in the factories are difficult; there have been reported cases of physical mistreatment. Workers suspected of forming labour unions get fired.  
(Various sources)

# Empowerment Through Linking Issues and Struggles

We were very much looking forward and excited by the opportunity to meet with Sandra Ramos and Gladys Urtecho of MEC who were traveling from London to meet with us accompanied by Julie Porter from CAWN. It was strange to think that we would be participating in a workshop with women who were coming from such a different culture and who we could not directly speak to due to the language barrier. However, our fears were soon overcome. I felt very humbled that these two women had the spirit and courage to travel from the other side of the world to raise awareness and lobby Brussels on the development of a policy that would directly affect the trade policies of Central America.

During a daylong workshop, Sandra and Gladys shared their stories of their work with MEC, in Nicaragua, and the challenges and barriers they faced. The group from Wexford soon began to feel very connected to the women from Nicaragua as they spoke more of how they reached out to empower women in the

export processing zones' factories and workshops and how they provided training that would support women in leadership roles in order to challenge the inequalities of the policies laid down by free trade agreements.

We wanted to know how we as women from the North could act in solidarity and support others who were being exploited by unfair trade and employment policies. Throughout the workshop, we were privileged to gain an insight into these women's lives, struggles and fantastic achievements. We were also motivated and inspired to continue our own work in our communities with a renewed sense of commitment to social change and the courage to keep on going and never give up. We in our group felt so encouraged and reenergised by this opportunity to meet with women from Nicaragua and to realise that, in some way, we could make links with the issues and struggles that we face in working at grassroots levels in our communities in Wexford. We left our new friends wishing them well on their journey to Brussels, feeling respect and solidarity and realising the power of the women's movement all over the world.

*by Pauline Ennis, Access 2000, Wexford*

## North–South Linking to Influence Policy Debates

The Central America Women's Network (CAWN) is a London-based organisation that supports, publicises and learns from the struggles of women in Central America in the defense of their rights. We have been working in close partnership since 2000 with MEC. This link has allowed CAWN to develop an understanding of the impact on women of politics and free market economics that is frequently overlooked in mainstream analysis.

MEC has trained a network of over 1,000 women working in export processing zones as labour rights promoters who teach their colleagues about their legal rights so that they can defend themselves. MEC also has a legal team that supports individual women and groups of workers when their rights are violated—from dismissal for pregnancy to factory closure without severance payments.

A large part of CAWN's work has been pushing for these women's day-to-day realities to be recognised in debates about labour rights and corporate social responsibility in the UK. In particular, we've been successful in getting the Ethical Trade Initiative (an alliance of companies, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and trade unions whose goal is to ensure that the conditions for workers producing for the UK market meet or exceed international labour standards) to adopt a gender perspective in its work.

During the past three years, CAWN has been supporting MEC's programme to promote women's civil and economic rights. The project focuses on economic literacy and aims to use this to strengthen the ability of poor women in Nicaragua to influence and participate actively in the formulation of gender-sensitive economic policies at the local, national and regional levels.

CAWN's role is as a vehicle for these voices in Europe, working to influence policy debates that fail to recognise the vital importance of women's paid and reproductive work to economic growth and prosperity. We hope that through solidarity between women in the global North and South, women's rights can become both a means and an end of a different vision of development.

*by Julie Porter, Central America Women's Network ([www.cawn.org](http://www.cawn.org))*

## Taking Action

One big question that the women in Wexford wanted to raise with MEC and CAWN is this: Given that the conditions in the EPZs are so exploitative, should we stop buying products that are manufactured in these factories? Sandra and Gladys from MEC were very clear: We in the North need to act. However, they are not asking consumers to boycott products because workers need their jobs. Without those jobs, women would experience dire poverty. For MEC, it is critical that as citizens of the EU whose policies have huge impacts in countries of the South, we lobby our MEPs and demand that they ensure that EU trade policies do not have negative impacts on gender equality and on the lives of women in the South. A similar question was discussed at a workshop at Banúlacht's conference in March. Kate Byron, from Women Working Worldwide ([www.women-ww.org](http://www.women-ww.org)), who co-facilitated the workshop, urged participants to become "activist consumers." Ask your florist or supermarket how they can ensure that the workers who are picking flowers and vegetables for their shop are treated fairly and with respect. Ask them how they ensure that labour conditions in their supply chain meet minimum labour standards as outlined by the International Labour Organisation.

# Where Are We Now? New Feminist Perspectives on Women in Contemporary Ireland

by Ursula Barry



*Niamh Reilly, Monica O'Connor and Angela O'Connell  
at the launch of "Where Are We Now?"*

Twenty years ago, I published a book with Attic Press entitled *Lifting the Lid*, which focuses on the inequalities and exploitation that characterised Irish society and the impact of those inequalities on women. Much has changed over the intervening years, and I have felt a strong need for a new book focusing on the current situation of women and filling a gap in the critical social analysis of contemporary Ireland. In *Where Are We Now? New Feminist Perspectives on Women in Contemporary Ireland*, my main aim has been to bring together different feminist writers and activists to reflect on the position of women and gender inequality in contemporary Ireland. I feel that there is little out there that draws specifically on a feminist perspective to explore central aspects of women's lives in 21st-century Ireland.

All those who have contributed to this collection are feminists and women who each combine two key characteristics: They are both writers on issues affecting women in Ireland and activists in looking to change the situation of women. They include women academics, researchers, journalists, policy analysts and women working in nongovernmental organisations (NGOs). They are women with a huge range of experience and understanding. Many have worked on women's issues, in Ireland and internationally, for 10 years, 20 years and more. Despite enormous demands on their time, each has given generously of that accumulated wealth of experience, to reflect on a chosen theme close to her heart.

This book sets out the position of women in Ireland today and analyses the dramatic changes that have taken place in the economic and social situations of different groups of women. It is not an all-island picture – it looks to the Republic of Ireland – so a further project is needed to bring together analyses both north and south.

Introduced by Susan McKay, each chapter focuses on a different aspect of women's lives in Ireland. Sara Burke explores the gender and income inequalities that characterise our health system, and Orla O'Connor and Mary Murphy analyse the economic dependency at the heart of our social welfare system. No current collection of chapters on the situation of women makes sense without a focus on care, and the contribution of Kathleen Lynch and Maureen Lyons examines the gendered order that shapes our system of care provision. Jane Pillinger looks at new gender patterns of migration, while Pauline Conroy and Helen O'Leary ask questions about women's experience of debt in contemporary Ireland. Broader social issues are the focus of Angela O'Connell's powerful chapter on lesbian mothers and Monica O'Connor's strong and passionate contribution on sexual exploitation and violence. Niamh Reilly takes a more global perspective in her chapter exploring some of the ways in which NGOs have used a women's human rights framework to provide a new dimension to their work for social change.

Although the themes selected for the book are wide-ranging, crossing economic, social and cultural fields, they are linked together by an exploration of inequalities in the distribution of resources and in the exercise of power. Intended to throw light on key aspects of women's lives, these themes include health, poverty, migration, debt, care, economic independence, lesbian parenting, violence and reproductive and human rights. Arguments are put forward for greater economic independence within the social welfare system; for more equality in sharing the responsibilities of care; for greater social justice within the health system; for greater security against debt exploitation; for more protection against violence and abuse; and for greater rights of access to both assisted fertility and abortion services. Contributors examine issues of social justice, equality and women's rights in order to explore how gender, social class, the rights of minorities and inequality are linked. The extent to which equality, human rights and social justice frameworks sufficiently encapsulate the inequalities of power reflected in gender relations in contemporary society is also questioned.

Even as all of the contributors to this collection position their thinking from the standpoint of women, each brings to her chapter a different approach and style. In some instances, the emphasis is analytical, looking closely at the statistical and other evidence of women's changing position within the economy, the care system, under social welfare and within new patterns of migration. In other cases, the personal stories of women – for example, lesbian parents and women as patients – are interwoven with a critical assessment of legal and institutional systems. Ideological and theoretical debates – in particular, the contesting of feminist understandings and analyses in relation to rape, domestic violence, pornography and human rights – are the focus of others. How economic and social inequalities combined with gender differences contribute to the failures of our health system and to women's vulnerability to poverty and debt are explored in a number of chapters. Some authors reflect on their personal experiences, and others recount social research interviews. Some have an academic approach, and others use a documentary style. To me, this range and diversity of contributions adds richness to the collection.

A book of this kind inevitably deals with selected themes. There are other key areas which have not been explored, and not because of their lack of importance. One example is the issue of body image, including how it is the focus of such a range of media interests, as well as the rapidly growing cosmetic and plastic surgery industries. This is hugely significant in the lives of both young and older women but has not been addressed in this collection. Hopefully, there are those writing and reflecting on this area in the Irish context who will make it the subject of a future book.

It has been a pleasure for me to work with women who are so strongly and passionately close to their subject areas, who have thought long and hard about women's lives in this country and who have committed themselves to social change. In a number of chapters, contributors are looking for very specific changes – for example, in the workings of the social welfare and health systems or in the legal rights of same-sex couples and of lesbian and gay parents and their children. There is no shortage of critical areas for which definite and urgent changes have been identified and called for. A recurring theme is how resilient the established system is and how resistant it is to change, shown,

for example, in the lack of response in the area of work to the needs and responsibilities of care or in the perpetuation of traditional and new systems of sexual exploitation. A desire to move towards a society based on solidarity, care and justice links together the different contributions in this collection. The shared outlook of all contributors is one of greater equality between women and men, respect for gender and sexual diversity within a system of enhanced economic and social justice, and better human and reproductive rights.

My thanks to each of the contributors to this collection and to Paula Clancy (TASC, New Island Press) and Joanna McMinn (National Women's Council of Ireland) who jointly commissioned this book.

## Contents of "Where Are We Now"?

**Chapter 1:** Changing Economic and Social Worlds of Irish Women, by Ursula Barry

**Chapter 2:** Women and Social Welfare by Orla O' Connor and Mary Murphy

**Chapter 3:** Unequal in Life and Death, by Sara Burke

**Chapter 4:** Matter of Life and Debt by Pauline Conroy and Helen O'Leary

**Chapter 5:** Very Ordinary People – Lesbian Mothers Talking, by Angela O'Connell

**Chapter 6:** Silencing Feminism – Making Sexual Exploitation Invisible and Legitimate, by Monica O'Connor

**Chapter 7:** The Gendered Order of Caring by Kathleen Lynch and Maureen Lyons

**Chapter 8:** Gender and the Feminisation of Migration by Jane Pillinger

**Chapter 9:** Global Norms and Local Action by Niamh Reilly

*Ursula Barry is Head of Women's Studies, School of Social Justice, University College Dublin*

Where Are We Now? costs €19.95 and is available from all good bookshops nationwide, or by contacting New Island at (01) 298 6967 [www.newisland.ie](http://www.newisland.ie).



# Gender and Neoliberalism in the Context of Tanzania

By Marjorie Mbilinyi, Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP)



*Members of TGNP at a protest about neo-liberalism and patriarchy.*

During recent years in Tanzania, official economic discourse has shifted away from poverty reduction in favour of economic growth. Last year's budget, for example, called for a "quick wins" strategy that prioritises economic growth over equity and poverty reduction. The rationale is that economic growth is necessary first in order to generate more resources for areas such as maternal healthcare and clean water for all. This is the old trickle down "theory" of development that was soundly rejected by Tanzanian leaders in the 1970s—there were too many countries in the world with high growth and high poverty and growing inequality.

## Who Benefits from Economic Growth?

In Tanzania, there has been increased economic growth as measured by the national accounts, reaching 6.8% in 2005 and 5.8% in 2006 with an average rate of 7.0% since 2001, which is attributed to the "successful" application of neoliberal economic policy. The major beneficiaries, however, have been foreign-owned businesses and enterprises, expatriate workers and consultants, foreign tourists and a small number of wealthy Tanzanians. The government, donors and economic experts all agree that economic growth has not benefited the poor majority and has led to a substantial increase in inequality and poverty. An economic map of Tanzania will show a small number of export enclaves (mines, plantations, flower greenhouses, tourist hotels), luxurious villas and hotels, and gated residential areas and shopping malls for the wealthy, awash in a sea of immiseration in both rural and urban areas. Referring to the recent ethnic conflict in Kenya, grassroots activists say the same will happen in Tanzania, but the tribes in this case are the haves and the have-nots.

During the last 20 years of neoliberalism, an increasing number of women and men can no longer subsist as smallholder producers in their rural homes and are forced to migrate to town

in search of off-farm employment, or to send their children. Many of those children are young girls who end up working as "house girls," "bar girls" or sex workers—the major occupations available for that age group.

When challenged, mainstream economists and government officials are quick to reply that the reduction of agricultural employment is a natural trend of development, found all over the world. However, they are turning history upside down. In the advanced capitalist economies of Europe and North America, rapid industrialisation led to a tremendous demand for labour in the formal sector and absorbed the millions of young people seeking work from within their own countries, as well as immigrants from outside.

This is not the present scenario for Tanzania or most of Africa—quite the opposite. African people are increasingly living in conditions similar to those of the colonial labour reserves and native townships, or the Bantustans, of apartheid South Africa. The majority of Tanzanians, for example, do not have access to clean running water and electricity, relying primarily on children and women to provide water and firewood fuel by carrying head loads. Waterborne diseases are prevalent in both rural and urban areas because of the lack of safe clean water and appropriate sanitation facilities. Only 40% of pregnant women have a skilled health worker to provide assistance at birth—47 years after independence—and on average, one woman dies every hour due to complications associated with pregnancy and childbirth. Furthermore, the maternal mortality rate is rising!

These conditions have worsened since the mid 1980s when structural adjustment was imposed on the Tanzanian government by foreign donors led by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Before this, the Nyerere-led government adopted a social welfare approach that was combined with nationalisation of basic economic and financial sectors and the shift of priority from the large-scale white-owned

agriculture sector to small-scale African farmers. Substantial resources were allocated then to public health, water and education, as well as to support for small-scale producers in both rural and urban areas—a trend which has now been reversed. During this time, women as well as men benefited from universal access to basic health care and universal education, and the former gross disparities in female access to schooling were reduced. State support for rural economic development provided women and men with viable incomes within their village communities and led to a sharp decline in male migrant labour. The resulting crisis in large-scale agriculture and mining contributed to later pressure in the 1980s to reverse these trends.

The steady decline in the agriculture sector since the early 1980s illustrates the impact of neoliberal policies. Once the backbone of the national economy, agriculture's share of GDP has declined from around 50% to 26%; compared to mining/quarrying at 15%, manufacturing at 8.2%, construction at 11%, financial services at 9.7% and transportation and communications at 8% (data from the Governor of the Bank of Tanzania, Professor Benno Ndullu, April 2008). The major growth sector in agriculture is largely foreign-owned horticulture, whereas the peasant sector has stagnated for lack of investment and support—a direct result of Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs).

In towns, street hawkers (largely young men) and food traders (largely women) are increasingly denied access to sustainable livelihoods and employment. Drawing on old colonial laws that sought to keep Africans away from city centres, government "clean-up" campaigns chase women and men traders, small-scale manufacturers and food processors from urban streets; the small shops and stalls are destroyed by town militia, leaving people with few options other than pimping, sex work and theft.

## Economic Policy and the HIV Pandemic

One result of neoliberal policies and the corporate-led globalisation of Tanzania is the escalation of a crisis in reproduction, which is graphically illustrated by the high rates of malnutrition, disease, maternal and neonatal mortality, and the HIV pandemic. Poor women and men are more likely to be deprived of food security and adequate treatment for malnutrition, malaria, waterborne diseases, and anaemia because of privatisation and the rising costs of food, water and health care. These are the very conditions that reduce immunity to HIV infection.

Women, however, are the most vulnerable to HIV infection and have the highest infection rates at an earlier age, not only due to their physiology but because of the impact of patriarchal structures in interaction with globalisation forces. The majority of women are economically dependent on men for their survival because women are relegated to the lowest level of occupations in both the formal and informal sector; denied equal access to education, credit and on-the-job training; and deprived of ownership and control of cash income and productive property, such as land and housing, on an equal basis with men. Economic compulsion, along with local cultural practices that have been systematically sustained by the government in the name of "customary law," reduce women's ability to negotiate safe sex.



Marjorie Mbilinyi (centre) at the 2005 TGNP Gender Festival

## Call for an Alternative Development Strategy

A growing number of Tanzanian women and men are calling for an alternative development strategy that will increase jobs, create sustainable livelihoods for self-employed producers, and generate livable incomes, while also stopping the wholesale plunder of national minerals, forests, wildlife and water. Basic industries and a sustainable exploitation of mineral wealth can provide the base for Tanzania to become an increasingly self-reliant economy, in cooperation with sister economies in Eastern and Southern Africa, and the entire African region.

The increased purchasing power that results from increased employment and incomes will boost growth for the goods and services of domestic producers, within a supportive regulatory framework provided by a people-centred government. At the same time, an increasing number of domestic producers will find lucrative niches in the world market for goods and services, based on value-added products of agriculture and mining, as well as tourism, manufacture and services provided by an increasingly educated workforce.

With increased economic self-reliance and broad-based growth, the national economy will be able to generate more domestic resources to support sustainable livelihoods for all, as well as provide public delivery of quality healthcare, education and safe clean water as a right for all citizens. The resulting reduction in dependence on external financing from donors will empower the government and its citizens to take back control over basic decisions about macro-economic policy and resource allocations.

Putting people, not profit, first, and prioritizing reproduction, as well as production and growth, are central elements in an alternative feminist economic agenda. Collective participatory decision making structured around inclusion, not exclusion—another hallmark of transformative feminism—will provide the popular base for participatory democracy and development. Needless to say, the political pressure needed for alternative economic and development policies will only come from the combined strength of a strong social movement at all levels that embraces the vision of the feminist movement.

# Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists

*The African Feminist Forum took place from 15th to 19th November 2006 in Accra, Ghana. The meeting brought together over 100 feminist activists from all over the region and the diaspora. The space was crafted as an autonomous space in which African feminists from all walks of life could reflect on a collective basis and chart ways to strengthen and grow the feminist movement on the continent. A key outcome of the Forum was the adoption of the Charter of Feminist Principles.*

*In this three-page feature we reproduce the collective statement which introduces the Charter, as well as the text of the Charter (in a very slightly abridged version). In a specially written piece, Liepollo Lebohang Pheko, a South African feminist activist, explains the political significance of the Charter for African feminism.*



## A Charter for Women who Dare

Liepollo Lebohang Pheko,  
Trade Collective, South Africa.

According to Nigerian feminist and academic Amina Mama, feminism calls for a refusal of oppression and a commitment to struggling for women's liberation from all forms of oppression—psychological, emotional, socio-economic, political, philosophical, internal and external. Like Amina Mama, many African women have come to enjoy the word, its meaning and the consequences of that meaning because it marks us as part of a community of confident and self-defining women. For us, African feminism is a transformative and radical expression of our essence. It dares all African women to expect more from our menfolk, our fellow women, our communities, our governments and ourselves. It is far beyond the politics of mere survival—it anchors us when our national ideologies appear fragmented, when our class discourse is contradictory and when the State itself threatens to overwhelm its citizens with its aloof self-importance once election sloganeering has subsided.

As such, the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists proffers the opportunity to name and claim back our struggle across all parameters, sectors and spaces. The Charter celebrates self-definition. In its own words, it accepts the contradictions of African feminism without "Ifs, Buts or Howevers."

The Charter underlines the right of African Feminists to identify with global struggles. Connecting current conditions with key historical events, such as slavery and colonialism, is central. The Charter recognises the diverse and indigenous nature of African feminism or feminisms and rejects any condescension of the Western feminist movement. It offers the hope of doing more, doing better and doing it on terms that speak to African women's essence.

## Collective Statement

It was felt that we need something to help us define and affirm our commitment to feminist principles, which will guide our analysis, and practice. As such, the Charter sets out the collective values that we hold as key to our work and to our lives as African feminists. It charts the change we wish to see in our communities, and also how this change is to be achieved. In addition, it spells out our individual and collective responsibilities to the movement and to one another within the movement.

With this Charter, we reaffirm our commitment to dismantling patriarchy in all its manifestations in Africa. We remind ourselves of our duty to defend and respect the rights of all women, without qualification. We commit to protecting the legacy of our feminist ancestors who made numerous sacrifices, in order that we can exercise greater autonomy.

The Charter is an inspirational as well as an aspirational document. Mechanisms for operationalising it were also drawn up at the meeting. Key recommendations were:

- The dissemination and popularisation of the Charter as a critical movement-building tool. This requires such inputs as translation of the Charter into as many languages as possible, communication of the Charter through different mediums, such as radio, websites, television, and so on.
- The use of the Charter as an accountability mechanism for feminist organizing. As such, it was recommended that it be developed into a tool that women's organisations can use for monitoring their own institutional development as well as for peer review with other feminists.

## Preamble to the Charter: Naming Ourselves as Feminists

We define and name ourselves publicly as Feminists because we celebrate our feminist identities and politics. We recognise that the work of fighting for women's rights is deeply political, and the process of naming is political too. Choosing to name ourselves Feminists places us in a clear ideological position. By naming ourselves as Feminists, we politicise the struggle for women's rights, we question the legitimacy of the structures that keep women subjugated, and we develop tools for transformatory analysis and action. We have multiple and varied identities as African Feminists. We are African women – we live here in Africa and even when we live elsewhere, our focus is on the lives of African women on the continent. Our feminist identity is not qualified with 'Ifs,' 'Buts,' or 'Howevers.' We are Feminists. Full stop.

## Our Understanding of Feminism and Patriarchy

As African Feminists, our understanding of feminism places patriarchal social relations structures and systems, which are embedded in other oppressive and exploitative structures, at the centre of our analysis. Patriarchy is a system of male authority that legitimises the oppression of women through political, social, economic, legal, cultural, religious and military institutions. Men's access to, and control over, resources and rewards within the private and public sphere derives its legitimacy from the patriarchal ideology of male dominance. Patriarchy varies in time and space, meaning that it changes over time, and varies according to class, race, ethnic, religious and global-imperial relationships and structures. Furthermore, in the current conjunctures, patriarchy does not simply change according to these

**"We believe in the indivisibility, inalienability and universality of women's human rights."**

factors, but is inter-related with and informs relationships of class, race, ethnic, religious, and global imperialism. Thus to challenge patriarchy effectively also requires challenging other systems of oppression and exploitation, which frequently mutually support each other.

Our understanding of patriarchy is crucial because it provides for us as Feminists, a framework within which to express the totality of oppressive and exploitative relations that affect African women. Patriarchal ideology enables and legitimises the structuring of every aspect of our lives by establishing the framework within which society defines and views men and women and constructs male supremacy. Our ideological task as Feminists is to understand this system and our political task is to end it. Our focus is fighting against patriarchy as a system rather than fighting individual men or women. Therefore, as Feminists, we define our work as investing individual and institutional energies in the struggle against all forms of patriarchal oppression and exploitation.

## Our Identity as African Feminists

As Feminists who come from/work/live in Africa, we claim the right and the space to be Feminist and African. We recognise that we do not have a homogenous identity as feminists - we acknowledge and celebrate our diversities and our shared commitment to a transformatory agenda for African societies and African women in particular. This is what gives us our common feminist identity.

Our current struggles as African Feminists are inextricably linked to our past as a continent – diverse pre-colonial contexts, slavery, colonization, liberation struggles, neo-colonialism, globalization, etc. Modern African States were built off the backs of African Feminists who fought alongside men for the liberation of the continent. As we craft new African States in this new millennium, we also craft new identities for African women, identities as full citizens, free from patriarchal oppression, with rights of access, ownership and control over resources and our own bodies, and we utilize positive aspects of our cultures in liberating and

nurturing ways. We also recognize that our pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial histories and herstories require special measures to be taken in favour of particular African women in different contexts.

We acknowledge the historical and significant gains that have been made by the African Women's Movement over the past forty years, and we make bold to lay claim to these gains as African Feminists – they happened because African Feminists led the way, from the grassroots level and up; they strategised, organised, networked, went on strike and marched in protest, and did the research, analysis, lobbying, institution building and all that it took for states, employers and institutions to acknowledge women's personhood.

As African Feminists, we are also part of a global feminist movement against patriarchal oppression in all its manifestations. Our experiences are linked to that of women in other parts of the world with whom we have shared solidarity and support over the years. As we assert our space as African Feminists, we also draw inspiration from our feminist ancestors who blazed the trail and made it possible to affirm the rights of African women. As we invoke the memory of those women whose names are hardly ever recorded in any history books, we insist that it is a profound insult to claim that feminism was imported into Africa from the West. We reclaim and assert the long and rich tradition of African women's resistance to patriarchy in Africa. We henceforth claim the right to theorise for ourselves, write for ourselves, strategise for ourselves and speak for ourselves as African Feminists.

## Individual Ethics

As individual Feminists, we are committed to and believe in gender equality based on feminist principles, which are:

- ♦ The indivisibility, inalienability and universality of women's human rights.
- ♦ The effective participation in building and strengthening progressive African feminist organising and networking to bring about transformatory change.
- ♦ A spirit of feminist solidarity and mutual respect based on frank, honest and open discussion of differences with each other.
- ♦ The support, nurture, and care of other African Feminists, along with the care for our own well-being.
- ♦ The practice of non-violence and the achievement of non-violent societies.
- ♦ The right of all women to live free of patriarchal oppression, discrimination and violence.
- ♦ The right of all women to have access to sustainable and just livelihoods as well as welfare provision, including quality health care, education, water and sanitation.
- ♦ Freedom of choice and autonomy regarding bodily integrity issues, including reproductive rights, abortion, sexual identity and sexual orientation.
- ♦ A critical engagement with discourses of religion, culture, tradition and domesticity with a focus on the centrality of women's rights.
- ♦ The recognition and presentation of African women as the subjects not the objects of our work, and as agents in their lives and societies.
- ♦ The right to healthy, mutually respectful and fulfilling personal relationships.
- ♦ The right to express our spirituality within or outside of organised religions.
- ♦ The acknowledgment of the feminist agency of African women, which has a rich herstory that has been largely undocumented and ignored.

### Institutional Ethics

As feminist organisations, we commit to:

- ♦ Advocating for openness, transparency, equality and accountability in feminist-led institutions and organisations.
- ♦ Affirming that being a feminist institution is not incompatible with being professional, efficient, disciplined and accountable.
- ♦ Insisting on and supporting African women's labour rights, including egalitarian governance, fair and equal remuneration and maternity policies.
- ♦ Using power and authority responsibly, and managing institutional hierarchies with respect for all concerned. We believe that feminist spaces are created to empower and uplift women. At no time should we allow our institutional spaces to degenerate into sites of oppression and undermining of other women.
- ♦ Exercising responsible leadership and management of organisations whether in a paid or unpaid capacity and striving to uphold critical feminist values and principles at all times.
- ♦ Exercising accountable leadership in feminist organisations, taking into consideration the needs of others for self-fulfilment and professional development. This includes creating spaces for power-sharing across generations.

**"Our focus is fighting against patriarchy as a system rather than fighting individual men or women."**

- ♦ Creating and sustaining feminist organisations to foster women's leadership. Women's organisations and networks should be led and managed by women. It is a contradiction of feminist leadership principles to have men leading, managing and being spokespersons for women's organisations.
- ♦ Feminist organisations as models of good practice in the community of civil society organisations, ensuring that the financial and material resources mobilised in the name of African women are put to the service of African women and not diverted to serve personal interests. Systems and structures with appropriate Codes of Conduct to prevent corruption and fraud and to manage disputes and complaints fairly are the means of ensuring institutionalisation within our organisations.
- ♦ Striving to inform our activism with theoretical analysis and to connect the practice of activism to our theoretical understanding of African feminism.
- ♦ Being open to critically assessing our impact as feminist organisations, and being honest and proactive with regards to our role in the movement.

- ♦ Opposing the subversion and/or hijacking of autonomous feminist spaces to serve right wing, conservative agendas.
- ♦ Ensuring that feminist non-governmental or mass organisations are created in response to real needs expressed by women, and not to serve selfish interests, and unaccountable income-generating.

### Feminist Leadership

As feminist leaders, we are committed to making a critical difference in leadership, based on the understanding that the quality of women's leadership is even more important than the numbers of women in leadership. We believe in and commit ourselves to the following:

- ♦ Disciplined work ethics guided by integrity and accountability.
- ♦ Expanding and strengthening a multi-generational network and pool of feminist leaders across the continent.
- ♦ Ensuring that the feminist movement is recognised as a legitimate constituency for women in leadership positions.
- ♦ Building and expanding our knowledge and information base on an ongoing basis, as the foundation for shaping our analysis and strategies and for championing a culture of learning beginning with ourselves within the feminist movement.
- ♦ Nurturing, mentoring and providing opportunities for young feminists in a non-matronising manner.
- ♦ Crediting African women's labour, intellectual and otherwise, in our work.
- ♦ Creating time to respond in a competent, credible and reliable manner to other feminists in need of solidarity and support whether political, practical or emotional.

**"As African Feminists, we are also part of a global feminist movement against patriarchal oppression in all its manifestations. Our experiences are linked to that of women in other parts of the world with whom we have shared solidarity and support over the years."**

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