



ANC TODAY

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WOMEN EMPOWERMENT | BY JESSIE DUARTE

Gender machinery, gender protocols and women's reality



In November 2005 the African Union's Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa came into force. Not only does the declaration support the spirit and letter of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), it endorses the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women. The AU has undertaken to work towards parity between men and women in the socio political and economic reality of each country.

In June each year Heads of State of the member states of the AU are required to report on progress made in terms of the solemn declaration, CEDAW and the protocol. Each year the AU commissioner for social affairs reports progress made in which the collective efforts of the continent are noted with dignity and

solemn respect.

Underneath the protocols, conventions and resolutions the reality for women in many countries on our continent has not seen great progress. There is a written commitment but we have yet to see real concrete action.

South Africa stands out as a country with a very progressive stance on the representation of women in decision-making structures. The ANC has taken decisions to have parity between men and women in structures where the ANC is represented. At its Durban conference in 1990 when the topic of a quota of at least 30% representation by women in the structures of the ANC was introduced, the debate did not find itself without robust opposition. The notion that arguing and debating the rights of women is a Western feminist idea that had no place in African social and political life was very much at the core of those who did not agree.

Thankfully, the tradition of the ANC is that once a decision is reached through debate and consensus disciplined cadres will implement it. We still face the daunting prospect of managing the reality that the emancipation of women goes beyond a right to vote in an election. The emancipation of women is the continuation of a struggle to have the rights of women actively recognised as human rights.

Our country has achieved a great deal in terms of representation in government, and the ANC led government did better than the original 30% quota with the average representation in Parliament being 32.7%, women in cabinet representing 42.8% of the ministers and 47.6% women who are deputy ministers. At local government level the ANC, while having more women than any other political party, reached an average of 23% women. It is at this level that women find it difficult to break the glass ceiling and yet it is at this level that the service delivery is the most critical.

At its Polokwane Conference the ANC adopted a policy of 50% parity in all ANC structures and where the ANC is represented. This will change the demography of all spheres of government. For some in our society this is seen as a battle for women to take "control" of decision-making structures. Human rights and the equality clause in our constitution fall away when the places of power have to be shared and the historical role that a patriarchal society has designated to men is threatened.

WEEK IN REVIEW

New cabinet meets | President Jacob Zuma's cabinet meets for the first time, pledging to focus on effective and efficient delivery. Ministers and deputy ministers emphasise transparency and accountability.

Opposition to Vodacom public listing | The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and Icasa, the communications regulator, lose a court bid to stop cellphone company Vodacom's listing on the Johannesburg Securities Exchange (JSE) and the sale of Telkom's 15% stake in Vodacom to the UK's Vodafone. COSATU is considering a nationwide boycott of Vodacom.

Minister returns car | Transport Minister Sbu Ndebele returns a car and cattle received as gifts from contractors participating in the Vukuzakhe programme. While government rules entitle him to keep the gifts, Ndebele decides to return them.

Eskom requests tariff hike | Eskom announces it has applied to NERSA, the national energy regulator, to increase tariff prices by 34%, saying the 'economic climate has worsened'

We have a constitution that entrenches equality, and yet we still have attitudes, beliefs, myths and traditional practices that inhibit the freedom of women. The AU and SADC have adopted declarations and protocols that "works toward parity of women with men in all member states". The SADC Declaration on Gender and Development adopted in 1997 calls for 30% of women in political and decision-making in the region structures by 2005. South Africa, Botswana and Namibia have to a large degree surpassed the SADC target. However the promotion of women's full access to and control over productive resources to reduce poverty among women is still elusive.

The reason for this is the lingering patriarchal structure and nature of our economies. The need to procure loans leaves women without property to offer as guarantees. There are no special instruments supported by government to provide loans to women.

Where the future of the continent is discussed, male civil servants are in the majority. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) programmes envisaged by the Heads of State seldom heard the voices of women in their initial development. The voices of women were only truly sought when the African peer review process was conducted to test the efficiency of the continent's commitment to development. Women understand the problems, but are seldom in the position to change and redirect resources towards solving the problem. When it comes to how services are delivered our voices are sought, but seldom on how to deliver services. This shows a patriarchal mindset that needs to be challenged.

When the atrocities of war are discussed, be it in the UN or at the AU, the voices of women are barely audible. Rape in conflict situations has become a part of the armoury. Africa is not alone in this. Bosnian and Croatian women suffered similar violent crimes, as did women in Darfur, Rwanda, Congo and Zimbabwe. Rape has yet to be declared a crime against humanity and it is the one violent crime that is not fully recognised as a war crime.

Where the right to equal pay for equal work is discussed in the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the voices of women are again less than audible. Protocols do not change attitudes. Mobilisation of people in favour of recognition of the rights of women do make a difference.

The South African Gender Commission has the best chance of success that it has had in the two decades of its existence to bring the issues that impact on the lives of women into the day light with constructive criticism which examines the structures of government and goes beyond the technical examination of compliance with the Equity Act.

Relying on patronage and the goodwill of the male dominated financial establishments needs to be challenged. Micro lenders brag that women are the best payers, but micro lenders are the best exploiters in terms of interest rates. So to give effect to meaningful participation of women in the economy we need one courageous formal bank to have one courageous loan product for women entrepreneurs.

Going beyond the right to vote and going beyond the ANC decision to have 50% parity in ANC representation in government structures is the next struggle to be fought.

We applaud the ANC's decision to give effect to the equality clause in our constitution and to recognise the energy that women bring to development. We also have to ensure that women who take on decision-making positions do not close the door behind themselves, and instead create an atmosphere that develops women who may wish to follow in their footsteps. While taking a girl child to work once a year is a good symbolic action, women policy makers must be women activists who go to the communities and encourage younger women to become future leaders.

The protocols, conventions and declarations open space for debate but mobilisation of women on particular issues will make a difference. We need to bring the social needs of women to the table wherever we can. We need to trespass where we are not invited and push the need for substantive change.

We need to get commitments that are timelined and guaranteed in as far as providing financial resources to women's programmes. We need a woman's machinery with the instruments, power and resources to make changes happen faster. The women's movement in our country has to find common cause across ideological lines. Domestic violence, rape, femicide and poverty can become common rallying points.

>> *Jessie Duarte is a member of the ANC National Executive Committee.*

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY

25 May 1963: The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) is established in Addis Ababa, marking the beginning of a quest for the unity of the continent and for the political and economic emancipation of its people. The day is now celebrated as Africa Day.

23 May 1983: ANC targets in Maputo are bombed by the apartheid government in retaliation to a car bombing outside SADF Headquarters. Through this action the regime intensified its destabilisation of neighbouring states.

23 May 1994: South Africa is officially admitted as the 53rd member of the Organisation of African Union (OAU) at a summit in Tunisia. This follows the end of apartheid and the formation of a democratically-elected government.

ETHICS AND PUBLIC SERVICE

An approach to defining the ethics of our movement

Last weekend, Transport Minister Sbu Ndebele was presented with a car and cattle by contractors participating in the Vukuzakhe programme. This was in appreciation of his work in creating opportunities for small contractors to be involved in road construction projects in KwaZulu Natal. This prompted a heated debate on whether he should accept the gifts.

The ANC noted that there were specific rules in government guiding the receipt of gifts by members of the executive. These rules are intended to ensure transparency and guard against abuse of office. It advised Ndebele to follow these rules, and to exercise his personal judgment on whether to keep the car and cattle.

Ndebele decided to return the gifts. This provided a lead to other public representatives who may find themselves in a similar situation. It has also helped to stimulate debate in society about ethics and public service.

The topic of ethics in politics is one that has occupied philosophers for thousands of years. Some of the most famous writings of Plato and Aristotle deal with ethics and politics. Plato argued that ethics is advanced by knowledge. He wrote, "all men seek good but go wrong through ignorance, not through evil will".

He interpreted knowledge as much more than education. Knowledge is a key tool for making objective, rational decisions. He dealt with information and transparency, as key tools in defining ethics in politics. Aristotle adopts a slightly different perspective:

"The end of all action, individual or collective, is the greatest happiness of the greatest number. There is no difference of kind between the good of one and the good of many or all. It is natural to regard the state as a community that exists for the sake of a good life for all. It is in the state that that common seeking after the good, which is the profoundest truth about men and nature, becomes explicit and knows itself."

Aristotle's perspective should sound familiar to most ANC Cadres and leaders. Max Weber, the eminent German sociologist and political economist, in a lecture delivered in 1918 entitled 'Politics as a Vocation', wrote extensively on the issue of clarity or objectivity as an antidote to conflicts of interests in politics.

He argued that: "Part of being able to see clearly is avoiding being caught by distractions, desires, emotions and ambitions. It is learning to find the stillness in the midst of the noise and activity all around us, and in that stillness, listening to our own intuition, our own cultivated judgment, our own inner ethical sense. It also requires sufficient independence and integrity to avoid being overly beholden to supporters and patrons."

Weber's second issue is the lack of responsibility. As noted at the ANC's Mafikeng Conference, the 1994 elections place a renewed responsibility on the shoulders of the ANC. A system of ethics must, at its core, be based on the need for politicians to take responsibility for their actions and events both individually and collectively.

Without responsibility, there can be no accountability. The system of accountability that the ANC has put in place, both in statute and in practice, is based on the need for those in power to take responsibility.

The ANC has done more than most political parties when it comes to combating unethical behaviour through ideological debates and direction, regulations, legislation and public watchdog bodies. The framework we have created should continue to be the bedrock of ANC policy and regulations on this matter.

The real question is what sanctions we could impose as a movement if regulations or even guidelines that we bring into effect are violated by our members. Such sanctions will need to be punitive, be applied timeously and firmly, and thus become a deterrent to deviant behaviour.

Codes, sanctions, disciplinary action and other measures deal with individuals or groups in a reactive manner. The challenge is how to instil the values of the ANC in our cadres such that they become a way of life in the way that the 2000 ANC National General Council (NGC) intended.

LATEST STATEMENTS

ANC welcomes decision by Minister Ndebele, 19 May 2009
<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?docs/pr/2009/pr0519.html>



UPCOMING EVENTS

ANC President visits Johannesburg to thank voters
Sunday 24 May 2009
10h00: Maponya Mall, Soweto
12h30: Hector Peterson Memorial, Orlando West
13h30: Pan Africa Mall, Alexandra

There is only one way. Continuous political education underlined by clear guidelines and effective potential sanctions. The guidelines for ethical behaviour must not seek to criminalise cadres. Instead we must seek to embed these guidelines in our political culture so that they become second nature. The trouble with political culture is that it takes a long time to develop and requires great leadership to popularise.

The challenge has been enforcement. We have relied on various mechanisms for enforcing our ethical rules. For instance, the executive has got its own methods and sanctions that are located in Cabinet and the public service. Parliament has its own processes. All these enforcement instruments are not in the hands of the ANC, even though the movement may have significant influence in them.

That means that there is no ANC mechanism for dealing with breaches. Often the ANC becomes a spectator in processes that involve its members and is unable to act timeously and in a manner that reflects its own political morality.

Things drift, problems are exacerbated rather than contained. The name of the organisation is dragged through the mud. Cadres learn ways of dragging issues and make use of the country's legal processes to delay, if not frustrate, the movement's own processes.

We rely exclusively on the disciplinary committee of the movement. The committee is not able to be proactive, timeous and decisive. The consequence is that whatever codes we develop will not make a difference if we do not create a new and effective way to enforce them timeously and decisively. It is important to cultivate an environment in which public representatives do not expect any special treatment for work well done.