



"Regional Peace, Democracy and Human Rights: a Gender Perspective."

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“Regional Peace, Democracy and Human Rights: a Gender Perspective.”

- Regional peace, democracy and human rights are interdependent.
- The respect of human rights and practice of democratic principles by countries coupled with fair distribution of resources ideally reduces tension and hence peace prevails.

“Regional Peace, Democracy and Human Rights: a Gender Perspective.”

- This presentation will focus on the (Southern Africa Development Community) SADC region and will draw examples of how people centered regional movements such as SAPSN can advocate for regional peace democracy and human rights especially for marginalized groups such as women

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- The need for gender equality in all development and governance processes in this century cannot be overemphasized.
- Gender equality gives women and men the same entitlements to all aspects of human development, including economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights; the same level of respect, the same opportunities to make choices; and the same level of power to shape the outcomes of these choices.
- Women in Southern Africa constitute more than 50% of the population. However, statistics show that their participation in governance processes is very low and are the most vulnerable to human rights abuses due to the patriarchal nature of the culture.
- Where there is Instability, their participation is even less e.g. the Democratic Republic of Congo has the lowest representation of women in Governance (Parliament – 7.7% and none at local Government (Gender Links and IPU website, October, 2008).

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- Although some countries such as South Africa and Mozambique have more than 30% representation of women in Parliament, most countries in SADC have very low representation of women at all levels of decision making.
- By October 2008, the average representation of women in SADC Parliaments was 21.9% and 29.7% at local Government (Gender Links and IPU website, October, 2008).

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- True democracy is undermined when women are excluded and this leads to inequity in resource distribution with men owning most of the means of production.
- There are no reliable sex disaggregated statistics on poverty in the region but it is important to note that women constitute the majority of the poor.

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- The region's economic and social underdevelopment is seriously compromising the value of its democracy and ability for people to enjoy their rights.
- That is, there is political "freedom" and "freedom" to participate in government, but "freedom" is fundamentally compromised because leaders can "buy" the votes of the poor, especially women, with a bit of salt and cooking oil.
- Without free and compulsory education for all regarded as a fundamental human right under Zambia's constitution for instance, the many uneducated and illiterate people cannot fully participate in democracy nor claim their rights.

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- Most SADC countries still operate under a dual legal system of law, general law and customary law.
- This makes it difficult for women to access justice due to the contradictions inherent in the two systems, e.g. in inheritance issues.

Conclusion.....

- After the attainment of independence from colonial rule, most countries in SADC have been relatively peaceful, with Zambia playing the role of a peace broker especially during the Kaunda regime.
- Therefore, there is no war in the region but there is “negative peace”(No war but tension). There are tensions in most countries in the region e.g. the Zimbabwe crisis.

Conclusion

- The negative peace being experienced in the region is as a result of the Governments inability to address the following:
 - The high inequalities in the distribution of power and resources between men and women.
 - High rates of violence against women (both physical and psychological) – Southern Africa is said to have the highest rate of gender based violence compared to other parts of the world, for instance, Interpol reports that South Africa has the world's highest rates of rape. (Beyond Inequalities, SARDC WIDSAA, 2008).
 - **Political instability** - The region has experienced a lot of disputed election results which is a continuous threat to peace, democracy and human rights, as many people feel cheated, for example, the Zimbabwe 2008 and Zambia 2006 election disputes. Disputed elections result in violence which hinders women from participating.
 - The lack of real **separation of power** has resulted in increased tension and lack of confidence in the electoral systems and institutions mandated to protect the rights of citizens in countries. There has been accusations by civil society groups and opposition groups that the Executive wings of Governments control the Judiciary and the legislature and in some cases there has been political interference in political cases. Democracy in SADC has not been fully embraced,

Conclusion.....

- Gender blind trade policies which favor men, e.g.. The SADC Trade protocol does not recognize that women and men engage in trade and investments differently.
- High illiteracy levels and lack of knowledge on human rights by women (ZARD study on levels of human rights knowledge among rural women)
- Corruption – resulting in citizens not being able to meet their basic needs.
- High levels of HIV with women bearing the burden
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Recommendations:

- There is urgent need for the SADC Heads of State to find solutions to the afore stated problems in the region.
- Leaders should begin to protect the rights of the region's citizens by condemning undemocratic practices.

Recommendations:

- **Regional Integration : An opportunity for civil society to face the crisis**
 - In SADC, The Southern African People's Solidarity Network SAPSN has created space for the grassroots to add their voice on the SADC agenda and ensure that their issues are heard by the heads of States. This creates a stronger more united force in advocating for peace, democracy, gender equality and human rights for all. Through its members at national level, ordinary people are mobilized to air their views at regional level.