Feminism, Culture and Development in Africa

By Ciarunji Chesaina

1.0 Introduction

African women continue to scramble for leftovers and crumbs as far as participation in the development of Africa is concerned. They are still victims of tokenism that is used to exonerate African societies of discrimination against and injustice towards women. In essence, African women are still victims of gender inequality. However, in the second decade of the 21st century they have gone a step further in their search and indeed struggle for justice. Rather than sit back or stand aloof and mourn about their plight, they are holding each other's hand and from this strong vantage point, they are better able to interrogate the social elements that militate against their participation in the development of the African continent.

The purpose of this paper is to interrogate culture as one of the elements or backbones in our social fabric that are used to create obstacles against women's participation in the development of our continent. It is important to emphasize from the onset that culture *per se* is not the culprit here; culture and the aspects that go with it are misused to discriminate against women and to institute other forms of oppression on women. For instance, in many African societies women are culturally assumed to be companions for men, who always have to take the second position. As they proverb goes, "the man is the head, the woman is the neck".

2.0 Culture and Institutionalization of Negative Cultural Elements and Attitudes towards African Women

Culture has been defined as the traditions, customs, attitudes and behaviour of a particular people or society. This includes the systems of government, the judicial system, the values, the norms, the ethics, the practices and all the accepted ways of doing things within the society's mandate or framework. Attitude, on the other hand, is a settled way of thinking or feeling about something. It includes orientation or stance towards something or vantage point from which one approaches issues or things. Hence stereotypes reflect cultural attitudes.

Culture is the mother of attitudes and stereotyping. Cultural attitudes and stereotypes are enshrined in the language, the arts and the literature of a society.

With regard to the status, images and attitudes to African women, African oral literature is an important carrier. This is because literature is persuasive and conveys the values of society in a persuasive and, sometimes graphic manner. Language, on the other hand, is the carrier of negative labels that are used to put women down.

Myths and myth making are given special attention here owing to the fact that they have been used for generations in Africa to thwart women's aspirations and potential. In Kenya, there are some myths which cut across different ethnic groups and have been used to justify the disadvantaged status quo for women.

Myths have been used to institutionalize the discrimination against women with regard to owning property. The Maasai myth entitled, 'The Women's Cattle' is a clear illustration (Kipury 1983:32). Right from the beginning, the narrator states that women's cattle were wild animals. This obviously is to make absolutely clear that women have no right to lay claims on real cattle. We are told that even these wild cattle, sheep and goats had to be taken away from women because of their callousness and carelessness. The myth concludes:

> And so that is how it came about that, women lost their cattle. They then went and lived with the men who had all along taken good care of their cattle. This is why up to this very day all the cattle belong to the men and women simply wait for the men to provide for them. (Kipury 1983:32)

This myth is not peculiar to the Maasai. The Embu the Kamba & the Gikuyu have similar myths which justify discrimination against women owning property. These myths claim that it is women's fault that they do not own property. They also place the man above the woman, in terms of responsibility and dependability.

Myths have also been used to justify and foreground negative attitudes towards women. The Maasai myth that narrates about the origin of marriage portrays women as schemers, murderers and selfish creatures ready to sacrifice their kith and kin for their own personal survival. They cannot be depended upon to work and live for the good of the community. The girl in the story schemes with enemy warriors to kill her brother so that she can elope with them. As usual with myths the story is told so convincingly that when the denouncement is arrived at, the audience cannot but get involved and agree with the verdict. The verdict in this story is stated convincingly thus:

On reaching home, the warrior convened a meeting and related what his sister had done to him. He said, "So, from now on, I beseech you to marry off the girls, never keep them at home because they are your enemies. If they have to choose, they will prefer a lover to a brother." Since that time, the girls have been given out in marriage. (Kipury 1983:36)

The motif of the jealous co-wife and step mother is too common in our oral literature for us to dwell on details of specific narratives. A man marries two wives, they each bear a son or a daughter (but more often a son). A strong bond develops between the two children. The co-wife dies and her child is left under the care of the step mother. The father goes on a journey. The step mother plans to murder the co-wife's child in the most brutal manner, for instance burying him / her alive, or even boiling him/her alive in water. The co-wife's child is either rescued or the jealous step mother's scheme boomerangs on her when she boils her own child alive instead of the co-wife. The father comes back, chases the jealous step mother away and lives happily ever after with his child or children. Here, women are portrayed as murderous schemers and of course as enemies of one another.

Although modern myths tone down the murderous aspects, they nonetheless amplify and try to justify the image of women as schemers and jealous of one another to the extent of wishing each other dead. In contemporary Kenya, we do not have to go very far to find examples of such myths. We have our very own television programme, 'Mother-in-Law' which we applaud so much because it seems so entertaining. But have we ever stopped to ask ourselves whether, as we laugh, we are laughing at the situations on the television or indeed laughing at myths about ourselves? To what extent are programmes like these confirming or brainwashing us about women being enemies of themselves?

The issue of how myths contribute to the cultural oppression of women, we need to look at where the negative attitude of women as creatures of lower nature came from. In many myths of Africa, the man is presented as a superior creature loved by God while the woman is so inferior that God does not even deign to recognize or create her. In fact, the man is created by God while the woman is created by man. The Fang of Gabon have two myths which portray man as a superior being, created by God while the woman is an inferior creature created by man from inferior material. In one, the man creates the woman by carving her from a piece of wood. The other

myth narrates how the man makes the woman from one of his toes. How belittling!

Nearer home, the Saramo of Tanzania has a myth of origin which clearly portrays women as having been created as dirty right from the pre-society epoch. The myth narrates how long ago there were no women. There were only men; two men who were honey gatherers. One day, one of the men climbed a tree to gather honey, leaving the other man sleeping under the tree. The man's axe accidentally dropped and cut the penis of his sleeping companion. On climbing down the man from the tree saw the penis and asked, what that was. The companion replied that the axe had cut it. The narrative concludes thus: "*What was left was a bleeding wound, like women have … Ever since that day women lose blood, just like that first woman*", (Schipper, 1984:24). Here women are portrayed as creatures whose origin is merely accidental. Worse than this, they are portrayed as mutilated men and unclean creatures.

In African oral literature, narratives abound which portray women as stupid while men are intelligent; cowardly while men are courageous, gullible while men are endowed with wisdom and discernment. Ogre myths, for instance are very powerful in underlining these attitudes towards women. Owing to their gullibility, women, for instance follow ogres assuming that they are handsome men. After a period of enslavement by the ogres, these women end up being rescued by some male heroes. The heroes are often younger brothers or these women's sons. Hence these myths underline that adult women's level of intelligence and discernment is even lower than that of male children.

Coupled with myths are proverbs which also institutionalize negative cultural attitudes towards women. Proverbs have been defined as the nut shell or kernel of a society's wisdom, culture, values, philosophy and worldview. Although in the contemporary world proverbs may not be an everyday occurrence in certain social *milieu*, the attitudes these proverbs ingrain are nonetheless projected. In Africa we have proverbs that convey very negative attitudes towards women. Women are projected as unintelligent, undependable, dishonest, callous, careless, cowardly, weak, and bad tempered emotional and so on.

It is true that there are proverbs that convey positive qualities of women, but these are qualities that are exploited by society. The West African proverb "mother is gold" is a good example. This proverb underlines African women's endowment with

excellent nurturing qualities as mothers. However, as Buchi Emecheta creatively documents in her novel *Joys of Motherhood,* society takes advantage of these qualities and exploits a mother dry of her human self, ignoring that she is a woman with human feelings. Proverbs which portray women negatively are prevalent and are given heavier weight in African societies.

One Gikuyu proverb states that: *"Whoever steals with a boy is happy when he is circumcised. However, whoever steals with a woman is only happy when she dies."* This implies that women are not dependable and women cannot keep secrets. We might mention here that attitudes ingrained in such a proverb have been used to discriminate against women attaining jobs in sensitive governmental and non-governmental organizations. Yet, the women who might be barred from given jobs have the necessary qualifications, sometimes even higher qualifications than their male contestants for the job. Women are portrayed as having loose tongues in the Moroccan proverb, "*Tie up a woman's tongue and a Mule's legs*". The comparison to mules implies that women are stubborn and need to be subdued just as a mule needs to be beaten to submit to its owner. It is obvious that comparison to an animal brings in the dehumanization that is the plight of African women.

This dehumanization of women is echoed by the Senegalese (Fulani) proverb, "*woman is like a winnowing basket; whenever it goes it winnows.*" The proverb has deep implications about the worthlessness that is associated with women. It means that whatever the circumstances or whatever the situation a woman is exposed, to she will still maintain the inferior position the society accords her. Even if she gets highly educated, she remains that inferior creature in the eyes of the society. In Zaire she is compared to the ground or a seat which does not choose who sits on it. One Lingala proverb states that: "*Woman is like the earth, everyone sits down on he*r" while a Lulua proverb claims that *Woman is like the earth: even a fool sits on her*". The Shona of Zimbabwe compares this worthlessness of a woman to the bark of a tree: "*A woman is like the unpeeled bark of a tree: whoever draws near may peel it off.*" There is the implication of women being ephemeral here and common property. In the same token the Umbubu of Angola compare a woman with flour saying, "*A woman is a basket of flour, the hungry come of their own accord.*"

Nearer home, the Gikuyu compare women with gourds saying, "*Women are like gourds: they cannot balance.*" The implication here is that women are unstable. This proverb echoes the theme of irresponsibility and undependable nature of women.

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They are irresponsible and undependable in society and they bring nothing but trouble. And they cannot change. As the Somali of Somalia say, "*There is some remedy for a fool who will change, but there is no medicine for a wife who will not take good counsel*".

The question that comes to mind is why then men live with women if they are that bad. Why then are women accepted in society? The answer is in the proverb from the Ashanti of Ghana: "*A wife is like a blanket: cover yourself, it irritates you; cast it aside, you feel the cold.*" Women are only tolerated in African societies because they are a "necessary evil".

3.0 Culture Based Barriers to Women's Participation in Development

Development has been defined as the process of growth or advancement into a higher or more purposeful state. In contemporary era, there has been a tendency to emphasize on economic and technological advancement at the expense of the political and socio-cultural. All these facets go together. For instance, political stability is an ideal base for economic development and even for socio-cultural development.

African women find themselves at the crossroads with regard to the development of the continent. Whereas African women are the backbone of the work needed in important areas such as agriculture and marketing of produce, their gender subordination greatly curtails their own advancement as well as their meaningful participation in the development of their continent. Women end up as beasts of burden rather than decision and policy makers, determining the direction of their destinies or the destiny of the continent. It is ironical that, although women are the major work force in food production for instance, they suffer the doldrums of poverty in Africa and they are the ones who bear the brunt of food insecurity in the continent for the simple reason that the families look up to them to feed them.

We acknowledge that culture is not static and it progresses and changes due to changing historical circumstances. However, as intimated above, cultural attitudes die hard and in the case of Africa, they have infiltrated into the contemporary world. In the next section, we identify some of the culture-based barriers to women's participation in development. These are mere illustrations which are coupled with others not mentioned in this paper.

3.1 Access to High Positions of Policy and Decision Making

Although there are some matriarchal societies in Africa, the patriarchal predominate. The patriarchal strategies of leadership greatly hinder women's access to high position of policy and decision making. It is often assumed that the male is the ideal leader, particularly in government departments. This scenario leads to a vicious circle; the fewer the women in high decision-making positions, the less attention is given to women's issues.

3.2 Information on Women's Rights

In Africa, illiteracy is highest among the female population. Culturally, it has been presumed that when resources are scarce (and Africa does suffer scarcity of resources) it is better to educate boys than girls because girls will marry and leave home, while boys will remain and look after their aged parents. This is in spite of cases which have proved that women are more responsible and dependable in ploughing their potential back into the family.

Illiteracy means that women are kept ignorant about their rights and unscrupulous individuals and institutions take advantage of that. There have been only a few cases of women challenging gender discrimination in recruitment for male-dominated professions (such as the armed forces). Many other cases go unreported largely because many women are not aware of their rights. Not many women come forward to challenge discrimination. After all, the institutions which would be approached for redress are also male-dominated and therefore likely to dismiss women's claims.

3.3 Access to Credit

Culturally, the men are the owners of property (including the women, since women are considered part of men's property). Even in the contemporary times, the title deed of land is in the name of the man, the car's log book is in the name of the man, the house title is in the name of the man and not the women. There are cases of joint ownership but these are negligible. This state of affairs creates a vicious circle for woman. Lack of property means lack of collateral for credit. And lack of loans and credit means difficulty in raising capital for business.

3.4 Exploitation of Women's Labour

An issue related to the above is exploitation of women's labour. Women often work on land that they do not own. Women work in businesses that they do not own. This is owing to the factor mentioned above that culturally the man is the owner of property. Hence they do not have right the profits reaped. Working for zero or little benefit lowers not only women's morale, but also bars them from making decisions of developmental nature. Since the women are the ones who deal with the crops or the merchandise, their participation in decision making would be more beneficial than that of the men as they are more aware of the behaviour of, for instance the seasons in the case of farming. In the case of business, women who do the actual buying and selling would be more knowledgeable about the behaviour of fluctuating market forces.

3.5 Women's Reproductive Roles

Women's reproductive role has been from time immemorial taken for granted. Many African men questioning why women need maternity leave while their mothers would work in the farm to the last minute and bring a baby home as they left the *shamba* in the evening. Some private firms and government departments discriminate against the recruitment of women in the child-bearing age bracket, with the excuse that they will become "liabilities" at some point need when they have to apply for maternity leave or request time off to take their children to clinics for medical attention. This only goes on to show how society operates on double standards with regard to women's contribution to development. Such discrimination does not take into account that, in performing their reproductive role women are in fact producing the future manpower.

3.6 Invisibility of Women

Many of the above factors lead to invisibility of women in economic and social development. Invisibility of women in development leads to a vicious circle whereby they are marginalized and their efforts to change the status quo fall on deaf ears and on blind eyes.

3.7 Stereotyping of Women

Stereotype refers to a typecast or a pattern of categorizing something. Over a period of time, certain images or patterns turn into stereotypes. Stereotypes are

often exaggerated and negative misrepresentations. Hence what is projected is not the correct image but the society's attitudinal view of some given object.

With regard to African women, there are a significant number of stereotypes used to describe them and language plays an important role in this. In Kenya, for instance, the use of certain stereotyped terms has greatly undermined their position. Two decades ago, when the *Pajero* vehicle was every was rich man's status symbol, young women were referred to as *Pajero*, thereby portraying young women as merchandise for sale, rather than human beings with potential to contribute to Africa's development.

Today young women are referred to as *mrembo,* the beautiful one. It is true that women are beautiful, but this reference denotes the stereotype of a sex object. It denies a young woman the opportunity to be seen in all her attributes such as intelligence, industriousness and so on. Older women are referred to as "mummy" or "mathee." Hence, with all these stereotypes, when a prospective employer receives a woman's application for a job, the first image that flashes in his mind is not that of a prospective candidate, but that of his stereotyped idea of a woman. Many African women have been discriminated against with regard to jobs for which they qualify. Stereotyping is to some significant extent responsible for this gender discrimination and the consequent barrier to women's contribution to development.

The above notwithstanding, we cannot sit back and resign to fate. There are steps that women can take as a gender group and interventions that institutions such as the African Women's Studies Centre can make.

4.0 Pathways to African Women's Liberation and Participation in Development

It is a right for every citizen to contribute to the development of one's country or continent. Hence discrimination against women from participating in the development of their country or continent is an infringement of their human rights. It is a form of oppression. Liberation from oppression entails the oppressed finding strategies to liberate themselves. Self liberation by African women will be more meaningful than that from external sources because African women are the ones who know their plight from their experiences. They are also the ones who know what they want. They are the ones who know what would be the ideal society that development envisions. The strategies outlines here are in two broad categories:

strategies by the women as a gender group and strategies by organizations, such as the African Women's Studies Centre.

4.1 Women's Strategies

The following are possible steps that women can take as a group:

4.1.1 Paradigm shift

Culture and our socialization in the culture of negativity towards women has brainwashed us. Gradually we have swallowed whole many of the negative statements that have been drummed over and over again at us. Statements such as, "women are enemies of themselves" which have made us look at each other with suspicion rather than with sorority (sisterhood) towards one another, statements about our inability to venture into male domains which have made us lower our self esteem and acquire an inferiority complex. We need a paradigm shift to be the assessors or evaluators of our strengths rather than swallowing whole what culture says of us as weaklings. We need to look with a positive eye, aspects that are distorted to derail us. For instance we should not cower when society calls us harsh for being firm, tomboys or men haters or shrews for being courageous and so on.

4.1.2 Solidarity

We need to use our numbers positively and realize we are a force to reckon with. We should desist from bending to the patriarchal strategies of divide and rule, which are part of our contemporary culture and are often used against us. A practical illustration is forming small support groups at our work places. The work place has always been organized in a patriarchal structure where the top most head has had to be a man. Let us hold hands with the colleagues above us and the colleagues below us. Let us listen to one another and build a women-friendly culture at the work place. For instance let us build such strong rapport that female victims of sexual harassment will not feel isolated or ashamed to seek empathy from female colleagues.

4.1.3 Reclaiming Space

Discrimination against women has robbed them of their space; space at home front, space in the social or public arenas. Female headed households are the best illustrations of this. Western sociological thought has divided female households into two categories; *dejure* and *de facto*. The *de jure* female-headed household is taken

to be that home in which the woman is head as a single, divorced or widowed woman. This is considered legal headship of the household. The *de facto* situation is where the man is away, probably working in another country, or in jail, as often happens in the contemporary world. So the woman is the one who most of the time is with the family. But regardless of her input in holding the family together or sustaining the family, she is not the legal head.

This western mind-set has ignored another important female-headed household that is very common in Africa. This is the female-headed household whereby the woman builds or rents the house, works to put food on the family's table, educates the children and so forth. The man is present but for purposes of sustaining the household he is dead. He is socially, economically and psychologically dead. In other words, he is a parasite. Yet the woman has to wear a mask of a married or coupled woman. She refuses to take credit for her struggle to sustain the family and hands it over to the dead parasite. We need to reclaim our space as heads of households even in such scenarios. The little credit can go a long way in boosting the woman's morale to continue the struggle for her own sake for the sake, of the children, and for the sake of the society at large.

4.1.4 Recognize our Strengths and utilize them Positively

Women have the strength to withstand stress more than the men. Let us use our strength to withstand stress positively by engaging in, for instance projects that can uplift us. We are peace-loving. Let us use this in solidarity with other women to inject the value of peace and create war-free and conflict-free cultures in our continent. War is one of those evils in our continent that has brought untold misery to our people and deterred development in Africa. And we all know that, because we are the mothers and the ones who hold the family together, when there is war or conflict, we are the ones who bear the brunt.

4.1.5 Demolish Vicious Circles from Future Generations

Women are the mothers charged with the responsibility of socializing the young and future generations. Let us strive to build a gender-equal culture in our continent through bringing up our children to be gender-sensitive. By our children, we mean the boy-children and the girl-children alike. We want a society where our boys or young men appreciate the opposite sex and do not repeat the mistakes of their fathers. We also want a culture whereby our girls grow up knowing who they are,

knowing their potential, refusing to be brainwashed with negative images of themselves. We want to bring up our contemporary girl-child to grow up as a confident woman with a clear and positive identity. This way, we shall have broken the vicious circle that deters Africa and women from developing.

4.1.6 Sensitization

Currently, sensitization mainly takes place at seminars and workshops. Obviously, when these seminars and workshops are over, we go back to our comfort zones. Let us recognize sensitization as a continuous process. In this regard, let us use our diverse potential. Those who are in agriculture, let us sensitize the women and men we work with, especially in the extension stations. Those of us in health, we come across men and women from various places whom we can sensitize. And all of us, regardless of where we are, let us strive to contribute towards building a more gender-sensitize language. Language is a carrier of culture and it can go to great lengths to damage or build efforts to build a better gender-sensitive culture.

5.0 Contribution of African Women's Studies Centre: Towards a Meaningful Purposeful African Feminism

Feminism has been defined as the advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of the equality of the sexes. Feminism is a continuous humanistic movement whose ultimate mission is to struggle against discrimination of women as a gender group within society. This entails fighting against all political, judicial, economic and socio-cultural elements that are used to oppress women as a gender group.

Proponents of feminism in Africa and the Diaspora have struggled and continue to struggle to define frameworks that are all-encompassing with regard to the liberation of African women and women of African descent from gender-based oppression. These proponents, for instance recognize the damaging role played by slavery and colonialism in the psyche of the African woman and in her relationship with her male counterpart. Hence for them, feminism has to address oppressive issues emanating from slavery and colonialism.

In this regard the question of race and racial discrimination comes in. Whereas the men were victims of racial discrimination during slavery and colonialism, their female counterparts were victims of triple oppression: racial oppression by the slave and colonial masters, gender oppression by the same slave and colonial masters and, unfortunately they had to bear the brunt of the frustrations of their male

counterparts' emasculation by the slave and colonial masters. We might be tempted to wonder why feminists such as the African American Alice Walker address slavery in their attempts to define appropriate frameworks for women of African descent in the African Diaspora. The reason is simply that the scars inflicted on women by the slavery experience are still alive and still manifest themselves in women's position is society as well as in their relations with their male counterparts.

Other theorists of African feminism have included the importance of criticizing negative images and negative representation of African women. In her Ph.D Kabira (1994) examines the images of women projected in Gikuyu myths and other narratives. She argues that these images are negative and they are deliberate attempts to justify the oppression of women as a gender group. Prof. Wanjiku Kabira therefore sees African feminism as a search for self knowledge as well as a search for the true identity of the African women. The search for the true identity of the African women no doubt must include laying bare and criticizing stereotypes that have for centuries been used to misrepresent African women. Prof. Ciarunji Chesaina's Ph.D thesis 'Women in African Drama: Representation and Role' (Chesaina, 1987), exposes the plight of African women in the cultural *milieu.* She interrogates the way in which women are represented and portrayed within the African society in various plays by African playwrights. She interrogates the way in which African drama either justifies or seeks to question the status quo and cultural attitudes towards African women. Hence for Chesaina, African feminism must include sensitivity and empathy towards African women. It must also contribute towards demolishing negative images and stereotypes that are often used to justify the status quo.

By the same token, African feminists such as Philomena Chioma emphasize the need for the re-evaluation of feminist literary theory if it is to cater for African women's plight. Chioma contends that we cannot ignore the gender oppression of women that emanates from racial polarization and dehumanization that the African woman has gone through as a result of the colonial experience.

Molara Ogundipe Leslie puts forward a case for the development of a black feminist perspective from which the African female creative writer has the commitment as a writer, a third world person and as a woman. This has to include the African woman as viewed from her own perspective as a third world person. Polarization into the first world, second world and third world parameters are

products of the colonial experience. The arguments of Chioma and Leslie are geared towards foregrounding an African feminism that recognizes the effect colonialism had on African women. Hence cultural dimensions have to take into consideration historical dimensions.

Alice Walker has come to view the term "feminism" as inadequate to denote correctly the process of liberating women of African descent. She has categorically divorced the term feminism and coined "Womanism." She explains that a *womanist* is a woman who appreciates and prefers women's culture to old accepted cultures based on patriarchy. For Walker, a meaningful women's liberation movement must appreciate and view as positive, women's emotional flexibility that has been viewed as a weakness in many patriarchy-based cultures. To her, a meaningful women's liberation movement must appreciate that tears, for instance, are a natural counterbalance of laughter.

We are all aware of the psychological strength our own great grandmothers drew from laughing at the great grandfathers' efforts to break them and derail them from participating in the sustenance and development of their societies. A womanist appreciates women's values and women's strength that many cultures have overlooked. A womanist must be committed to the survival and wholeness of entire society, male and female.

The point of emphasis here is that the African Women's Studies Centre could consider creating terms that define adequately a meaningful liberation process for African women. It need not bear the term "feminism" but it must be all-encompassing to capture the aspirations of African women.

We have spent significant time and space defining feminism in recognition of its centrality at this workshop as well as in the endeavours of the African Women's Studies Centre in the struggle for African women's liberation.

6.0 Conclusion

The African Women's Studies Centre is aware of the role that the disadvantaged position of African women plays in hindering their participation in development. Indeed this is one of the key issues that the Centre interrogates with regard to various areas of development in the continent. We recognize the important space that the Kenya constitution has accorded women. We recognize that the constitution has stated clearly that it is illegal for women to be discriminated against by virtue of

their gender. We also recognize the enactment into law, of various tenets of the constitution that are gender friendly to women. But we must recognize that much more needs to be done, particularly at the implementation stage. Kenyan women need to be alert to have their aspirations taken on board in this implementation process.

The Centre also recognizes the efforts of other women's organizations such as Forum for African Women's Educationalist (FAWE), African women's Development and Communications Network (FEMNET), Association of African Women in Research and Development (AAWORD) and many others. The Centre recognizes the role that such women's organizations have played in accelerating efforts towards enabling women gain access to mainstream development areas.

However, this paper argues that the area of culture and cultural attitudes still needs to be addressed. As Achola Pala and El Saadawi (two of the foremothers of African feminist) have argued, traditions die hard. Negative traditions and attitudes towards women are ingrained in men and women right from birth. Achola Pala (1976) states: It would appear that the woman is always owned and in transit: at birth she is her father's daughter; and she grows up prepared to move and become somebody's wife. The family prepares her for marriage but does not invest too much in her and does not allocate any property to her. When she gets married, dowry may be paid, implying that she is being bought, and hence owned by her husband. If her new owner, the husband decides, he may ask her to move on so that he can get another wife.

Let us not close our eyes to what is looming all around us. Few of us in this room can claim that we have not attended pre-wedding ceremonies at which our daughters are sold and bought. Money changes hands at the *koito* among the Kalenjin or the "*ngurario*" among the Gikuyu. Money also changes hands at the *ayie* and *nyombo* among the Luo.

It is a high time that the African Women's Studies Centre gave culture great attention in order to unearth and lay bare those cultural practices and attitudes that bedevil women's efforts and militate against their contribution towards the development of our mother African continent.

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