Draft two

Policies and Practices Towards Women's Empowerment: Policy advocacy by Gender focused NGOs and the realities of grassroots women in Uganda.

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Abstract

This is an exploratory study that sought to analyze the causes of the gaps between the policy advocacy work of gender focussed NGOs at the national level and the realities of the grassroots women in Uganda. The study was designed to identify the factors that affect the effectiveness of policy advocacy work aimed at empowering grassroots women, its linkages with the issues of women at the grassroots level and make recommendations for improvement.

The study was based on qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. Data was collected from six key informants from National Association of women organisations in Uganda (NAWOU), Uganda Women's Network (UWONET), OXFAM, Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE), Federation of Uganda Women Lawyers (FIDA) and ActionAid Uganda(AAU). It is also based on secondary data from past literature on the subject and from the above NGOs. Thirdly the study is based on the active participation of the writer in the advocacy by gender focussed NGOs at the national level for the past three and half years and having worked in Rakai World Vision Uganda Project from 1994 to 1997.

The findings are presented under the following themes:
- Current situation of women in Uganda,
- Policy advocacy by gender focussed NGOs and
- Factors affecting policy advocacy with a deeper analysis of the linkages between policy advocacy and grassroots women.

The major findings of the study are that while Uganda presents a very good opportunity to ensure that grassroots women actively participate and benefit from advocacy processes, this opportunity has not been fully utilised.

1.0   Introduction

This is a report on an exploratory study on policy influencing and the realities of grassroots women in Uganda. It explores the current policy influencing process and the extent to which it has changed the lives of the rural women in Uganda. The study is presented in five sections. The first section is on the national and international contexts. The second section provides the study problem, aim, objectives and key questions of the study. The third section is on the methodology, and significance of the study; the fourth presents the findings and the last section contains the conclusions and recommendations.

1.1 International Context

Efforts have been made at international level to improve the lives of women. This has been through adoption of international instruments and programmes of action aimed at committing governments to empower women in their countries.

Among these is the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which was adopted by the UN general assembly as the International Bill of Women Rights in 1979 and came into force in 1981. CEDAW states that…. "the full and complete development of the country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields"[*].

The convention provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to and equal opportunities in political and public life as well as education, health and employment. It affirms the reproductive rights of women, and targets culture and traditions as influential in shaping gender roles and family relations. Countries that have signed or ratified the convention are legally bound

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[*] CEDAW

to put provisions into practice. It basically defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination.

According to the convention, discrimination against women is defined as "…any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing, nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field" (ibid.).

States committed themselves to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms including: [*]

- To incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in their legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women

- To establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination and

- To ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organizations or enterprises.

In 1995, the fourth World Conference on women took place in Beijing and produced an outcome document popularly known as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It set out its goals as gender equality, development and peace and constituted an agenda for the empowerment of women. "The objective of the Platform for Action is in full conformity with the purposes and principles of the charter of the United Nations and international law and that is the empowerment of women. The full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all women is essential for the empowerment of women." [•] The Beijing +5 document emphasizes that it is the duty of states regardless

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[*] Adapted from CEDAW document

[•] Beijing+5 Out come document-UN

of their political, economic and cultural systems to protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The platform also recognizes that women face full barriers to full equality and advancement because of such factors as their race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion or disability.

The Beijing Platform for Action identified 12 critical areas of priority to achieve the advancement and empowerment of women. These were reviewed by the Commission on the status of women and it has since 1996 been making annual recommendations to have be adopted so as to accelerate the implementation of the platform.

The twelve areas include, Women and poverty; Education and training of women; Women and health, Violence against women, Women and armed conflict; Women and the economy; Women in power and decision making, Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; Human rights of women, Women and the media, Women and the Environment; and The girl child. In 2000, the Beijing Platform for Action was reviewed in New York and states recommitted themselves to the platform and made further commitments to ensure the realisation of its goal that is gender equality, peace and development.

1.2 The Uganda Context

Uganda like many other African countries has committed itself to implement the international instruments and programmes of action. In 1985 committed itself to CEDAW without any reservations. Uganda has been an active participant in the International Conferences on women. Other than CEDAW, Uganda has committed itself to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. Uganda has realized that the issues of women's low and subordinate status are part of the major causes of poverty in the country. Thus overcoming the subordinate status of women has become a major concern to development organizations. Women organisations specifically committed to overcoming the subordinate status of women have been established and other organisations have committed themselves to promoting women's empowerment and mainstreaming gender into their pogrammes. This scenario became more real during the preparation for and

after the Nairobi forward-looking strategies in 1985. A number of women organizations were started or became more active in Uganda. These include organizations such as Action for Development, Federation of Uganda Women Lawyers, among others. The preparation for Beijing and after Beijing led to formation of several other women organisations such as the Uganda Media Women's Association, East African Initiative for the Advancement and Uganda Women's network among others.

In 1986, The Ministry of Women in Development was started by Government to advance the issues of the marginalised. It began as the Ministry of Women in Development and was changed to the Ministry of Gender and Community Development and now it is the Ministry of Gender Labor and Social Development. One of the issues that can be highlighted here is that since its change from the Ministry of Women in Development, the Ministry has been going through several institutional changes and now Gender is only a department and not a Ministry. This has reduced its visibility as the national machinery for bridging the gender gap between men and women.

Though this has been one of the most under funded ministries, it has made a number of strides in providing and building the national machinery for the advancement of women and gender equality. Two of the major outputs of this Ministry have been the National Gender Policy and National Action Plan for the Advancement of Women. The policy recognizes gender relations as a development concept in identifying and understanding the social roles and relations of women and men of all ages and how these impact on development. It stipulates that sustainable development necessitates maximum and equal participation of all social groupings in economic, political and social cultural development (National Gender Policy 1999). The National Action Plan identifies four critical areas of concern for the government of Uganda. These are poverty, income generation and economic empowerment; reproductive health and rights; legal framework and decision making; and the girl child and education. A fifth area, violence against women and girls is soon to be added.

The national constitution that was instituted in 1995 provided for the equality of both genders and outlawed all practices that impinge on the rights of another person (Republic of Uganda, 1995). The revision of the national laws is yet to be done to ensure the adequate implementation of the constitutional provisions.

The Local Government Act stipulates that women must occupy 30% of all positions of the Local Council structure while people with disabilities occupy 20% of these positions (a man and woman) (Local Government Act 1996). This gives a total of 40% of women's representation on these structures. However the active participation of women and people with disabilities to represent their constituencies is still low due to lack of skills in advocacy, lack of enough resources to mobilize them and the continued power and culture structures that promote gender inequalities. Women's political participation is promoted as long as they remain within the political status quo.

A number of organisations especially women's organizations with technical and financial support from international agencies and donors have done a lot of advocacy work to promote the rights of women as human rights in the country. Some of the advocacy initiatives include the campaign on land rights and the ongoing campaign on the domestic relations' bill. While this is the case with organisations at the national level, women's groups at the grassroots level are mainly engaged in income generating activities with major emphasis on agricultural projects and handcrafts (Nabacwa 1997, United Nations Systems in Uganda 2000).

In spite of all the above initiatives, the major problem has been and still is a gap in the linkages between the national and community initiatives to promote the empowerment of women. While the national level NGOs with the exception of a few, are engaged in policy advocacy work aimed at making government policies gender sensitive, the grassroots women are mainly focusing meeting their daily survival needs with little focus on government policies and laws.

The above analysis can be backed up by the findings of the Country Programme Review 1999 of ActionAid Uganda. The review revealed that though the organization had played a lead role on gender issues within the whole of ActionAid as an agency and at national level to advocate for the rights of women, this work had not been matched with the interventions and realities at the field level.

The above was attributed to limited analysis of the causal relationship between the subordinate position of women and poverty, and the contributions of the interventions that have been undertaken towards addressing this problem. Thus in most cases the interventions that were undertaken were not comprehensive in meeting the strategic needs of women. The attempts that were undertaken for example for women's participation in decision making yielded limited results. The review indicated that women had not adequately participated in the decision-making processes and the few who did, had to do so amidst difficulty. ActionAid did not adequately militate against the forces that affect the effective participation of women on such forums (ActionAid 2000).

The ActionAid review further indicated that the organization's approach and methods of work have not been leveled to ensure that women amidst their triple roles actively participate in the planning and implementation process. Thus by large the programmes have been gender neutral and time has not been taken off to examine who is to actually be targeted and how? A few programmes were specifically designed to target women having identified them as a poverty category. However because these were developed without a gender analysis in most cases, and probably with limited listening to the women themselves, they did not adequately respond to their strategic needs (Ibid.).

In terms of the benefits, the review pointed out that women received minimal benefits in comparison to their male counterparts. That there was one pattern that seemed to be clear from all the Development Areas visited, when it came to resources that needed much financial investment, there was no emphasis on women being major beneficiaries as was the case with small financial resources. The big financial projects included Oxen plough projects, and infrastructure projects (schools, roads, health units, and dams) where men

were the major contractors of such projects. The small resource projects included goats and agricultural inputs such as hoes and seeds (Ibid.).

The review showed that there was limited linkage between the project work and the community realities. The gender relations within the community were changing, women had increasingly become more involved in small income generating activities and the men were reducing their financial support to the households. However there was limited analysis of these relations and how they impacted the organization's work (Ibid.).

The review further indicated that though ActionAid together with other players were involved in creating gender awareness within the communities, it was not clear what the community understood this to be and how it related to, and even how it contributed to positively changing their lives as men and women. (Ibid.).

The changes at the grassroots level have been very slow. That is the capability of women at this level to demand and have their strategic gender needs met, their rights respected and protected, access to/control of resources and to actively participate and influence the key decision making processes in their favour. By and large their lives have remained the same, having a heavy workload to support the household livelihoods, going through domestic violence, mostly illiterate and so many of them are unable to make decisions about their lives (ActionAid Uganda 1999).

The experience of ActionAid Uganda provides some of the challenges faced by gender focused NGOs. It has been noted that limited cooperation and support has taken place between grassroots women and the national women's organisations. National women organisations have been criticised as being elitist and not benefiting the poor women as pointed out in the UN system report of 2000. " At national level however, women organisations have so far not been able to mobilize poor rural and urban women" (United Nations System in Uganda 2000). This has meant lack of a united front to ensure the realisation of the government commitments to women empowerment. There is limited

appreciation of how the organisations at national level and the women groups/CBOs can be able to compliment each other's work.

2.0 Statement of the problem

The above analysis shows that there exists a relatively positive policy environment for women's empowerment at the national and international levels. Government itself has made a number of commitments as seen above. However the translation of this policy environment to benefit the grassroots women has been a challenge. Government needs to do more to align its constitutional commitments to other laws and the development plans of the country. In this regard, gender focussed NGOs have engaged in policy advocacy to the government to meet these commitments. Though these NGOS are undertaking these efforts with the intention of improving on the quality of lives of the grassroots women (economically, socially and politically), these are yet to be translated into real positive changes. That is, women effectively participating in decision making in community management, controlling economic resources and having their rights valued and respected. More work needs to be done for the grassroots women to fully benefit and have the quality of their lives improved. This thus calls for a critical analysis on why this trend of events has taken place and to make recommendations on how to improve the lives of grassroots women so that they can benefit from the government's policy commitments, and the work of the non-government organizations.

2.1 Aim

The aim of the study is to analyze the causes of the gaps between the policy advocacy work of gender focussed NGOs at national level and the realities of the grassroots women so as to make recommendations, which would contribute to improvement in the quality of lives of the poor women. The analysis will focus on policy advocacy work aimed at empowering women, its linkages with the issues of women at the grassroots level, and make recommendations for improvement.

2.1.1 Specific Objectives

➢ To examine the current realities (situation) in the quality of lives of the grassroots women.

➢ To examine policy advocacy work by gender focused NGOs

➢ To examine the factors affecting policy advocacy work by gender focused NGOs

➢ To examine the gaps between policy advocacy work by gender focused NGOs and the issues for the grassroots women.

➢ To make recommendations on how the non-government organisations and the women groups can contribute more effectively to improving the quality of life of grassroots women.

2.1.2 Key questions

1. What is the current situation (realities) of the grassroots women? .

2. What are the factors affecting policy advocacy aimed at improving the quality of life of the grassroots women?

- What is the organisational structure aimed at promoting gender issues?

- Does the organisation have a gender policy, and if so, is it embedded in the organisation at all levels?

- How is the organization supporting its staff (technically) to implement programmes that can be able to improve on the quality of lives of poor women?

- Are the organisations listening to the needs of the women at the grassroots level?

- What is the experience with the grassroots women?

- What are the available opportunities to the grassroots women?

- What are some of the ways in which the organisations are going about their work?

3. What are the existing linkages between the grassroots women and the actors at national level in women empowerment?

4. What changes need to be made to ensure that the quality of life of grassroots women is improved?

3.0 Methodology

The study has depended mainly on qualitative data from three sources. One is secondary data collected from reports and reading of past studies. It has also depended on primary data collected through interviews with selected organisations. The organisations are National Association of Women Organisations of Uganda (NAWOU), Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), Uganda Women's Network, Forum for Women in Democracy, OXFAM and ActionAid Uganda. As a follow up to these interviews, the areas of operation of these NGOs were visited to hold discussions with the women or women groups that they were working with. These organisations were selected because of the following reasons:
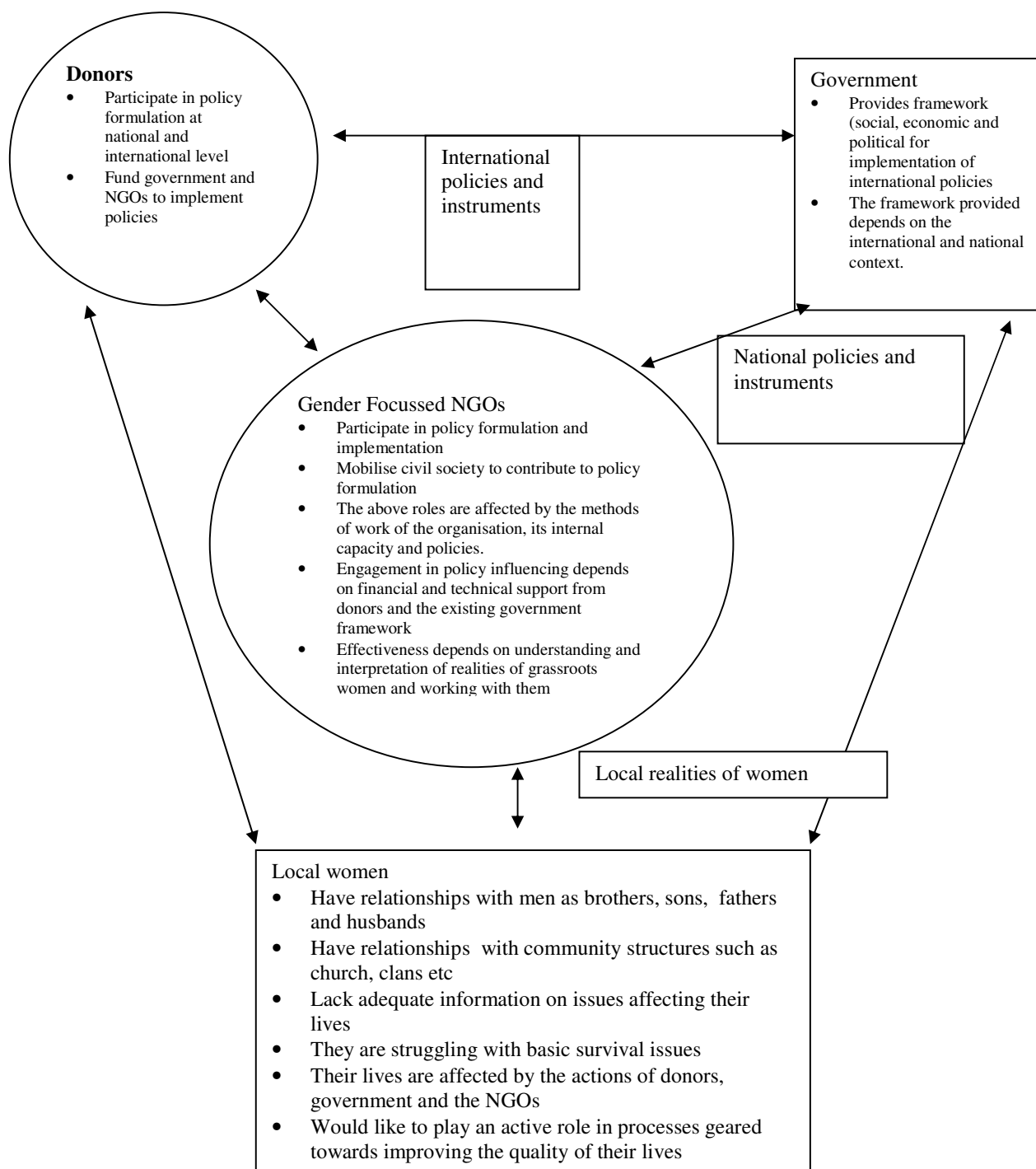
1. They all have women's empowerment as part of their organisational commitments.
2. They all have advocacy as one of the means of achieving this commitment.
3. Oxfam was selected because of it is nationally known as one of the organisations that began gender work in Uganda.
4. ActionAid was selected because of its interest in this study and secondly it is also one of those organisations that is emerging as a major supporter of the women's movement nationally and internationally.
5. FIDA was selected because of its work on legal empowerment
6. NAWOU was selected because of its structural linkages with the grassroots women
7. UWONET was selected because it is known as the advocacy network on gender issues
8. Forum for women in democracy was selected because of its current work on women and decision making.

The interviews were based on the framework of analysis (see page 12) and the key questions.

Lastly the study is also based on the reflections of the researcher who has been an active participant in policy influencing for the last 3 ½ years.

3.1 Framework of Analysis for the study

The conceptual framework of analysis is based on the Understanding by the researcher of the relationships between the various institutions involved in policy advocacy, formulation and implementation.

Donors
- Participate in policy formulation at national and international level
- Fund government and NGOs to implement policies

International policies and instruments

Government
- Provides framework (social, economic and political for implementation of international policies
- The framework provided depends on the international and national context.

National policies and instruments

Gender Focussed NGOs
- Participate in policy formulation and implementation
- Mobilise civil society to contribute to policy formulation
- The above roles are affected by the methods of work of the organisation, its internal capacity and policies.
- Engagement in policy influencing depends on financial and technical support from donors and the existing government framework
- Effectiveness depends on understanding and interpretation of realities of grassroots women and working with them

Local realities of women

Local women
- Have relationships with men as brothers, sons, fathers and husbands
- Have relationships with community structures such as church, clans etc
- Lack adequate information on issues affecting their lives
- They are struggling with basic survival issues
- Their lives affected by the actions of donors, government and the NGOs
- Would like to play an active role in processes geared towards improving the quality of their lives

The researcher understands that policy formulation and implementation aimed at empowering women in a country is influenced by a number of actors. These include donors and international bodies with the mandate to formulate international instruments at International level. These are influenced by the governments and not government organisations who facilitate civil society to participate in policy formulation and implementation. The success of the process depends on the relationships among the various actors.

3.2 **Significance of the study**

1. It provides a basis on which ActionAid can promote and strengthen processes, which can empower women to become advocates of their own rights. This is based on the fact that AA is committed to people- centered approach in its work on enabling them to have their rights enjoyed, respected, and promoted. It is also committed to strengthening women's movements globally to advocate for gender equity. It provides information that will enable ActionAid Uganda to improve on its current strategies on women's empowerment. It is hoped that this study will set a precedence in which more work can be done to explore the people centered approach in promoting the human rights of women by the organisation. The study has provided an opportunity to the ActionAid Uganda, Team Leader - Gender to take off time to reflect on how the organization is currently working, understand the problem and make suggestions on how to improve on the situation. The organizations Team Leader- Gender has used this opportunity to share and learn from other Gender and development practitioners from other parts of Africa. This has improved her current skills and understanding of working on gender and development issues.

2. It provides a basis that Gender Focused NGOs can use to improve on their current ways of policy advocacy aimed at empowering grassroots women.

3. It adds to a wider understanding on women's empowerment in Uganda. It provides knowledge to development planners and policy makers on the alternative means through which grassroots women can become advocates of their own rights and

needs. It is hoped that this study will be useful to other development partners of ActionAid Uganda such as the National Association of Women Organisations, Uganda Women's Network and others with whom this information will be shared.

4. The study provides an analysis of the relationship between policy advocacy and the real life experiences of rural women.

4.0 Study Findings

4.1 Current situation of Women in Uganda

The Uganda Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP 2000) identifies powerlessness as one of the dimensions of poverty. The plan outlines the various forms in which powerlessness appears that include:

- Weak property rights, for example, being unable to stop powerful neighbors from encroaching on one's land.

- Lack of ability to access social services because of isolation or gender norms such as a girl who wants an education but cannot persuade her family to keep her in school.

- Lack of choices, such as widows in some districts who may have no effective choice against being married by their late husband's brother.

- Inability to enforce legal rights, for example in Kalangala where some women had been abused by men but were unable to get transport to the police station because of collusion among men to deny them access to boats (means of transportation),

- Inability to stop the prevailing insecurity that leads to psychological impairment such as the problem of alcoholism in some war afflicted areas.

- Having to pay bribes to get services (the national integrity Survey found that 40% of the users of public services had to pay bribes; having little influence on the kind of services delivered and having no obvious channels of communication to wage a complaint if services delivered or the delivery is poor. The plan notes that such experiences are not only materially impoverishing, they are also demoralising.

The report outlines the causes of powerlessness as:

❖ Institutions or social norms that discriminate along gender or other lines.

❖ Low incomes and/or lack of property rights, which make it harder not only to buy things but also retain personal independence (especially for single women), and to retain social networks by participating in social activity.

❖ Lack of information about legal rights and other decisions of public institutions, which affect their lives.

The domestic relations review report says that men dominate women and are regarded by society as heads of households, decision-makers and resource owners. This dominance is found in both the public arena and private sphere (UWONET 2001, PMA, 2000). The Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture points out that women face barriers to participation in community activities that include refusal by husbands, discrimination, subordinate roles, weak leaders, lack of mobilisation, lack of time and failure to see the benefit of their participation (PMA, 2000).

The ActionAid Uganda Gender Policy states that men and women, regardless of age and class go through unequal power and social relations. These are some of the major causes of poverty in the country. That in Uganda, poverty whether among women or men goes beyond lack of access and control over resources, it is also influenced by beliefs, attitudes and cultural practices that tie the people down and influence their progress and participation in decision making. The policy further states that the unequal social relations accord to girls and women a subordinate and low status in comparison to boys and men and that it is a major constraint towards the overall development of the country. Lastly the policy states that poverty is brought about and is seen differently in girl/women and boys/men and has a more negative impact on the former than the later regardless of age and class (ActionAid 2000).

This concurs with the words of the advocacy officer UWONET "women remain in their subordinate status, they do not have access to information, they are not able to push issues forward and lack confidence". However one needs to be careful because, as Jackson points out, the concept of poverty cannot be taken as a proxy for the subordinate status of women and is no substitute for gender analysis which transcends class divisions

and material definitions of deprivation (Jackson, 1996). This does not rule out the fact that there is some relationship between economic development and women empowerment. "Doing something about women is good for economic development or even more narrowly, economic growth"(Kabeer 1996). It is by empowering women that poverty will be eradicated but it is not necessarily that if we fight poverty, we will do a lot for women (Kharono 1998).

According to an action research study on domestic violence in Kawempe, a low income suburb of Kampala, both men and women acknowledged that there is domestic violence and that wife beating is a common occurrence. The major cause of domestic violence is the inequalities between the man and woman in the household. Men feel able to dictate all areas of decision making in the home and when a woman disagrees with the decision, violence erupts. This is because men see it as her questioning his judgement and decision making and not asserting her rightful opinion (Action Research on Domestic Violence, Kawempe Division).

The FIDA advocacy officer said that their legal aid programme has enabled women to seek redress in case of dispute but that their coverage is still small. It is in four districts. She further said that despite legal assistance they (women) are still dependants. She attributed this to lack of economic empowerment, illiteracy and a heavy workload. There is need of an integrated approach to women empowerment. " There is need to empower the rural women in all aspects that is economic and social if quality of life is to be improved". The advocacy Officer UWONET said that women are aware of their rights, issues that affect them; but this is applied to those who have access to the media, impact is not felt at the grassroots level. From the interviews, the gender focused NGOs expressed the following as the real life situations that the grassroots women are facing:

1. Lack of experience,
2. Cultural attitudes,
3. Lack of confidence,
4. Resistance from culture,
5. Lack of economic empowerment, illiteracy,
6. Domestic chores, ignorance of procedures and the law,

7. Conflict of cultural laws and written laws.

The interviews with women CBO leaders at the grassroots level identified the following as their needs:

- Loans because women in rural areas have mobilised themselves into small groups

- Training in various fields by lobbying the district to deliver this training.

- Access to information by the group leaders which they can then share with their fellow members in the groups

- Organise meetings at parish level to evaluate if this information is delivered to the people.

- NGOs to monitor their activities. This is very important. One woman who was interviewed said that one of the problems she has with ACFODE is that " they give us the money but they do not come to check on us so that we can explain our problems".

- Donors to come directly to the district or straight to the community

- Free medical treatment

The above is just a representation of the understanding of the needs by the centre NGOs of the needs of the grassroots women and the latter is a presentation of what the grassroots women see as their problems. It is possible that if one interviewed the woman herself and not her leader, she may also give a different picture of what her real situation is. The major issue here would be the extent to which the different stakeholders can meet these needs and what role does the woman play in the process of meeting these needs.

Economically, women produce over 70% of the total agricultural output but ownership, and control over land, their labour, technological innovations and above all the benefits thereof is minimal or non-existent. That is why women are the poorest of the poor (World Bank 1995, PMA, 2000). Traditional restrictions to women's rights to own land reduce their ability to negotiate within the household. The respondent from NAWOU said that the choice of the rural women is limited because of lack of economic resources. The Uganda Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture states that women have limited economic opportunities due to their societal roles and responsibilities, their low social status, relationships with men, lack of ownership and access to productive resources, low

participation in decision making and high workload (PMA, 2000). The allocation of time within the household is an important gender issue in many parts of Uganda. There is evidence in rural areas that women work considerably longer hours than men when domestic work is taken into account (PEAP 2000).

Women through their triple roles provide a critical though often unacknowledged contribution to economic growth (Stein Jane………, PMA, 2000). Economically rural women are the poorest. The need for capital is acute for women whose dependence on male relatives leaves them without land of their own or other property to use as collateral for credit in the formal banking system. Accessing a loan is not easy for women no matter what their marital status holds. There are limited micro finance institutions in rural settings, which marginalises the small holder sector at the grassroots. In order to cope, women have established community based organisations as support systems both economically and socially (Snyder 2000).

Life expectancy in Uganda is estimated to be at 40.5 years (UNDP 1998). The maternal mortality rate that is one of the highest in the world is variously calculated at between 506 and 1000 deaths for every 100,000 births (Government of Uganda 1996).

In terms of education, statistics of 1995 indicate that 57% of rural women were illiterate compared to 29% of the men and 24% in the urban area compared to 14% for men (MGL and SD 1999). Universal Primary Education has greatly increased the enrolment of both girls and boys from 3.1 million to 5.1 million by 1998 (MGCD 1998). The challenge is that the drop out rates particularly for girls are still high. Marriage accounting for marriage, pregnancy, sickness and lack of fees (MOED, 2000).

It is important to note that some of the realities raised above are not unique to Ugandan women. '*Beyond inequalities, women in South Africa,*' points out that rural women face severe hardships, especially in the areas of water, sanitation and fuel wood. Legal and human rights provisions in the constitution and their impact on everyday life are not known to majority (SARDC 1997).

4.2 Policy Advocacy Work by Gender Focused NGOs

Chapter 4 of the Uganda Constitution 1995 embraces the principles regarding good governance, including human rights and freedom and due process. It is recognised that the fundamental freedoms of the individual are inherent rather than granted by the state. All organs of the state shall thus seek to respect and uphold the rights and freedoms of all individuals. The rights and freedoms include among other things equality and freedom from discrimination based on inter alia sex, race, ethnic origin or social economic standing. The same chapter also allows parliament to enact laws necessary to implement policies and programmes aimed at redressing social economic or education or other imbalance in society and provide laws that provide for any matter acceptable and demonstrably justified a free democratic manner.

However, government has been slow in enacting laws to match the constitutional provisions for gender equality or where they have, the enacted laws such as the Land Act do not fully reflect these commitments. This civil society, and more so women NGOs, with support from donor agencies have resolved to carrying out various advocacy initiatives aimed at pressuring government to enact laws and policies in line with the constitutional provisions.

Since the enactment of the 1995 constitution, NGOs have engaged in a number of advocacy initiatives, the major ones being ensuring land ownership by women with focus on spousal land co-ownership and the domestic relations bill to be enacted into law. Other campaigns have majored on eliminating gender-based violence and recently increasing the participation of women in politics.

Most of these campaigns have been carried out through use of the following strategies:

- Formation of alliances and coalitions such as Uganda Land Alliance, Coalition against Domestic Violence, Coalition on Politics and Women, and the Domestic Relations Bill.
- Holding meetings with key persons such as the Minister of Justice, Speaker of Parliament, Chairperson of the Uganda Law Reform Commission, and the Directorate of Gender, religious leaders;
- Using the media (print media, and broadcast)

- Public dialogue and workshops.

- Research/ generation of data e.g. during the land rights debate

These campaigns have brought issues affecting women to the attention of decision-makers and the public particularly those in urban areas. Though this is the case, it is still a challenge to clearly have the strategic interests of women in the policies and laws that are being enacted by government. This is exemplified by the fact that the campaign for the domestic relations bill has gone on for the last five years and the issues it contains were raised over 37 years ago in the famous Kalema report (Kalema 1964). Secondly the 1998 land Act was passed and is being promoted by government as a pro poor measure. The act provides for a written consent of the spouse before leasing, mortgaging or sale of land of family survival (Government of Uganda 1998) The land act however omitted the co-ownership clause which many gender focused NGOs were advocating for as the major means through which women's rights to land can be protected. It has been argued that the provision for a written consent for land which they do not actually own is meaningless. Secondly the law does not provide for widows' ownership rights, wives of polygamous husbands and ignores the prevalence of illiteracy amongst women in requiring prior written consent Though the land campaign advocacy did not succeed as expected, Uganda Women's Network, that provided leadership to the campaign has indicated its withdrawal from pursuing the lost land reform (Goetz and Jenkins 1999).

NGOs engaged in ensuring that policies are gender sensitive face a number challenges in achieving their aims. More often than not they have had limited success. This can be attributed to a number of factors that are discussed below.

4.3 Factors affecting Advocacy by gender focused NGOs

There are a number of factors that affect the effectiveness of policy advocacy in Uganda. These include:

- **Linkage between national machinery for the advancement of women and gender focussed NGOs.** The linkage between the NGOs focused on gender

advocacy and the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development charged with the role of the national machinery for women empowerment and gender mainstreaming has been weak. This is attributed to a number of reasons which include:

a) The restructuring of the Ministry over a number of years has resulted in the reduction of the institutional leverage of the gender component. Its role has been diffused in comparison to the role articulated in the national gender policy (Aklilu and Kasente 2001, Uganda CEDAW report 1999). With the continued restructuring and the reduction of the leverage of the gender component of the Ministry, there has been a growing discontent among the NGOs focusing on women empowerment. This discontent is based on the argument that the Ministry is not adequately playing its mandatory role. The Ministry has not sided with them in situations when they have lobbied parliament to enact laws such as the Land Act and the on-going campaign on the Domestic Relations Bill. This growing tension has reduced the ability of the two to work together to further the concerns of the grassroots women. It could be argued that the Ministry has been reluctant to identify with the women empowerment cause in overcoming subordination in the social and political arenas particularly if the process entails making major policy changes in the country. Its willingness to do this is still questionable particularly if these processes do not toe the government line whose tools and interests it exists to further. Thus when policy advocacy has been done and it is challenging the status quo, it has become a point of tension rather than cohesion between the Ministry and the NGOs and this seems still far from over.

"Some National Machineries for women have focused on welfare-oriented projects and programmes that target women. By contrast, the mainstreaming agenda demands that gender issues get a hearing in macro-level policy making. Policy oversight and advocacy roles are vital for influencing wider government policy and pushing for legislative change" (Oxaal, Z., 2001).

b) There is lack of a forum in which the gender constituency can be harmonised and coordinated. "The national machinery needs to make it part of its agenda to create an appropriate forum that facilities civil society organisations to contribute

to the realisation of the gender agenda in the Ugandan context" (Iklilu and Kasente). Linking NGOs and Women organisations with policy makers in government is a key role for National Women Machineries in the context of mainstreaming (Oxaal, Z., 2001). The failure of the Ministry to provide a forum for various stakeholders of women empowerment has meant loss of opportunities to influence policy formulation and implementation.

c) Lack of resources by the Ministry**. As earlier noted, there are limited budgetary allocations to the Ministry. This has caused limitations in the ability of the ministry to play its role. Bridge argues that in addition to strategic plans, national machineries need to be backed up by budgetary allocations and monitoring procedures (Bridge 2001). The lack of adequate resources has made the Ministry to drive its agenda depending on the funding guidelines of the funder and hence in most cases the agenda has been donor driven. This has affected the Ministry's ability to respond to the gender needs of the Country. This assertion does not mean that external support is unnecessary; the concern is that it should not be done at the expense of national interest. This is because in this way it undermines the development of effective strategies towards addressing critical issues (Kemigisha 2000, Okuonzi and Macrae 1993).

- **Linkage between NGO priorities and government priorities**. Snyder and Tadese argue that women's concerns and needs must be on the agenda of governments and not just voluntary groups. Though this should be the case, by large the agenda on women particularly in the recent past has been on the periphery of the government priorities and in most cases women's policy influencing work has not been strategically done to address this problem.

  a) The Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) is now the blue print for guiding Uganda's development. Though to an extent the plan recognises the gendered dimensions of poverty, its strategies fall short of this. It often mentions that it is

the responsibility of the Ministry of gender to create gender awareness in the other ministries (PEAP 2000). Akillu and Kasente rightly point out that there appear to be little synergy between PEAP and the National Plan for Women formulated as a consensus programme of action by a wide spectrum of stakeholders from the gender constituency in the country. They attribute this to the failure of the policy development work of the Ministry to respond to the newly emerging issues in Uganda's development (Aklilu and Kasente 2001). "Women organisations have an essential role to play in providing a voice for women to collectively voice their needs, demands and to hold government accountable for legislative and policy commitments(Akpalu, Ofei-Aboagye, Derbyshire 2000) Thus it is critical that the NGOs committed to women empowerment map out the priority areas of government so that they engage with the government priority processes. They should also finds ways and means of influencing the agenda if it is not in line with the interests of women.

b) Currently, Sector Wide Approaches in the four pillars as per the PEAP are being developed. The four pillars of the plan are rapid sustainable economic growth and structural transformation; good governance and security; increased ability for the poor to raise their incomes; and enhanced quality of life for the poor. Gender focussed NGOs need to realize the missed opportunities and strategically position themselves in these processes because it may be difficult to do so at a later stage. Currently the donor group on gender has mobilised women NGOs to influence the recently concluded Consultative Group meeting of donors and the ongoing Judicial Review Commission specifcally in the area of criminal and commercial laws and unless the local NGOs are able to engage with this process it may be difficult for them to assert ownership of its outcomes and not see it as donor driven. Secondly it seems this extensive exercise seems be geared to reviewing commercial laws so as to "attract investors" and not for the benefit of the wider society because no similar comprehensive exercise has been undertaken for laws related to women's rights.

c) Other than the above, government has already developed a Plan for Modernistion of Agriculture (PMA) partly based on the Uganda Poverty Participatory

Appraisal Project findings. The PMA recognises gender as having an influence on division of labour and power relations within households, which bring about differences in access to and control over production resources. The Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture commits itself to pay special consideration to gender issues given the gender inequalities in Uganda. The PMA views the household to be the most effective unit if poverty is to be reduced most effectively. The strengths and contributions of all members and teamwork need to be valued and fostered at this level (PMA 2000). The fact that most of the women in the country are farmers and that they contribute greatly to agricultural production, it makes sense if activists for women empowerment used agriculture as an entry point to empowering rural women. Unfortunately, there are very few women NGOs that are engaged in advocating for the rights of women in the agricultural sector. There is great need of influencing the PMA because in the first place it was not developed to address the problems of poor farmer, rather it was developed as a result of Uganda's pursuit of neo-liberal economic policies. The focus was on big farmers, poor farmers only came in later after aggressive lobbying by CSOs. The National Agricultural Advisory Services Bill which emanates from the PMA, privatizes extension services; farmers must be organised into groups to access resources at the sub-county level to fund extension. Though the bill may e seen as a way of enabling farmers access extension services since the are liberalized, it is marginalising women who may have limited resources to be able to attract extension service providers.

d) Changing Policy Environment: Influencing women concerns has not fully taken advantage of the decentralization process. The decentralisation of power began way back in 1993 under the Local government statute and later the Local government statute 1997 so as to refine the process in line with the 1995 constitution. The process involves handing over political, administrative and financial responsibilities to the districts. Conditional and unconditional grants have been given to the districts under this process. Donors can engage in direct financing at district level. The Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Local

Government are the most important central government agencies in determining and guiding the decentralisation process. The Minister of Local government can promulgate detailed regulations on the operation of local governments (Uganda Gazette. No. 40, volume XCI, 1998, Goetz and Jenkins 1999). Currently under the pilot programme, five District Development Plans have been made. The lessons and experiences from the pilot districts will lead to nation wide application of the programme. The process of decentralisation calls for participatory assessment of priorities of the districts. The decentralization process has given districts the mandate to plan for the development of their districts. Districts can develop bylaws in line with the needs of their community. Under decentralisation, central government can no longer direct councilors to allocate resources according to national priorities. However it can encourage councilors through performance measures" (Ministry of Local Government…..). Though this is the trend of events, most advocacy work has aimed at influencing the centre to change the national laws and policies. These have by and large been detached from the districts and have more often been interpreted as elitist women's issues. Policy advocacy has not optimally taken up the new opportunities that decentralisation is offering. Even at the centre, strategic linkages have not been made with the Ministries that matter. Other than the challenge of linking up with the decentralisation process, the women who are members of the local council themselves are facing their own problems that affect the effective representation of their constituencies. Though Uganda has a representation of nearly 40% of women on the district forums, they still have a number of challenges which include the need to enhance their skills in gender analysis, effective communication, lobbying and advocacy. At the same time men on the leadership committees are ignorant about gender issues (SNV - Uganda 2000). Other than lack of adequate skills women on these councils face other problems such as refusal by the men to attend meetings, heavy work loads which cause poor time keeping and effective participation, lack of respect for women as leaders by both men and women, lack of transport, low educational attainment, and lack of self esteem. These mitigate negatively against women

and hence they fail to influence policies at the lower levels of government (Mugisha…….).

In spite of these challenges, decentralisation provides a great opportunity of working with women on the councils who can then mobilise women and men support towards specific advocacy issues. It provides opportunities to influence community leaders including clan leaders. It provides opportunity for building women solidarity and bringing the women movement closer to the grassroots. It also provides an opportunity of advocating for policies and plans at the district level that are responsive to women issues. Lastly it provides an opportunity of building bottom- up advocacy campaigns which may help in changing some of the laws that government may have failed to change probably because of not knowing the likely reaction from the citizens.

Unconvincing Arguments presented to policy makers:

In most cases the arguments that have been presented to policy makers have not been presented in the language that policy makers want to hear that is proof with figures and numbers. Issues have mainly been presented qualitatively using case studies to illustrate the gravity of the problem. Figures to back up the arguments are lacking. There are limited arguments at the moment relating the subordinate status of women and the violation of women rights to poverty. Unfortunately it is usually what policy makers want to know that determines how information about women will be taken up in development bureaucracies (Goetz 1994, IDS paper 378). The need for data backed up by qualitative figures has been a major point of contention between donors/government and CSOs. The UPPAP study provided the first qualitative figures which made policymakers begin to look at issues from this perspective, but not all policy makers have picked up this understanding and it becomes more complicated when it comes to gender issues. They are often overlooked in the absence of an explicit conceptual framework that brings them into consideration (Whitehead and Lockwood 1998). Cornwall points out that government elite and bureaucracies are hostile to mainstreaming efforts. They see them as externally imposed agendas bringing few benefits. He further says that this is due to a

retinence in national ownership of gender equity issues and the lack of trust between governments and civil society organisations including women's organisations. (Cornwall 2001) On the other hand, Mama in her paper on Gender and Activism says that politicians and policy makers frequently display a politically correct concern with gender inequality, only to founder when it comes to implementing change, citing lack of expertise and information as obstacles to overcoming the discrimination and its consequences (Mama A, 2001).

Though there is a department for gender and women studies at Makerere University and a Centre for Basic Research and the Makerere Institute of Social Research, relationships have not been fully nurtured to ensure that they are utilised to generate data that those involved in policy advocacy can use. More often practitioners with limited skills have had to generate their data whose authenticity has at times been challenged by policy makers. "Despite the inter-relatedness of these various modes of gender work, the linkages between gender studies and the various policies and practices intended to combat gender inequality remain subject to constant interrogation. Even within the most privileged and exclusive academies that the west has to offer the world, those engaged in gender studies remain self critical on questions of relevance of their work to feminist activism"(Ibid.). Butegwa states that the result of this scenario is committed activists within the movement with very little knowledge of the theoretical basis of their work (Butegwa 1997). It is critical that a relationship is built between gender research, training institutions and gender advocates, practitioners and advocates on the ground to facilitate theoretical research and analysis to critique established concepts and models and design alternative analytical tools (Akpalu, Ofei-Abaagye, Derbyshire, 2001). Mama in her paper on Activism and the Academy cites the need for retaining links with gender activists namely grassroots women's organisations and movements in the wider society as critical if gender studies are to retain their relevance **(Mama A 2001).**

Other than providing data in the language that policy makers would like to hear, it is important to have demonstrations of the effect of the problem if not addressed. Value based linkage of the problem to other issues is important because it widens the support base for the issue (Chapman 2001).

It is clear that while Uganda is acclaimed to be at the forefront on women empowerment

in Africa, there is limited documentation of the models and processes on the subject that have developed over time. This situation has made it difficult for gender related advocacy to convince policy makers who only understand issues from a statistical and economic perspective and do not see the relationship between the rights of women and poverty reduction in the country.

Institutional mandates vis-a- vis policy advocacy

Most of the advocacy has been done in an ad hoc manner. In most instances, the NGOs have built up pressure when they hear that the bill is soon to be tabled in parliament, which has given them limited time to lobby. This has also made it difficult for gender focused NGOs to fully support such processes financially and technically. This is because the campaigns have more often been ad hoc in nature that it is has been difficult to predict and plan accordingly.

On the other hand, Kawamara says that many NGOs haphazardly join coalitions and advocate for issues that are not linked to their programme activities. They may belong to a policy advocacy network yet they do not reflect the advocacy activities undertaken by the coalition in their work plans nor budgets (Kawamara). Chapman and Wameyo say that objective setting may be a difficult exercise as NGOs often work both individually and as part of a coalition or coalitions to effect policy. At times, depending on the way the campaign is structured, it may be seen differently by the different actors (Chapman 2000). This is because all of them may not be trying to achieve the same thing, may favour different strategies and wish to establish different relationships with those in power (Chapman and Wameyo 2000). Kemigisha in her analysis of gender equity and equality in Uganda, argues that many national women's organisations focusing on health identify advocacy as their key activity but that in most cases it is left hanging. There are no clear goals, activities and indicators (Kemigisha 2000). As a result of the need to work on specific areas of interest, some NGOs find themselves working in isolation or leading others who have least interest and thus commitment to the issues (ActionAid Uganda, 1999).

The lack of the advocacy issues or plans in the organisational mandates makes it difficult

for the institutions to prioritise them. Thus the involvement of the organisation in a certain advocacy issue will depend on the interest of certain individuals in these organisations. If these individuals are senior members of the organisation, it is likely that it will be prioritised but if not, they may send junior or volunteer members of the organisation to represent it in the advocacy programmes in the coalition. Unfortunately such persons usually lack the mandate to make decisions for the organisation. This has an effect on the advocacy in that quick and immediate decisions may need to be made or an opportunity is lost.

Secondly it is important to high light that over time, some institutions include the advocacy concerns into their work and may even go ahead and mobilise grassroots women and men towards the issues as is the case in ActionAid Uganda where communities have been mobilised to become part of the domestic relations bill and land rights for women campaign. The problem is that usually the secretariat of the coalitions/alliances has no mandate to coordinate such initiatives and they remain fragmented.

Limited institutional capacity to advocate on gender issues

Without strong systems or NGOs/grassroots groups to hold government accountable, policy victories can be short-lived (Chapman and Wameyo 2001).

It is important to walk the talk. Thus while advocating for change in national policies, the organisations doing this need to understand how their work relates to women empowerment and the gender relations within the community and their organisations. It is important to have mechanisms that can hold them accountable.

"Mainstreaming gender is both a technical and political process that requires shifts in organisational cultures and ways of thinking, as well as in the goals, structures and resource allocations of international agencies, governments and NGOs" (Kardan 2001) Mainstreaming requires changes at different levels within these institutions, in agenda setting, policymaking, planning, implementation and evaluation (, Akpalu, Ofei-Aboagye, Derbyshire 2000).

Of the six organisations interviewed, only ActionAid Uganda had gender policy while for OXFAM BG Uganda, gender was a cross cutting issue and they were in the process of gender mainstreaming. All the women organisations did not have a policy. One said, "take for granted that NAWOU is dealing with gender issues, women issues". Lack of clear articulation of the institutional position and policy on gender issues makes it difficult to plan for staff capacity development and strategic direction. This was clearly noted; of the organisations interviewed, only two, OXFAM and ActionAid seemed to be committing resources to staff training. One of the organisations said that they enroll staff committed to gender issues, whether they have the capacity to work on them seems secondary. The women organisations are investing limited resources to staff training on gender issues and where it is done it is either to senior members of staff or the scope is narrow. On the other hand the institutions through their advocacy work need to understand how to go about gender relations in the advocacy work. It can also be argued that OXFAM GB Uganda and ActionAid can be able to commit resources to staff training because they have the money which may not necessarily be the case for the other national organisations.

Other than lacking the skills, in most cases the lead institutions have lacked structural linkages with the grassroots women and those that do have not optimally utilised them to contribute to the national advocacy. There is need for the women organisations to network and link up with women at the lower levels so as to transfer relevant skills, share and exchange information and enhance communication processes based on the realities of the women at all levels (SNV –Uganda 1999).

Though it has a small membership, Uganda Women's Network has been recognised for its role in advocacy work at national level. Uganda Women's Network membership is based in Kampala. The organisation was started on the assumption that they (UWONET) would be able to draw on the linkages to the grassroots through their membership which unfortunately did not work very well, resulting into its operating as an organisation. The cause for this can be attributed to a number of causes. The major cause of the problem from the member organisations' point of view is that, they feel UWONET has often not recognised their contribution and that it has not included them in

its programme implementation schedule. This has made them feel that the network does not recognise their importance and value. Secondly it seems the members feel threatened that in belonging to a network they will lose their autonomy. There's also the issue of limited resources, which has already been highlighted. The network and the member organisations request for resources from the same donors that creates tension between the network and its members. This has at times created a conflict in the role of the network and that of the members. In raising funds, the network has to be accountable for their usage. At times the members are not as forth coming as they should be due to the factors above, but then, it has to get the work done because there are deadline. As a result, the network has at times had to do the work that the members would have done. Though this may be the case from the members, UWONET secretariat feels that the members do not see the importance of working in a network and hence are not always forthcoming and raise issues about what 'is in it for them' (what benefit is in the network for them). It should be noted here that the relationship between the members and their network is not only peculiar to women's organisations, it is common to other networks too.

The National Association of Women Organisations has a membership of over 77 NGOs and 1000+ CBOs. NAWOU has been known for its structural linkages with the grassroots women. In spite of this, the association has failed to mobilise the women organisations to fulfill its mission. The major cause for this scenario is that the members feel NAWOU is geared more towards meeting practical gender needs and not ready to go all the way to the strategic gender needs. Also the apparent tension between NAWOU and UWONET, which is slowly dying out, has affected the ability of NAWOU to mobilise the members. [*]

As already noted at the beginning while ActionAid was working with the grassroots women, its work did little to positively impact the lives of women. The relationships with grassroots women and men, if well organised could put pressure on government and its various structures to implement its policy commitments, unfortunately this has not been the case. NGOs that have international and grassroots linkages such as ActionAid and OXFAM have not fully utilised their location in this process to further the policy

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[*] The causes of this tension are explained under changes within the women, movement.

influencing processes on women empowerment. The failure for the various actors to fully utilise their locations (positioning) has reduced their ability to influence government policies in favour of women.

The above arguments agree with previous writers who see the success of gender issues being linked to the level of external pressure by donors and women's groups, the extent of the 'fit' of gender issues with the mandate and procedures of an organisation, and the strength of members who work on gender issues in translating their knowledge into agency-specific procedures (Kardam 2001, Kardam, 1995, Razani and Miller, 1995).

Other than the problem of structural linkages, women NGOs have lacked adequate resources to be able to adequately mobilise the grassrots women and men. Most donor agencies for which women NGOs depend for funding commit limited resources for funding gender-related activities. They usually have specific areas of interest that affects the NGOs that depend on them for funding. They have more than often been co-opted to take on so many agendas depending on what funding is available. With limited staffing, the programmes of these NGOs have become big and cannot be managed and coordinated effectively. The involvement of these NGOs has shifted from Civic Education, election monitoring, advocacy on all the issues that have come up, to some of their staff becoming consultants to the donor agencies. While this may be viewed from one point of view as being strategic in tapping the limited available resources, it has also had its shortcomings.

It has affected the long term planning as programming has been tailored to the demands of the donors and the same NGO has had to change its focus so many times so as to access the available funds. These NGOs have been turned into government and donor service contractors. Though this may be the case, the funds that have been provided have been small and the period of focus on the issue by the NGO has depended on their availability. The donors themselves are not coordinated as far as funding is concerned, thus more often the local NGOs have had to send a similar proposal worded differently depending on what that donor wants to hear and this has been time wasting. This has made the local NGOs dance to the tune of the donors, implementing their agenda and following their approaches and at times having their missions compromised in the

process. This has affected their capability to sustain advocacy work so that it benefits the population.

Other than the above problems, institutional leadership is another challenge that policy advocacy is facing in Uganda particularly in regard to women organisations. Some of the women who lead these organisations cling to positions of authority and all the decision making rests within the hands of this one person. Sei refers to this as the "Queen Mother syndrome" [*]. She says that some organisations have been turned from being Non Governmental organisations to non-governmental individuals. This often leads to ineffectiveness (Sei T 1997).

Most decision-making structures are still male dominated

Breaking through the decision-making structures has been a major challenge for the advocates. I recall very well when we went to meet the Minister of Justice Mayanja Kangi on the issue of the domestic relations bill and he seemed such a "milestone to jump"(a big hindrance). He simply did not seem bothered and was seeing us as confused persons who do not seem to know what they are talking bout.

During the parliamentary debate of the land act, Hon Miria Matembe tabled the co-ownership clause which she had prepared in consultation with the members of the campaign for increased women rights over land and it was passed as part of the land act. Unfortunately when the final text of the act was brought back to parliament, this provision had been omitted. Though other factors such as poor record keeping, reporting, and publishing may have played a part in this, its disappearance has been attributed to the 'all male' committees debating the land bill at the Ministry of lands, in the cabinet and parliament. The President himself has been reluctant in supporting women's rights over land as noted in his pronouncement in early 1998 that women had to prove themselves in marriage before they could acquire rights to property (Goetz and Jenkins 1999).

The powerful institutional and attitudinal barriers that exist where gender is concerned limit the prospects for policy change (Cornwall A…2001..). The Domestic Relations Bill

campaign review states that, "while the strategy of lobbying parliament was a right strategy because these are the decision makers, it was not addressing the real problem. Parliament as a structure is patriarchal. Men and women who subscribe to patriarchal ideologies dominate it. The majority have the attitude that women are supposed to be subordinate to men and therefore passing this bill would mean destabilizing the status quo, which they feel must be maintained"(Uganda Women's Newtowrk 2001). Some women in parliament may see it as a better move in terms of personal career development to express solidarity with a male colleague rather than entering into conflict with them on gender issues (Cornwall, A.,…2001…..). Some of the women who enter parliament go with the self-motive of excelling in their carrier and not necessarily the agenda of advancing women. I recall the recent behavior by the Vice President who invited us to parliament to discuss with her the issue of the Land Act amendment to include the co-ownership clause. She completely opposed this and discarded the research by Land Alliance on the co-ownership clause saying it was invalid. She even went to all the radio stations in the country to elaborate her point of view that was completely contradictory to that of the advocates. One of the respondents said that one of the gaps existing between grassroots women and the actors at national level is that MPs quite often have the greed for personal gain and their personal interests over ride those of the community.

The same concern is re-echoed by Tamale in her paper in which she arges that though the affirmative action policy has witnessed the increase of women in parliament from a total of four before its enactment in 1989 to the current 52, its benefits cannot be over emphasized. She links this to the patriarchal forms of doing politics; women are still considered intruders in a preserve that was almost exclusively male. It is also viewed as a top down policy imposed by the state that at times has made the beneficiaries to have allegiance to the state for giving them the opportunity to access the public arena. She says, "… while women have been put in positions of leadership and authority, practical and structural obstacles that stand in their way for effective performance still remain". She further urges that affirmative action needs to be linked to broader social and economic transformations (Tamale 2001). Institutions need to be changed to reflect and

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[*] Note there is no drone bee syndrome which makes this a sexist statement

represent women interests, if the goals of gender equality are to be attained and not just bringing women into unequal mainstream development processes (Goetz, 1995, Akpalu, Ofei-Aboaagye, Derbyshire 2000). It should be noted here that the arguments that have mainly taken place on this issue are that these women do not go into parliament under the mandate of women though they are women. They are elected as woman district representative not representatives of women. They do not have performance indicators and more often they have said that they are subject to more scrutiny than their male counterparts. They do not have any agenda about women that they are supposed to promote while in parliament and hence cannot be held accountable to what is not in place.

The fact that these obstacles still remain, it has been difficult for gender focused NGOs to work effectively with women parliamentarians. The fact that they were elected by an act of government means, they tend to feel that they should have allegiance to government and not challenge it. Thus in most cases they have endorsed government policies even when the gender advocates have advised them otherwise. An example of this is the land act that was passed by government in 1998. The NGOs advised the women parliamentarians to support them but for some their alliance to government could not allow them to side with the Gender focused NGOs.

Learning from past experiences

Policy advocacy has been going on for a long time in the country. The major achievement from this advocacy is the 1995 Uganda Constitution. It is acclaimed as one of the most gender sensitive and progressive constitutions[*] in the world. Other than the constitutional provisions, major policy changes have been witnessed such as the gender policy, and the affirmative action provisions in local government, parliament, universal primary education and university. Though this is the case the policy advocacy by NGOs has not done a critical analysis of how those achievements were registered in order to learn from them to plan for further changes. Secondly limited follow up has been made to

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[*] It should be noted that the constitution does not provide for political pluralism in the country

ensure that they are effectively implemented to benefit the grassroots women.

Mugisha says that during the constitutional formulation process, women became so well organised, that they produced more memoranda than any other social group. Their submissions emphasized similar issues without any marked difference between educated and illiterate, urban and rural, rich and poor women that greatly contributed to their success. Women worked with the youth, people with disabilities, organizations for children rights and the rural poor. Women parliamentarians formed a caucus that met regularly to get views from fellow women. Women parliamentarians had a fully established desk to coordinate their activities during the debates ((Mugisha 2001). It is clear from what Mugisha is saying that the success of the process laid on the team work among the various actors and particularly so the linking of the process to the women at the grassroots level but also identifying with others such as the youth and the disabled who also had issues that they wanted the constitution to address and together they formed a formidable team.

However this process of working together and forming alliances and caucuses was not carried on after the constitution to ensure that the constitutional achievements are fully realised. It thus remains a big challenge that is moving the constitutional commitments to gender equality into realities particularly when it comes to the rural woman. This as per the above arguments can be partly attributed to the loss of the momentum and the partnerships that were built during the constitutional formulation process.

The changing political situation in the country

As already noted, women NGOs became more active in the mid 1980s. This was the time that Uganda got a new government that showed commitment to women empowerment as already discussed. However because of this courtesy, the government has expected some kind of allegiance from women. Thus it has not taken lightly those who have tried to challenge it and in most cases women NGOs have also been caught between having allegiance to the government that has been good to them and demanding more from it to ensure that their rights are protected.

Butegwa says that some African governments deliberately sponsor conservative,

reactionary movements in order to neutralize the progressive women's movement (Butegwa 1997).

The government of Uganda is not far from that. "The government fears a strong civil society and sometimes NGOs fear to appear confrontational to government (ActionAid Uganda 1999). In order to retain an image of being committed to women empowerment, government has tried to ensure that it has overwhelming support and limited challenges from women organisations. To achieve this, government has more often provided good jobs to the women who have been articulate or vocal on women issues. In this way, they find it difficult to challenge its policies since they have become part of it. While this can be seen as a step in the right direction, having allies in government, more often they have compromised on their allegiance that has greatly weakened the advocacy on gender issues. In certain instances those who are vocal have been blacklisted as opposing the government. Women have on several occasions been reminded to be grateful to government. They are thus at cross roads, caught up between asking for more and appreciating what they have received so far. Unfortunately, the more which is not available at the moment is what is needed to change the lives of the grassroots women such as the co-ownership clause which was omitted from the Land Bill and the Domestic Relations Bill which government is reluctant to pass into law. Some of the questions that do not seem to have clear answers are:

- What is the extent to which government wanted to go as far as the whole question of women empowerment is concerned?

- Did government envisage that women would start demanding for the recognition of their rights?

- Did government foresee the resistance that was likely to come up from those who have a traditional view of the position of women in society?

  If it did, the current approaches of its work do not seem to reflect this. As already noted due to limited resources the ministry charged with this role has hardly fulfilled its mandate and it is still far from doing so.

- How can the challenge of having women in decision-making positions and being compromised while in those positions be dealt with? This question is based on the argument that on one hand we want gender sensitive women in key decision making

positions to break the glass ceiling of power but once they are there, they are silenced.

- How can mechanisms be built to ensure that women who acquire decision-making positions remain strong mouthpieces for women's empowerment?

On the other hand, the behavior of government towards advocacy work could be attributed to its general attitude towards civil society as exemplified by a restrictive registration system. The system is aimed at controlling civil society because it fears that it can be used by people against the government. "While the absence of multi-party democracy may not be specifically to blame for restrictions of this type (or the violations of procedure indicated by the lost amendments to the land act), government anxieties that certain NGOs might be in league with particular parties may have inclined it towards a less liberal attitude than might be optimal for fostering a civil society that could hold government accountable and inactions which affect the poor "(Goetz A and Jenkins R., 1999).

The ActionAid Uganda gender study states that the challenge facing lobby and advocacy initiatives is the fear of the unknown.

Changes within the women's movement

The women's movement has gone through a number of changes that can be attributed to international and national causes. The international causes mainly being the preparation for and the implementation of the outcomes of the international conferences such as the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985) and the Beijing Platform For Action (1995).

During that same time 1985-1995, Uganda was going through political changes, which affected the women NGOs that were formed during this period of time. It was a period of political, social and economic reform. The women NGOs that were formed during this period of time were more revolutionary in comparison to the past NGOs**.**

The older NGOs did not wholly welcome the new NGOs. They saw them as imposters and not partners in the process. Though not overtly, this attitude has gone on to this day.

The new NGOs came with a commitment of seeing change in the policy environment in regard to women. Some of these NGOs included the East African Sub-regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women, Uganda Women's Network and Uganda

Women Media Association among others. Although government was committed to the empowerment of women, it probably had not expected the rate at which women were advancing. Thus these new NGOs were received with suspicion as witnessed in difficulties in registration and awarding of political position to members of organisations such as National Association of Women Organisations in Uganda which had existed earlier and were less assertive as the new organisations.

The position of government in regard to the new NGOs worsened the already suspicious situation between the older NGOs and the new NGOs. The new organisations felt that the older organisations were less assertive while the older NGOs felt that the new NGOs were taking over their roles. This tension and apparent division within the women NGOs themselves has continued to this very day and it has more than often prevented them from building a united front to defend their position with government. This 'pull her down' syndrome (phd) as it is popularly known has affected the women's working together and has at times created unnecessary tension amongst themselves and their organisations. This in turn affects the wider work that is done by other organisations that link up with the women's organisations.

- **Keeping the agenda on women as a women's agenda and not as a national agenda:**

The policy influencing processes on reforming laws to match the constitutional commitments have been seen as a women issue and not beneficial to the whole society. This could be linked to the fact that the strategies that have been used have placed the woman at the centre of the discussion and have dwelt less on the socially constructed relations between the men and women and their political, economic and social implications to both of them. However in instances where social relations have been considered and the term gender has been applied, the issues have usually been lost in the gender 'jargon'.

It is clear that the arguments that emerge to influence a policy depend on the position one takes in interpreting gender, something which there appears to be little consistency (Whitehead and Lockwood 1998). *If gender means ask women too, it is likely that the data that will be gathered will be gender disaggregated with limited attention to the*

gender dynamics and relations. If it is equated with the gender division of labour, it will contain accounts of men and women's workload. If it refers to women's issues, it may refer to women's access to limited resources, institutional deprivation and suggestions focusing on women. Razavi and Miller argue that ' the situation of women cannot be improved by simply asking women themselves what their interests are (Razavi and Miller 1995).

Secondly there is a generation gap among the women themselves, which has made it difficult to build a united front to push the advocacy agenda forward. Middle class charismatic women have spearheaded these campaigns. Thus in most cases the sustainability of the advocacy initiatives have depended on the availability and involvement of these few individuals. It is still difficult to bring on board the young women and the older women have not yet understood the middle age women who want a change in the current status quo. This creates difficulty in the sustainability of the movement, though it can also be questioned the extent to which there is a women's movement in Uganda.

Other than the above challenges, the middle age women who are involved in advocacy work have found themselves at constant scrutiny of the media and the public that has made life difficult for them. This subjects them to becoming burnt out with limited opportunities to rejuvenate them.

Thirdly policy advocacy processes such as the Domestic Relations Bill and the Land Act campaigns have not been able to build critical mass support especially from the men and religious institutions. These are however very influential in the lives of the grassroots women either as husbands, religious leaders, fathers or brothers. These are the 'judges' and custodians of customary laws which by large provide the yardstick for accepted behavior for women who are subject to punishment in case of deviation. Thus to avoid ostracism, in most cases the grassroots women have in most cases sided with the men rather than their counterparts in policy advocacy campaigns. As Chapman points out trust and rapport needed to have been built with the local communities prior the introduction of the debates on the bill (Chapman 1999). Campaigns of changing national laws need to be done together with campaigns against discriminatory customary laws. The campaign against female genital mutilation that has been done with the involvement of the elders in

Kapchorwa district provides lessons that may be necessary for those involved in gender advocacy to explore and learn.

"Gender refers to men as well as women, and specifically recognises that men as well as women should be involved in the promotion of gender equality. Gender mainstreaming work needs to involve men and women as service users. It also seeks to involve men, who are committed to gender equality as agents of change"(Akpalu, Ofei-Aboagye, Derbyshire, 2000).

A mainstreaming approach does not rule out initiatives targeted only at women or only at men. Innovative, strategic and catalytic initiatives have a key role to play in promoting gender equality. A targeted approach to increasing the strength of women as a constituency or interest group, for example, is complementary to a strategy of mainstream gender equality in public service institutions (Ibid.).

It should be noted that this situation is not unique to Uganda alone, the campaign against child labor in India, shows that law reform and practice is a slow process. It also shows that while a law may be in place, enforcing it is another issue, but this does not mean that the law is not important. Legal frameworks and International conventions though largely un-enforced provide a lever to the work of Non Governmental Organisations (Chapman 1999).

The above arguments call for more activity than just legislation. It is important to map out the different players so as to identify and implement the needed strategies at the different arenas of the campaign. Prevention also becomes critical. Thus the need for a lot of work on the ground and some investment in policy advocacy at national level to compliment the work on the ground.

Reconciling the international commitments to the local realities in Uganda

As earlier noted, Uganda is one of those countries where there are negative cultural practices and traditions against women. Usually some of these are defended in the name of traditions and customs, more often than not, cherished and perpetuated by women

through the socialisation process. On the other hand Uganda is a signatory to CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action as already presented in the introduction. Uganda has also made a constitution that declares unlawful practices and beliefs that impinge on the rights of women. The milestone is translating this into practice. Efforts as already discussed have been initiated in translating these commitments from the 'top' to the 'grassroots'. The challenge however is that the commitments are far removed from the realities of the women and men in the villages due to the conflicts in the understanding of the rights of women at these different levels. An example to illustrate this is given by Mbire-Barungi who says that while a city woman may see nothing wrong in demanding a divorce, the women who uphold the traditional culture find it unthinkable for a woman to want to end her marriage however bad it is. On the other hand, the judge will grant a divorce to a woman only if in addition to adultery, she has another ground as proof against her husband. This example provides a very complicated situation in which the international provisions, the constitutional provisions, the unreformed laws and the customary practices and beliefs all meet to make it difficult to empower women. The example also presents the complexity of working on gender issues. Wallace argues that gender relations are complex and embedded within cultures, that change is often imperceptible and may take years to come about (Wallace 1999). Indeed, gender focused NGOs find themselves in a situation with several odds in their campaign against discriminatory practices and the challenge is reconciling the different levels so as to achieve the desired goal - that is the empowerment of women.

The above problems are worsened by lack of progressive monitoring mechanisms on the progress so as to make strategic changes in the approaches.

The above is not only common to gender focussed NGO advocacy. It is clear that emphasis is usually put on changing text in an international instruments than to mobilise people in order to let them speak on their issues. This Not to value these instruments any less, but there seems to be a lopsided interest in them, and very little or almost no effort made to really empower or mobilise people towards applying these policy instruments. The argument does not mean that Legal frameworks and international conventions are less important. Though they are usually un-enforced, they are very important in giving NGOs a leverage to get the concerned parties involved and legitimize the needed actions

(Chapman 1999)

Linkages with grassroots women

Gender focused NGOs at national level have mainly focused on highly visible top down activities such as having gender sensitive laws in place, rather than on the slower and more invisible processes of transforming societal culture and practice at all levels. Law reform in itself is very critical and important if women empowerment is to be achieved but it is possible to have laws that are not practiced and understood by the various social groups. It is easy for them to remain on paper. "*The fact remains that legislative and policy changes in women status are often several stages removed from the often harsh lived realities of women in Africa. In politically authoritarian contexts, the gap between policy and practice is most marked: high profile initiatives on behalf of women often bear little or no relation to the harsh realities of women and do little to change them*"(**Mama, A., 2001**)

The ActionAid Uganda gender study states that though the issues being advocated for are mainly of national concern, they often lack grassroots experience and data or researched information (ActionAid Uganda 1999). The links between rural CBOs and women groups and Kampala based women activities are still weak. Though some National Women NGOs have undertaken projects in rural areas and in some cases these are participatory, more often the problem, methodology and anticipated outputs are still defined by those from the centre. A respondent from the NAWOU Mbale district office said that nothing is done with them when it comes to identification of their needs. She further said that since the last two years, the NAWOU secretariat has not met with them. She remarked, " in case of Tororo they only came to launch 'their' project." She was talking of a nutrition project that NAWOU is implementing on behalf of government. All the staff including the driver came from Kampala and NAWOU district members were not even given an opportunity to compete for the jobs. Local councils are being used to identify the beneficiaries though the Chairperson was taken to Kampala for training and had expected that their Tororo executive will be in charge of the project but that was not the case. She also said that another women organisation by the names of ACFODE has conducted workshops in the district but that it has never invited them to attend. According to her, they have not received any financial support from the centre instead they (NAWOU

secretariat) got subscription fees from them claiming that they will train them and also connect them with other NGOs besides giving them loans to start projects. The fact that the rural women feel that the national organisations are only using them and not taking them as serious partners makes it difficult to have a level ground for the two to work together. *"Genuine empowerment also requires women to have a voice over which decisions are made"(Cornwall, A., 2001).*

The same author says

"Empowerment is essentially a bottom up process rather than a top-down strategy. Recent experience suggests that gender planners working towards empowerment must develop ways of enabling women themselves to decide what their gender interests are and how to bring about change. Promoting empowerment requires that organisations review their structures and procedures, to increase accountability and responsiveness to women whose empowerment they aim to support"(ibid.)

Doing the above is one of the biggest challenges. A review of the Domestic Relations campaign that has been on going for the last four years found that only 20% of people living in the rural areas have knowledge of the bill, compared to 90% of those in Women NGOs in Kampala. The same review says that the time that is used to discuss the domestic relations bill on radios and televisions is unfavorable to women, because they are then busy with household chores. Secondly, newspapers and English have been used as a major means of communication for the campaign. Many women cannot buy newspapers and cannot read English (UWONET, 2001).

The campaign process has been top down and has not yet succeeded in mobilizing grassroots women to its cause. The report further says that the bill has been seen as a middle age women issue and not all embracing for the other age groups. This is because the women who have spearheaded this campaign are in this age group and have not been able to attract the other age groups to the issues in the bill (Ibid.).

"Activism in the women's movement has not been limited to the elite but in many African countries, the elite are most visible. Many see their role as advocacy (erroneously) interpreted to mean speaking on behalf of the masses. The political strength of the women's movement and legitimacy of the demands is closely related to

the extent to which the majority of women are seen to identify with and participate in the demands of the movement. The challenge is to develop workable strategies to transform into a popular movement" (Butengwa 1997).

However it is still difficult for the women in decision-making positions to be able to mobilise the grassroots women. Due to the educational requirements, the affirmative action policy has only benefited the elite. Tamale says that one of the weaknesses of affirmative action to fully benefit women is the fact that it was a top-down policy by the state whose recipients were not involved in devising the procedures and rules of participation. Thus more often than not, the beneficiaries have felt an allegiance to government for having given them this opportunity and have fallen into traps of complacency and self-satisfaction rather than advancing the concerns of women (Tamale 2001).

Experiences from the approaches on empowerment show that the different aspects of empowerment are linked and that progress in one area cannot be sustained without attention to others (Oxaal Z, 2001). However, this has not necessarily been the case in Uganda. Other than the problem of the capacity of women in decision-making positions, there has been limited linkage between the daily survival needs of women and their strategic interests. While most of the grassroots women are struggling with their basic daily survival, most of the policy debates have been presented in a manner that does not relate to these needs. Thus the grassroots women have seen them as issues relating to a certain class of women and not them. More often the issues presented by the gender focused NGOs have been labeled elitist and those against their campaigns have utilised this language to de-campaign these issues and advised the rural women not to join in their 'wagons'. Butengwa says that this kind of scenario is common in low-income countries manifesting itself at different levels from the grassroots women to women NGOs where some will focus exclusively on immediate needs and regard the work of others as largely irrelevant. Donors also have a tendency of insisting on immediate and visible impacts on projects they support. Models that can ensure working with immediate as well as strategic interests is yet to be fully taken advantage of by the different players involved in women empowerment (Butegwa 1997).

However, Tripp warns of the danger of dichotomizing the strategic and practical gender interests. She says that this is elitist in out look assuming that women cannot transform every day struggles for the betterment of their communities into struggles that challenge sexual subordination. She argues that struggles over strategic interests can be inherently struggles against subordination of women. She further gives an example from Uganda where women from a village called Wakitaka in Jinja not only fought to obtain but to lead the health unit. She says that struggling to access basic services can it self be transformative. The mobilisation around day-to-day interests builds a consciousness that evolves. Tripp views this consciousness as the capacity of women to critically analyse the forms of discrimination they confront and to find ways to creatively change these relations (Tripp).

Thus the critical need to influence policy changes in ways that the persons to be affected by the policy identify with. This may involve negotiation of priorities with them, defining the struggle with them and fitting it within their context. However this is still a challenge, that is reconciling the bottom-up, empowerment strategies with the top-down efforts that are currently going on. The reconciliation calls for an understanding of linking the daily survival needs which are more often the immediate demands of the grassroots women and the structural changes in policy reform. It is important to note that policy influencing at times cannot wait for slower paced grassroots education and participation efforts (Covey 1994). Though this may be the case, if NGOs act as intermediaries of grassroots women who are merely clients, policy work can lead to the evolution of civil society with strong professional gender focused advocacy NGOs; and a weak and disorganised grassroots base. This may do nothing to reduce the power of those being lobbied (Chapman and Wabeyo 2001).

" Most writing on policy processes and campaigns focuses on the work of policy elite at the national and international level. The vital contribution of people at the grassroots as *campaigners,* not suppliers of information or receivers of messages is often overlooked." (Chapman and Fischer 2001).
The findings of this study are in line with this assertion. Responses from most of the

NGOs interviewed indicated that by and large, the campaigns have not enrolled the grassroots women to become active campaigners other than providers or receivers of information from the top. Limited resources have been invested in building the capacity at the grassroots level to empower women to take control of their change process.

Some efforts are being undertaken by institutions such as Uganda Media Women Network to reach women through the media whose shortcomings are already discussed. ActionAid has of recent adopted the Music Dance and Drama strategy to bring campaigns closer to the people and to enable grassroots women participate in national initiatives such as education and women rights campaigns. It is too early to evaluate the effects of this strategy. However, it would be good to have a follow up on its progress.
The major advocacy network for women, Uganda Women's Network respondent said that they have no links with grassroots women. They involve them in the campaigns through research. The advocacy strategies of the network include meetings and talk shows on radio and TV, newspaper pullouts, information sharing, awareness raising and lobbying which are mainly done at the national level. The major assumption that Uganda Women's Network holds is that its members will include the advocacy agenda into their organisational mandates to ensure that it reaches the grassroots women. However as already discussed, this has not been the case. This thus creates a major gap between the two levels.

Limited efforts have been taken to build the capacity of the grassroots women to fully take control of their destiny. Those that have been made have either done so through legal literacy, leadership, and income generation and have not provided programmes that can result into total empowerment of the woman. Secondly as already discussed most have been initiated from the centre or donor demands and not by women themselves which has continued to disempower them.

Though this is the case, Uganda presents a suitable environment in which the CEDAW convention and other International Instruments can be implemented. As already noted there are over 1000 community based organisations that are registered with the National

Association of Women organisations in Uganda and 77 Non governmental organisations. The Gender Focused NGOs in spite of the factors that affect their effectiveness are a force to reckon with. Uganda has an academic arm of the women's movement that is the department of gender and women studies, Makerere University. There is a donor committee on gender and a number of issue specific coalitions and networks on gender. Government has put in place structures ranging from parliamentary representation, to decentralization and women councils together with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. The challenge is how to ensure that the community-based organisations closely work with the different players who are working towards the advancement of women. Chapman points out that it is a challenge to move beyond informing the grassroots of what is good for them towards ensuring real change as well as engagement and empowerment at the grassroots, which will develop civil society with potential influence on many other things. Other than building civil society's potential to influence, it is critical for them to be part of the advocacy process because they do not have a sense of ownership in the solutions posed, they are less likely to cooperate leave alone the fact that the factors that are likely to influence change in behavior are more at the grassroots level (Chapman 1999).

An example is given by Fisher and Chapman in Ghana in which grassroots women are mobilised to support an International Campaign on Breast-feeding through their groups. The campaign was started in GHNA with significant inputs from northern NGOs campaigning against large national corporations to control marketing of breast milk substitutes from these corporations. Through this they were able to play a key role in a high profile international campaign. The success of this campaign relies on volunteers, home visits and counselors. It entails dedication of time "Without them real change at the grassroots would be harder if not impossible, to achieve" (Fisher and Chapman 2001). Uganda also presents another example of the campaign against HIV/AIDS whose success has been acclaimed internationally. The political will of government coupled with strategies that aimed that ensuring that the various stakeholders have greatly contributed to the success of the campaign. The campaign has also gone on at all levels; while policy provisions have been made at national level, work has been going on at the grassroots

level. The success of the campaign against AIDS/HIV has also been based on the mobilisation of the men, women, boys and girls to take part in the campaign. It is also based on the translation of the campaign materials so that the local people are able to understand and identify with them. Today the spread of HIV/AIDS has drastically dropped in the country.

The issues raised in this subsection can be summarised by the assertions of Chapmam who says that a lot can be achieved in policy change and awareness raising without grassroots involvement but that such involvement is essential to ensure any change. She further argues on the links between policy -to- practice and practice-to- policy using her experience in policy advocacy. She claims that International campaigns first took up advocacy work that drew up their practical experiences on the ground that she calls practice -to-policy. This witnessed the trend of moving resources from development projects into advocacy work. She further says that there is a close link between projects and advocacy work and the need for long term work at the grassroots even after policy changes have been achieved which she terms policy -to- practice (Chapman 1999). This in essence is the major argument of this study that the two should be linked. The ultimate goal of policy advocacy should be to ensure a change in lives of the people whose lives policy advocacy is intended to improve.

5.0 Conclusions

The study indicates that while there seems to be a relatively progressive policy, environment, policy advocacy work is still vital if women empowerment is to be achieved. Progressive policies have been put in place by government. These include, the 1995 constitution, the national gender policy, the national action plan on the advancement of women, the affirmative action provisions in the local government act, the universal primary education policy and the Makerere University 1.5 points provision to female education among others. Secondly several institutions geared towards supporting the advancement of women have strengthened or developed in the country over the last eighteen year that include the women NGO, the women community based organisations, the donor committee on gender, and the Ministry of gender, labour and social

development. In spite of this, unfair laws, and negative customary practices and beliefs that impinge on the rights of women are still dominant. These coupled with the level of poverty in the country make women and girls to lag behind men in all the social, political and economic aspects of life.

It is clear that the policy advocacy work that has been done has not engaged with the key government processes such as PEAP, sector wide planning such as the PMA. Due to this, there has been a tendency for it to be marginalised and not to receive the attention it deserves. This has been worsened by lack of political will from the national machinery and the NGOs themselves. This is exemplified by lack of a unified and coordinated voice on gender issues by government in collaboration with the civil society. Secondly the unity among NGOs is often short lived. It is high during peak times of the advocacy campaigns and weakens if the advocacy aims are not achieved within a short time. This affects the availability of a consented and collective influence on government and donor policies.

The programmes geared towards achieving government commitments to women empowerment are not systematic and lack benchmarks. This makes holding government accountable to its commitment to women empowerment difficult. This situation is worsened by the fact that most of the gender focused NGOs pressure to government to meet its commitments has had limited participation of the grassroots women and men mainly because of the ineffective strategies.

Decentralisation provides an opportunity to improve on policy advocacy work by bringing it closer to the grassroots. On the other hand, it posses the challenge of spreading thinly, increased overhead costs and the need for more technical power to do the work in ways that are friendly to the grassroots women and men. Unfortunately, as the study has shown, the lead agencies in policy advocacy are Kampala based National NGOs with limited resources from donors with terms that these organisations are yet to change in their favor. Secondly the institutions have limited skills in gender and policy advocacy, which impinge negatively on their work.

The study further suggests that there is limited negotiation of interests among the various actors, that is the donors, government, NGOs and the local women and men at the grassroots. This has resulted into lack of space particularly to the grassroots women to express what changes they would like to see in their lives and what actually empowerment means to them.

With lack of this 'space' for the different actors to work together, it means that achieving women empowerment is far from over. This is because gender inequalities are so deeply rooted in the communities and cultures. As Rowlands points out, the empowerment process is not necessarily linear, but more like a loop or a spiral and there are different areas of life in which a woman can be empowered, the political, the economic, health, education and the home. This makes the whole process of women empowerment quite complex. Thus while commitments can be made at international and national level, it is important to take into account those who will be affected by these commitments. It is also important to understand their priorities, analyse how long it will take, how thorough the change is going to have to be, and an estimate of this against the available resources and strength to reach the goals (Rowlands, J., 1995). This can only be possible through co-operation, negotiation and supporting each other as actors on the same issue.

Other than the need to work together as actors on the same issue, the study suggests that it is important to understand where power lies in the process of gender advocacy. According to the study, power lies in customary laws and practices which govern the community, the men to whom customs have accorded more power, the government which makes the polices and the donors who provide the resources and the women and men at the grassroots who are victims but also agents of change though the socialisation process.

While the study suggests that involving grassroots women and men in policy advocacy is critical particularly if the changes are to be achieved, it also posses a number of challenges. There is limited understanding, and appreciation of the lived experiences,

resources, and limitations of poor women. This limited understanding affects the ability to find viable solutions to their problems. Secondly involving them in policy advocacy means taking up their valuable time that would otherwise be spent earning income, digging or looking after their children that will increase their burden of work.

Civil society engagement with government to make it accountable has not been rooted within the realities of the grassroots that has affected the achievement of the advocacy aims and sustainability of the advocacy work. This emanates from the apparent division that is drawn between daily survival needs and the need for women to overcome their subordinate status and take control of their destiny. It is also due to the changing women movement and political situation in the country as discussed in the paper. This thus calls for the need to re-route policy advocacy into issues and ways that the grassroots women and men identify with. It also calls for more work at the grassroots, increased top-level government commitment and strategic plans with clear benchmarks and substantial financial support.

The above analysis implies that Policy advocacy cannot be an end in itself. It is a means to an end and hence the call for integrated programmes where policy advocacy is one of the strategies used to change the quality of lives of poor women. I t also means that for policy advocacy to succeed, direct investment needs to be made in programmes aimed at poverty alleviation. It means ways need to be explored to reduce the woman's work load so as to flee her time to engage in initiatives aimed at enhancing her social status beyond the household.

Recommendations

After sharing this paper with some members of gender focussed NGOs, the following were made by the participants requesting ActionAid to assist in realizing them.

❖ To carry out a more comprehensive in depth study. Which focuses on the grassroots women and men's experiences with policy advocacy on gender issues.
❖ To build the capacity of civil society organisations in advocacy

Further questions

This study has raised a number of challenging questions to which the researcher feels there are no immediate blue print answers.

1. How do you break through patriarchy?

a)   Male dominated structures

b)   Men supporting the concerns of women as their concerns too?

2 How do we move issues concerning women to go beyond women issues?

3. How do we ensure policy advocacy empowers grassroots women? What can be done to build the capacity of women at local level-what can women organisations, donors and women themselves and government do? Whose capacity are we building?

4. What does the campaign to achieve government commitments mean in terms of advocacy strategies.

5. Realistically how strong are those involved in gender advocacy to achieve their goals?

6. What does it mean in terms of speaking to donors with one voice?

Definition of key concepts

Understanding of empowerment

Empowerment is the ability for a person female or male to interpret her or his situation and make informed choices and decisions affecting one self, family and community. According to this paper, women empowerment refers to the process where women are facilitated so that they are able to interpret their own situation (social, economic and political), identify the desired changes that they would like to make and go ahead and make those changes in their lives, family and community and positively benefit from those changes. That is being able to take control of their social, economic and political destiny.

Policy: A framework, set of principles that provide guidance in making certain decisions.
Policy Advocacy: This is the process of using the available strategies, which may include formation of coalitions to influence or lobby government or any of those who hold power to make decisions that meet the set demands.

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