

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction: Setting the Scene**

This chapter serves as the introduction to the study; it presents the aim of the study and the research questions that the study attempts to answer. A brief examination of Lesotho's gender landscape is given with the intention of locating the problem statement for this study, as well as providing argument for the justification of carrying out this thesis. The theory that has influenced this study is discussed with the intention of locating the national gender equality debates within the broader theoretical framework. The chapter also presents the summary of the methodology and research methods employed for this study. The final section gives the scope of the study as well as an outline of the chapters that make up the thesis.

### **Translating transnational feminist agenda within a local context**

This study attempts to examine how the interface between the domestic political context and the articulation of the transnational gender equality discourse has operated to define and shape the place of women's issues within the mainstream policy debates and processes in Lesotho. It traces when and how global women's issues entered the national policy debates, and critically examine how different policy actors interacting at the transnational space have defined the content and place of these issues within the mainstream policy agenda.

The place of gender equality agenda within the national policy debates is critically analysed with the intention of highlighting the intricacies that have impacted on the institutionalisation of the global gender equality initiatives. The study highlights the broader gender politics in Lesotho since independence to 2005, and gives a history of gender equality debates within the broader framework of the globalization of feminist ideas. In addition, the study highlights the place of women's political representation and voice within the institutionalization of these discourses under different regimes. By employing a transnational feminist historical analysis this study attempts to

explicate both national and transnational equality politics that have worked to shape the content and nature of the gender equality politics in Lesotho.

Because gender equality like other equality policy issues is influenced by changing norms at national, regional and transnational levels, a number of actors interact within these spaces for different reasons; the study therefore explores the role that different development actors such as political parties, the state, women's organisations, the donor community and mainstream nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) have played in defining the content and place of national women's agenda, and the extent to which such conceptualisation has led to the limited visibility of the women's voice in key political processes despite their relatively high educational attainment. The study attempts to make a case that the gender equality agenda has been a product of globalization of development ideas that have shaped norms and standards set to address the minority status of women as well as patriarchal ideologies that subordinate women across the globe.

In order to understand how different policy efforts have influenced and shaped the current gender landscape in Lesotho, the study starts from the premise that the intersection of domestic policy and political factors on the one hand, and global feminist activism on the other has been responsible for the continued gender inequalities that are manifested through the absence of women in major political processes of their country. It asks the following specific questions; when and how did the global women's agenda find its way into the development discourse in Lesotho? What have been the national and political and historical circumstances that necessitated the emergence and evolution of the women's agenda? Which transnational gender issues have dominated the national gender equality debates and what actually was said about women's concerns? What policy interventions have different regimes employed to push the transnational gender equality agenda within policy debates? What have been the main global ideological shifts that have influenced the way gender equality has been defined and addressed? What factors contributed to these shifts, and how have the shifts affected policy and practice as regards women's presence within the political space? What has been the role of state and non-state development actors in influencing policy change as regards the place of

women's issues within the national policy agenda? In broad terms the study seeks to determine the extent to which gender inequality within the political space in Lesotho is a product of the synergies of various development actors' efforts in their conceptualisation, articulation and prioritisation of the global gender equality agenda. The study locates gender equality struggles within the broader global feminist activism which must be directed at transforming existing domestic patriarchal barriers within political institutions, structures and practices.

The section that follows looks briefly at the Lesotho development and gender landscape so as to locate the problem that necessitated the present investigation.

## **The Context: a Glance at the Development and Gender Equality Landscape**

### **The background to the development context**

The kingdom of Lesotho is a small mountainous country covering about 30,000 sq. km. with a population estimated at 2 million (2006 census). The country is land-locked and completely encircled by the Republic of South Africa. Three-quarters of the country is highlands while the remaining one quarter covers the lowlands. Because of the vast ragged landscape cultivation is limited to less than 10 percent of the arable land. The rural highlands are relatively less developed and experience periodic severe winters and heavy snowfalls that often cut off rural people from basic services.

Lesotho is classified as one of the least developed countries with a per capita income of US\$272 (2005). According to the Household Budget Survey (2002/3), more than 50% of household members live below the poverty line. The survey further shows that the depth of poverty stands at 28.97 percent. Furthermore, according to the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) of 2006, Lesotho ranked at 149 out of 177 countries. This has been linked to declining social and economic indicators; these include increasing maternal mortality rates which show 762 deaths per 100,000 live births, and high HIV prevalence which ranks at 23.2 percent, the third highest in the world. These factors have contributed to declining life expectancy at birth, currently

estimated at 35.2 years. One feature of the HIV prevalence is its concentration in the urban and peri-urban areas, linked to textile manufacturing sector that predominantly employs young female adults. The table below shows some development indicators for Lesotho which among others explain the countries position in world rankings.

**Table 1: Selected development indicators**

INDICATORS	VALUE	YEAR	SOURCE
Population size (de jure)	1.876,633	2006	BOS
Annual population growth rate (%)	0.08	2006	BOS
Life expectancy at birth	41.2	2006	BOS
GDP per capita	\$1.600	2009	CIA World Fact Book
External Debt as % of GNP	44	2003	CBL
Population below poverty line (%)	50.2	2007	BOS (2007)
Unemployment rate for people aged 15-35	34 %	2009	UNDP
Adult (15-49) prevalence of HIV	23.2%	2005	NAC/UNAIDS
Maternal mortality rate (per 1000 live births)	762	2004	LDHS
Net primary school enrolment rate for boys (%)	80.6	2004	MoET 2004
Net primary school enrolment rate for girls (%)	85.6	2004	MoET 2004

National literacy rate	87 (%)	2006	BOS (2006 census)
HDI rank (out of 177 countries)	156	2009	UNDP

### **Background to the political context and the gender equality landscape**

The Kingdom of Lesotho embraces a multiparty democracy with a constitutional monarchy styled after the Westminster model of the former colonial master, with the King as Head of state and an elected Prime minister as Head of government. In its history Lesotho has been ruled by authoritarian regimes including a military rule, the only army rule in the SADC region. Since 1993, democratically elected government has been in place amidst a number of disputed election outcomes. Even with this regime in power Lesotho cannot be classified as a fully democratic state, rather it can be described as a nascent democracy in transition. Nonetheless, like most African countries Lesotho presents some feminist paradoxes as these undemocratic regimes have implemented very crucial feminist agendas.

The commitment to promoting representative democracy and gender equality in particular since Lesotho attained independence in 1966 reflects a very sluggish process. Gender equality has not constituted the ‘core’ business of the national political agenda though the concept features in almost all major policy documents and the country has been involved in various international forums on women’s issues and has signed and ratified almost all international instruments meant to address gender inequalities; this can be attributed to various dynamics within the political and policy institutions and processes. Evidence will show that even when women’s issues were brought into national debates it has always been as a response to international calls. There are a number of contextual factors that are central in analyzing the institutionalization of a feminist agenda in a given country. It is these factors that have the potential to shape and define the content and place of a transnational agenda within the national or domestic political discourses. Lesotho like the rest of the developing world has its unique historical and political factors that shape the indigenization of global feminist agendas, and these are worth mentioning albeit

briefly. They include the policy framework and legal system, electoral politics, women's literacy rates, the migrant labour system and related apartheid system in the neighboring RSA, and the aid industry and dependency on foreign assistance.

### *The policy and legal framework*

Since the UN decade for women was inaugurated in (1975-1985) Lesotho has committed itself to transnational feminist norms by acceding to almost all international and regional instruments and conventions meant to address gender inequality. These include UN conventions and recommendations of international conferences such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW<sup>1</sup>), The Fifth Conference on Women 1995(WCW), The African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights(ACHPR). It has participated in all major international women's conferences (Mexico 1995, Copenhagen 1980, Nairobi 1985 and Beijing 1995). It must be noted though that Lesotho deposited its instrument of ratification of CEDAW with the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the eve of the Beijing Women's conference; that is on 22 August 1995 (Acheampong 1993). Further the ratification was accompanied by a two paragraph reservation on issues related to chieftainship, religion and customary law as enshrined in the Constitution, these institutions are predominantly patriarchal as for example, chieftaincy is based on male lineage while most denominations especially the Catholic Church still prevents women from being priests while section 28 of the Constitution continued to treat married women as legal minors; the ratification concluded that:

The Lesotho Government declares it shall not take any legislative measures under the convention where those measures would be incompatible with the Constitution of Lesotho.

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<sup>1</sup> The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the United Nations on 19 December 1979 and entered into force on 3 September 1981 on receiving its 20th ratification/accession". (Acheampong, 1993)

By reserving the discriminatory clause on customary issues the Lesotho government is failing to safeguard the rights of women and is undermining its commitment to the international and regional instruments. Because the customary practices are mostly implemented at the family level women tend to internalise this subordination and in turn this affects their attitudes and confidence towards political or public participation (Letuka et al 2004). Regionally, the country is party to the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development as well as the AU Declaration on Gender and Development.

At the national level the Lesotho Constitution, the government's principles on democracy and the rule of law as well as the Gender and Development Policy form the framework for pursuing gender equality (MGYSR, 2003). These instruments and pronouncements are supposed to provide an enabling environment within which laws and policies intended to address gender inequalities can be enacted. Several law reforms have been initiated to address inequalities within institutions such as marriage. These include the Pensions Act of 1992 which accommodated married women to get pensions of their deceased spouses, the Sexual Offences Act of 2002 that among other things criminalises marital rape, and the Legal Capacity Act of 2006<sup>2</sup> which abolishes marital power that husbands used to have over the person and property of their wives, and also allows married women to enter into contracts and access loans.

Because culture always finds its way through processes meant to emancipate women, the above law reforms have been initiated without altering some discriminatory provisions of the Constitution. For instance Lesotho uses a dual legal system in which both the common law and customary law are constitutional. This system predisposes women to discrimination as the customary law treats women as minors. As highlighted by the WLSA report women are customarily perpetual minors who are 'always under the guardianship of someone. When unmarried they are looked after by their fathers, on marriage by their husbands and on the death of their husbands they fall under the guardianship of the heir (who might be their sons or any male relatives)' (1991:4). Though the common law treats women differently when they reach the age

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<sup>2</sup> According to respondents this Act had been delayed by Parliament until 2006 when the Millennium Challenge Corporation –MCC, made its passage a condition for accessing the MCA funds

of 21, the same law treats them as minors once they get married in community of property; upon marriage the husband becomes the woman's guardian who is given marital power to among others, administer the shared estate<sup>3</sup>. Recent scholarly work has highlighted the role of laws in marginalising women even in the absence of men. The dual legal system has been the focus of most women's organisations advocacy work and as such discriminatory laws have been the target of most organisations. This focus has missed political issues that shape the same legal status and reforms that have been made have not altered women's invisibility within the political leadership. Of course addressing the laws should be part of the struggle against gender inequalities but not the end by itself. As Makoa (1997) argues the legal interventions have failed to improve women's participation within the political space as well as prioritisation of their issues within the national political agenda.

As is case in the rest of Africa these legal and institutional developments have not translated into women's political gains (Hay and Stichter 1995). Women's contribution in major political processes and decisions is limited as women are grossly under-represented within the national political leadership. Though at the local government level women constitute more than 50% of councillors, this is a fairly new phenomenon emanating from the regional feminist advocacy that called for government's intervention to increase women's representation in decision-making, and as such government reserved 30% seats for women in designated constituencies in line with SADC agreements on promoting gender equality in the region<sup>4</sup>. As the study will show this intervention was bitterly contested not only by opposition parties and individuals, but also by some civil society organisations as well as some members of the Law Society of Lesotho.

At institutional level few structures have articulated explicit measures to advance women's representation and the prioritization of gender equality. The ministry of Public Works and Transport through the Department of Rural Roads (DRR) is an

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<sup>3</sup> Only in November 2006 was marital power abolished through the equality capacity Act under the influence of the Millennium Challenge Cooperation, and efforts to disseminate the implications of the Act were slowly initiated.

<sup>4</sup> The Local Government elections were held for the first time since independence in 2005



exemplary case as it has set out 30% participation in construction work as a requirement for employment of women by small contractors<sup>5</sup>. Similarly though the judiciary seems to be making big strides in appointing female judges, similar efforts are not visible regarding women's representation within the national legislature and senior political positions in government and political party structures. A small number of women have been nominated to leadership positions while some have been elected to parliament. Notable nominations are that of the speaker of the National Assembly, the Police Commissioner, the Commissioner of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)<sup>6</sup> and few cabinet ministers. These nominations and appointments have blurred the need for continued gender activism and as such women's constituencies of gender conscientisation have operated at the margins of the mainstream political agenda. Incidentally few of these appointees have any relation with the women's movement and none of them got appointed on the basis of their involvement with women's issues. Makoa argues that these appointments to senior positions should be seen as 'part of "political cleansing" campaigns than a sign of growth in gender sensitivity (1997, 6). The impact that these nominated women have made in addressing women's issues has not attracted scholarly attention probably because of the insignificant numbers and impact such women make.

The centrality of these policy and legal interventions is relevant here as their existence creates an impression that there is political will to institutionalize international gender equality norms at the national level. On the contrary, evidence will show that in essence these have affected domestic women's mobilization and have shifted attention away from women's real concerns and political interests.

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<sup>5</sup> This has also come as a result of the demand of the donor agencies that sponsor transport programs such as the Irish Aid

<sup>6</sup> The Commissioner was appointed Chair of the IEC in 2008; this was the first woman to hold that position since the inception of the Commission in 1997.

### *Women and the political system*

While the process of globalization has enabled feminist ideas to spread easily across the globe, the gender landscape in Lesotho largely owes its history to the nature of the political processes and events that have characterised Lesotho's politics since 1966. In other words both the political system and the nature of political regimes have had direct bearing on the way global gender equality norms have been conceptualized and institutionalized. In turn, these have defined the place of women's issues within the national political discourses and the broader development agenda. The global gender equality agenda has been pursued under different regime types with differing policy emphasis on women's issues. Though Lesotho was described as a fairly stable democracy after 2002 election (Matlosa and Sello; 2005) its history reflects a political journey characterised by instabilities such as authoritarian rule between 1970 and 1986, a military rule of 1986 to 1993 as well as contested election results that culminated in a change of the electoral model. Under these regimes a number of policies and laws were passed that had direct bearing on women's concerns. Furthermore, despite their levels of democracy these regimes have made commitments to implement international norms and standards meant to address gender inequality. However the context that has been characterized by undemocratic tendencies has to some extent influenced the nature of gender debates and the place of women's issues within the national policy debates. Given that different regimes pursue different agendas under different historical moments, a critical analysis of how different types of regimes have attempted to define women's issues and institutionalize a global feminist agenda is central in this study.

Feminist ideas are not engaged only by governments, but they also influence political party choices. A small number of women have entered the political space due to their educational qualifications but there is also a significant number that have done so through their party card. Because of their high educational attainment, some Basotho women have been able to hold senior positions in government and this has had an impact on how male political leadership viewed the need for promoting women's political advancement. On the other hand because of their numbers women have formed large majorities of political party membership. It is within these political

parties that Makoa (1997) argues that women's literacy has failed to mould political feminist consciousness and leadership, but women have been socially mobilised to put men in power. Despite the accelerated retrenchment of mine workers since the 1990s, Basotho women still constitute the largest membership of political parties yet they are marginally visible within the leadership space of these parties. For example, according to Matlosa and Sello (2005) after the 1998 elections the main opposition party BNP, estimated that up to 74% of its membership is women while the ruling Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) estimates 55%. Smaller parties like Lesotho People's Congress (LPC) and National Independent Party (NIP) claim 58% and 66% women membership respectively. About two parties have been headed by women but these do not necessarily draw their membership from the women's constituency. This representation is however missing in the executive structures and leadership of these parties and consequently affects their presence in political government positions as well as national political processes that shape the mainstream political agenda. As found by Letuka et al (2004), none of the parties in Lesotho consider equal representation when nominating candidates for elections. The authors argue that the nomination process is left in the hands of the party executive which by its nature is male-dominated. Because of the absence of statutory provisions for political parties to prioritise gender equality in their structures and programs, gender equality has been extensively marginalized within the political party prioritization of issues. This is a challenge for the whole political and development project as women's voice is marginalised and their potential to contribute effectively to national development is missed.

### ***Women and electoral politics***

Elections constitute the core of multiparty democracy and regular and fair elections are significant elements of a global democratic project, however, Lesotho's history of electoral democracy is characterised by a mixture of instabilities and political apathy. The country's use of the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral model has been blamed for its exclusions of different groups within the society. For a long time electoral literature focused mainly on the model's failure to promote multi-party principles as it tended to produce a one party state, these debates ignored the model's failure to include women, and their invisibility has been peripheral within mainstream electoral discourses. The introduction of the new electoral model; the Mixed Member

Proportional (MMP) in 2002 has not brought any significant changes as reflected in the table below. While the model has been able to accommodate an increased number of political parties into the legislature it has not addressed the underrepresentation of women in the political space. This has raised questions on the extent to which electoral democracy is able to address political inequalities specifically gender inequalities. The table below shows that even with increased numbers of constituencies and a change in the electoral system the number of women representatives in the legislature has not significantly improved.

**Table 2: Number of Women in Lesotho Parliament from 1966-2005**

<b>Year of Election</b>	<b>Total No. of seats in the National Assembly</b>	<b>Total No. of women in the National Assembly (%)</b>	<b>Ruling Party</b>	<b>Electoral model</b>
1966	60	0	BNP	FPTP
1970	60	0	BNP	FPTP
1993	65	3 (1.5%)	BCP	FPTP
1998	80	3 (3.8%)	LCD	FPTP
2002	120	13 (11%)	LCD	MMP

**Source:** Compiled from various research sources such as Kabemba (2003), Letuka et al (2004), Matlosa and Sello (2005)

The introduction of MMP was hailed for bringing peace and stability to Lesotho as it promised to bring fair representation (Matlosa and Sello 2005), but as this study will show the model only succeeded in bringing on board increased numbers of political parties that continued to nominate mainly men into the National Assembly. The table below gives a glimpse of the Sixth Parliament (2002-2006) representation which came after the introduction of the Mixed Member Proportional electoral model that brought to an end the one party parliament, it also gives a selected summary of women nominated to positions of power:

**Table3: Representation of women during the Sixth Parliament-2002-2006**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Female No.</b>	<b>Males No.</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% of Women</b>
MPs: National Assembly	13	107	120	11
MPs Senators <sup>7</sup>	13	20	33	39
Cabinet	4 Ministers & 2 Assistant m Ministers	13 Ministers & 2 Assistant Ministers	17	24
Principal Secretaries	5	9	14	36
Deputy Principal Secretaries	3	11	14	21
Ambassadors	2	8	10	20

**Source:** LCN Report 2005

The significance of the second table is that it challenges the popular belief that proportional representation electoral systems necessarily promote inclusive democracy such as gender political equality. As the table illustrates, though the 2002 elections were based on the new MMP model that replaced the FPTP model which had been used since 1966, women's political representation remains a big challenge. The increased numbers of women is reflected mainly in nominated positions while elective positions remain male dominated hence bringing into question the commitment of political leadership in promoting gender equality in leadership positions. A feminist paradox is also reflected in the numbers for the Senate, while this draws its membership from the traditional institution of chieftainship it has a higher number of women (39%), this is because most women in this House act on

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<sup>7</sup> 50% of Senators who are women stand for their husbands or sons, while many act as ward chiefs and village chiefs.

behalf of their husbands or minor sons. Interestingly, the substantive chiefs are in most cases suspended from duty due to incompetency or ill discipline of corruption or alcoholism. Factors that lead to rampant alcoholism among senior male chiefs have not been analyzed from a gender perspective. Needless to say the significance of equal representation for addressing gender inequalities will be highlighted in the next chapters, suffice at this moment to say women's absence in strategic policy positions impacts directly on the way the broader global feminist agenda is defined and addressed within the national political agenda.

### *Women, literacy and politics*

Education and literacy have always been regarded as instruments to empower and liberate women, the education of the girl child has been promoted at the international level with the conviction that once women are educated they will be able to enter the labour market and this will enable them to compete effectively with men. This liberal feminist perspective holds that women's subordination to men is the result of relative low literacy rates among women, hence the prominence of this global agenda within the eight UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Basotho women have been praised for attaining higher literacy rates as compared to men. This situation has been described as "a striking case; there [in Lesotho], more than three quarters of the students, even at the higher education level are female"<sup>8</sup> (Lumumba 1996: 11), It must be noted that this assertion needs to be cautiously read as some statistics show that females dominate at institutions that offer programmes which are traditionally 'soft' such as teaching and nursing. At the university they dominate in Humanities and Education, however few of those who go into sciences and economics have been reported to do exceptionally well; this has been proven by the Prizes they win at every graduation ceremony. High female literacy rates in Lesotho have been explained as a unique feature in the continent, for example Judith Gay observed in 1982 that even in rural areas it was women who formed development committees and were the ones who implemented rural development activities as they were capable of reading and translating government documents. The literacy rates are attributed to a number of factors such as the migrant labour system that offered employment to males only and

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the accompanying missionary education system which accommodated Basotho girls who were the targets of Christian conversion.

Unlike most African states, Lesotho has enjoyed high female literacy rates from primary school to tertiary level without any significant pressure from either the women's movement or the international community. For example according to the UN Statistics Division (2001), literacy rates of women above 15 years are 90 percent while that of males is 74 percent. According to this report the disparities impact on accessing employment opportunities and females are found in large numbers within the public sector at the middle management level while the senior positions they are less visible. Currently this achievement is however threatened by the high incidence of HIV and AIDS<sup>9</sup> infections which force girls to drop out of school to look after sick parents and consequently look after their siblings when their parents die. The impact of the pandemic is thus narrowing the gap between male illiteracy and female illiteracy. What is of relevance for this study is the failure of this educational attainment of women to open political leadership space for them as well as the failure of the system to mobilize women to effectively use the transnational norms to demand governments' and political leadership responsiveness to their concerns. Instead of transforming society's beliefs and practices that are harmful to women, the education system has in fact entrenched patriarchal ideologies by encouraging female students to enrol mainly in traditional disciplines that confine females to the private space while male students are found in disciplines that help them to be more competitive on the labour market as well as in politics (ILO 1994).

The analysis of the education system and women's position within the political agenda has to be understood within the larger context of colonial legacy and the migrant labour reserve that Lesotho was turned into by successive colonial and apartheid governments. The colonial government funded institutions that accommodated Basotho girls to professions such as nursing and teaching. Special

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<sup>9</sup> The prevalence rate is estimated at 23% for the ages 15-49. Women are said to constitute more than 50% of the infected and affected.

schools and boarding facilities for girls-only were built, while the syllabi focused more on ‘domestic Science (Epprecht 2000). The government saw the education of girls as a ‘cost-effective way to cultivate ‘modernization’ in a rapidly changing milieu’ (page 128), citing the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies, Epprecht notes that educating girls was seen more as sensible as ‘women are the stable, and from certain aspects, the central figures in society...It is thus clear that the education of women and girls may have an even greater effect for good or evil upon society than that of the men and boys.’ In the same manner the church opened same-sex schools and boarding facilities. The Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS)<sup>10</sup> has been the pioneer on educational facilities that deviated from the emphasis on ‘domesticity’ espoused by colonial governments. However government had the upper hand as it demanded that ‘all girls had to pass examinations in ironing, cooking, and laundry’ (Epprecht *ibid*; 129). It is this type of the education system that Basotho females were exposed to and which was inherited by the new government at independence; the system did not prepare women in any way to take leadership positions but to accept the home as their rightful place. Since independence to the present day the education system has lacked in both life and leadership skills. Civic education on democracy has always been left to the non-governmental organisations that use electoral events as the only avenues to teach people about voting. In these campaigns gender equality is not treated as central to democratic consolidation.

The purported high literacy rates that have dominated development debates have been used by political leadership to deny women entry into the political space. What makes the situation more puzzling is the fact that ‘educated’ women are very reluctant to actively participate in politics, and as such gender equality politics are left in the hands of semi- literate women who cannot engage political leaders to honor their commitments as they do not participate at regional or international forums meant to address gender inequalities. A common question that has been posed against measures to increase women’s political presence has been:

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<sup>10</sup> PEMS came to Lesotho in 1833 and were the first Christian missionary invited by King Moshoeshoe I, it changed its name in 1965 to Lesotho Evangelical Church.



*what do women want? They are more educated than men, and they are many in numbers, why can't they use their educational advantage to get into politics, why do they have to be treated differently?*<sup>11</sup>

In essence what this suggests is that the gender equality agenda is seen as irrelevant hence it is treated with indifference.

### ***The Migrant labour System and Lesotho's geopolitical position***

The South African mining industry that has been the main source of Lesotho's revenue until the early 1990s, has not only been critical in shaping the socio-political economy of Lesotho, but it also left more than 50 percent of Basotho women as *de facto* heads of households. In the absence of men, Basotho women had to make decisions about developing their families and communities, they took the opportunity of sending their girl children to schools as male children were concerned with getting jobs in the mining industry as well as looking after livestock. On the other hand the missionaries who were competing over the 'souls' of the African people used the education opportunities as a way to win more followers and hence promoted education even for girls who in traditional societies would not be targeted for education as they would be expected to remain submissive<sup>12</sup>. The extent to which the missionary education curriculum entrenched the subordination of women has not been given a critical analysis even when the country attained independence, while at the same time scholarly literature on migration has neglected the role of male migration in shaping the nature of political debates and the place of women.

The migrant labour system and its social effects on women in Lesotho have been given significant intellectual and scholarly research attention by both local and international scholars (Gordon 1978, 1981, 1994, Showers 1980, Murray 1981,

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<sup>11</sup> This question was posed by a group of men who were at the BNP offices while I was interviewing their political Leader, who consequently reiterated the sentiment that there is no need for special measures for women.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Ntimo-Makara who is an academic and gender activist, April 2007

Matlosa and Pule 1997). Scholars like Elizabeth Gordon have argued that the wives of the migrant workers faced a lot of stress in making decisions during the absence of their husbands, while on the other hand Walker argues that the “institution of migrant labour undoubtedly led to a decline in patriarchal authority within the family – to the advantage of formerly subordinate groups such as women” (cited in Matlosa 1992, 4). This view suggests that men’s absence led to the empowerment of women as they were able to make decisions at the family level, however, what this perspective doesn’t explore is the extent to which such freedom has been able to open the public space. Women’s freedom to manage the private sphere was limited to certain roles but men still held enormous powers as they controlled the family’s income. Moreover this freedom has not been translated into political power and women continue to be absent from major decisions that affected them and their children. For example, for a long time women could not take a passport for a child as this was the sole prerogative of men who most of the times were away. Similarly women could not sell animals even if there was a need because animals are considered to belong to men who then make legally binding agreements even though women maybe responsible for their wellbeing in the absence of their spouses. This illustrates the relativity of women’s power under the migrant labour system and highlights gendered stereotypes that dominated the policy and legal context.

Migration as a capitalist invention took boys out of the school system and placed girls in the domesticating education system provided by the missionaries and endorsed by the colonial governments. The system also influenced the change in gender roles as women took charge of family and agricultural responsibilities amidst economic dependence and vulnerability. Despite taking up these roles women did not have property rights to own economic resources such as land or large animals. This dependence has been internalised by women and has not only impacted on women’s economic status and their political efficacy but has also altered marriage relations. As highlighted by Hay and Stichter (1995:196), the migrant labour system did not only exploit African male labour but it also altered family gender relations as wives of the migrants were not allowed to accompany their husbands. The authors cite Bernstein (1985) who maintains that “the South African government wanted a labour force that would not be burdened with superfluous appendages such as wives, children, and

dependents who cannot provide service". To achieve this, migrant labourers' wives were prohibited from staying with their husbands. The mining authorities were assisted by the colonial leaders who made it illegal for women to leave home without their husbands' consent (Epprecht; 2000). However as records indicate, Basotho women continued to cross the border to sell their labour as farmers, domestic workers, and traders in liquor and sex at the mining compounds.

After the retrenchment of big numbers of migrant workers in the late 1980s, women migrants have increased in numbers. For example the UN-INSTRAW report on 'Gender, Migration and Remittances in Selected SADC Countries' (2008), notes that Lesotho had 100,000 mineworkers in 1990 and this number fell by almost 50% as by 2006 there were merely 46,000 migrant workers. Women who depended on the remittances of the returnees were left with few options for survival while on the other hand the economy of the country declined due to the diminishing proceeds accruing from the remittances. But notably the retrenchment led to increased number of men contesting the political space while women remained at the margins of that space.

Instead of resigning to their unfortunate fate the women devised ways of survival. An increased number of women have migrated to Maseru where a growing textile industry employs more women than men<sup>13</sup>. According to the UN- INSTRAW report Basotho women have also migrated to South Africa in great numbers and they are found mostly in domestic work and in the informal sector, and unlike men whose entrance into South Africa was officially recorded, women enter the country illegally and have been subjected to exploitation and harassment in the hands of both their employers and Home Affairs officials, and at many times they have been deported under demeaning conditions. This indifference on the part of Lesotho government and that of South Africa can only suggest that because women engage in menial jobs their economic contribution to the country's revenue is not taken seriously. On the

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<sup>13</sup> The industry was bolstered by Lesotho's access to international clothing markets under AGOA. However the end of the Multi-Fibre Agreement in 2005 saw most factories closing down and an estimated 12,276 employees lost their jobs.

RSA part, because most of these women are not educated they don't bring any contribution to their formal economy hence they are seen as intruders.

Lesotho's economic dependence on migrant remittances needs to be understood within the broader context of the apartheid system in the neighbouring South Africa which dictated not only the economic terms but even the broader policy choices of Lesotho regimes. This dependence influenced their prioritization of policy issues based in part on how such issues would be viewed by the apartheid regime; within this policy uncertainty gender equality would therefore not constitute a core priority of any of Lesotho regimes pre-1994.

While women were exposed to national party politics as early as 1960s, men were exposed to movement politics as they became members of the Union of Mineworkers in South Africa as well as participating in liberation struggles as supporters of the ANC. This suggests that the migrant workers were able to engage in political activism that had the potential to equip them with leadership skills. There are a number of ex-migrants who have been able to enter political leadership while women remained underrepresented. On the other hand women's participation in political processes has been confined to party cheer-leaders while the few men left in the country dominated the political leadership structures. Women's support of the political parties has not translated into political consciousness and Lesotho's politics are characterised by the absence of feminist activism. This has direct bearing on how the transnational feminist agenda is being engaged to shape the content and nature of gender equality debates as well as determining the place of women's issues on the development agenda.

### *Politics of Gender Equality and Donor Dependence*

Lesotho's development issues, including the continued gender inequalities cannot be fully analysed without understanding the magnitude of the over-dependence of the

country on foreign assistance. This dependant development is not only financial but it is also political. The aid politics in Lesotho have been intrinsically tied to the political situation in the neighboring apartheid South Africa. For example, during the apartheid era Lesotho received enormous amounts of foreign assistance while the end of apartheid saw the exodus of donors to Pretoria. In fact according to Afrol News, by 2005 Lesotho had become the least favorite to donors as for instance; it was receiving about US\$69 million compared to dictatorship states such as Eritrea that got US\$80 million. According to some scholars, this aid was never meant to address concerns of marginalised groups or even to lessen Lesotho's dependence on a hostile South Africa as has been traditionally claimed (see for example, Ferguson 1995). The decline of aid to Lesotho after South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994 can be largely understood within the context of donor's definitions of Lesotho's development problems as well as the overall change of the aid architecture. Coincidentally, this donor exodus happened at the time of accelerated retrenchment of mine workers and these two factors have affected Lesotho policy choices tremendously.

On the other hand the impact of the donor flight to Pretoria on women's advancement has not received any academic scrutiny. However, during their stay in Maseru donors' focus on women's issues marginalised the women's political struggles within the broader development agenda. An in-depth analysis of the role of the donor agencies in shaping the gender discourse in Lesotho is discussed later in the thesis. Suffice to note that the donor community marginalised gender politics and the domestication of the global feminist agenda as their concentration was on the developments taking place in South Africa, their limited focus though was visible within welfare issues such as health and basic education. Both foreign aid and remittances have been core revenue bases for Lesotho and their decline had both policy and political implications. This point is intended to highlight the interface between Lesotho's vulnerability to external financial sources and the impact thereof on the national development agenda. Though most government's commitments to gender equality have been as a result of the country's commitment at the international and regional arenas, the donor's economic advantage cannot be undermined, hence the need to understand how this relationship influences the prioritisation of development issues in particular the articulation of transnational feminist issues that have shaped national gender discourses.

### *The women's movement and the national political agenda*

Any country which has succeeded in putting women's issues on the political agenda drew its strength from the vibrancy of the women's movement. Countries such as South Africa and Namibia are good examples. Women's groups have a long history of existence in Lesotho which can be traced to the pre-independence era; they have participated in most international forums where transnational gender equality norms have originated. However, this demonstration of collective activity has operated at the margins of formal politics as these groups have been preoccupied with survival strategies within a weak economy and changing states. This position constrained their ability to influence policy even on issues that affected them directly. As will be demonstrated in chapter four the women's movement in Lesotho is dominated by grassroots organizations which characteristically lacked a unified political vision, and this has exposed them to political greed that has helped to keep them out of the political race.

These organizations emerged at different historical and political moments yet they have shared the same lack of political activism. However, a number of those that emerged during the 1980s when political activities were officially banned by the military regime brought a new paradigm shift as they started advocating for women's rights and legal capacity. The emergence of these advocacy groups cannot be explained in terms of domestic political conditions only as during this era there was a global call for democracy and the women's rights as human rights discourse was being globally driven by transnational women's groups. Because the democracy project and the roll-back of states were advocated largely by international organizations, these women's rights groups aligned themselves with the international groups and this helped them to attract a lot of funding from international aid institutions hence the need to unpack the influence of this dependence on their agenda and mandate. The extent to which these groups have operated to define and shape the global women's agenda within domestic gender equality discourses as well as political factors that have influenced their choices of agendas, form part of the current investigation.

### ***Gender politics and the Church***

Though the role of the church in entrenching patriarchal norms that constrain women's potential to unleash their leadership skills has not attracted feminist scrutiny, in Lesotho the church is very central. The country is predominantly religious with Christianity constituting more than 90 percent. The Catholic Church enjoys the majority of believers and this church has influenced a number of national issues including education and politics. In most denominations women are not granted the space to lead despite their large numbers in such congregations. Christian values have instilled moral obligations of servitude and subordination of women. Women play prescribed traditional roles in the church and this is transferred to the political realm as women accept their roles as that of cheerers. Because of its powerful space the church especially the Catholic Church, does not promote women into its leadership while the few denominations that accommodate women leaders still put men in senior positions of the church structures, yet the call for gender equality has not been extended to this community. Furthermore, the church in Lesotho has openly supported particular political parties and governments that shared their political ideologies. For example the Catholic Church has openly supported the BNP government (Epprecht 2000, Weisfelder 2002), while the protestant Lesotho Evangelical Church (LEC) has been reported to have supported the Congress party. This support carried with it the patriarchal ideologies that these institutions embraced which influenced political debates and policy choices of different regimes that have governed Lesotho. And because of its strong hold on the society the church has not influenced political leaders only, but it has its influence also on women and men outside state institutions. This issue is very critical in understanding how religious discriminatory principles are able to permeate policy institutions to entrench such tendencies in order to maintain control.

### **Institutionalizing a global feminist agenda: The Problem!**

As part of the global community Lesotho participates in international forums that shape and dictate international norms and practices meant to address gender inequalities globally. As a response to these commitments both state and non state actors have advocated for some liberal policies that address gender inequalities. The

institutionalization of some of these issues has been pursued under highly aid dependent and undemocratic conditions by ‘unlikely’ actors. The puzzle is complicated by the high number of domestic actors who claim their space within the struggle for gender equality, yet women have ostensibly remained invisible within the political leadership. In addition to global interaction Lesotho boasts of high female literacy rates that have given some women an opportunity to penetrate the economic sector while the policy and political space has remained disproportionately male dominated. It has remained an enigma to explain why despite the supposedly conducive transnational and domestic political environment Basotho women have made a minimal mark within the political space and have thus operated at the margins of major political processes of their country. Lesotho’s commitments to international calls for gender equality and democracy have not translated into political gains for women. Basotho women’s advantage of being more educated than their men, and the exposure to the development industry in the absence of men, as well as their membership in political parties suggest an opportunity within the domestic space to influence policy choices on women. Hence this study attempts to examine the way domestic political discourses interact with the transnational feminist agenda to shape the place of women’s issues within mainstream development debates.

A number of political intricacies that have undermined efforts to indigenise the global feminist agenda have escaped feminist scrutiny for small undemocratic states like Lesotho. The failure of the domestic system to enhance collective mobilisation of women’s agency to obtain ‘a critical mass’<sup>14</sup> representation in decision making positions, as well as pushing women’s issues on the political agenda has not been part of scholarly debates. In order to address this anomaly there is a need for a deeper understanding of the national political context within which a global agenda has been pursued, and the effect this has had on the content and nature of gender equality discourses. Such an analysis is lacking in current gender debates which have continued to depoliticise women’s issues rendering them peripheral to the whole

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<sup>14</sup> 30% representation is regarded as a critical mass; according to the Commonwealth program of action “when at least one third of those in decision making structures such as national or local parliaments are women, a critical mass is reached which has been found to affect the way in which issues are tabled for discussion and policies and plans developed making it more likely they will address women’s and men’s needs (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1995; 16).



discourses of democratic governance. The ways in which the women's agenda as a global development initiative, found its place into local development discourse, the ways in which it has evolved in meaning overtime and the way in which the agenda has been pursued under different regimes call for a systematic analysis. Similarly, the role of various development actors interacting at the transnational space in influencing the place of gender equality issues within the national policy agenda, as well as in shaping the content of such discourses needs to be analysed within the political and historical background that has been characterised by neo-patrimonial relations as well as a fragile democratic culture.

This study therefore is an attempt to problematise the political trajectory of a transnational gender equality agenda within the local contexts in order to understand the domestic sites of resilience to gender equality interventions despite official claims of commitment to women's advancement. The analysis is located within shifting global conceptualization of women's issues, strategies that emanated from such thinking. And also significantly, the study looks at who have been the 'cast of characters' in this policy space and how they have influenced the indigenization of global gender norms and debates within the domestic context.

## **The Theoretical Framework**

### ***Transnational Feminism: Situating the Local within the Global***

This study is looking at the history of Lesotho's gender equality politics within the framework of transnational feminism. It traces how global feminist issues have entered the domestic policy arena and shaped national policies on women's issues. The sections offer a theoretical definition of transnational feminism which informs this study, and an argument about why in the context of Lesotho it is important to identify different actors who interact within the transnational arena.

While different strands of feminism have attracted a wide scholarly attention to explain women's struggles globally, there has been a lack of the same attention in looking at how global feminism has shaped gender equality policies at both international and regional levels as well as within individual countries. Global feminism helps us to locate the gender equality agenda within globalization debates, and as Ferree and Tripp (2006, 12) have argued, it is through the process of "globalization that feminism emerged as a goal in a wide variety of issue advocacy networks that are active at the transnational level".

### **Feminism**

In their preface, Ferree and Tripp (2006) define feminism as the broad goal of challenging and changing gender relations that subordinate women to men, this view acknowledges the capacity of patriarchy to differentially advantage some women and men relative to others, and sees feminism striving to challenge this and therefore bringing social change. Women are central to feminist's struggles because of structural discrimination they suffer at different levels, feminism therefore challenges women's subordination to men, and strives to bring about social change (Ferree 2006).

While feminism has been widely associated with women and women's movements Ferree and Tripp (2006) argue that feminists are not necessarily women, but they are all those activists whose mandate includes the empowerment of women, and they can be located within or outside state institutions. According to this view, feminists may or may not decide to call themselves feminists, furthermore, they may not even describe their agenda as feminist yet their aim involves empowering women. When conceptualized in this way feminist activism can therefore take place 'at different spaces and across time'. It is therefore important to appreciate that feminists are not by definition frustrated women within women's movements but that there are men and women within governments' institutions, in mainstream non- governmental organizations or even within the donor community who work to drive a feminist agenda. Because feminists are not necessarily women it therefore means that not all women are necessarily feminists, and for (Ferree 2006, 7), "feminist activists are found in various contexts and associations, and these entities may have multiple

agendas”. Disney (2008, 41) also argues that “all women’s activism is inherently feminist through the process of engaging women to transform their lives”, however, she cautions that it would be wrong to presuppose that all women’s activism is necessarily feminist in its aims, and that even women within women’s movements may not describe themselves as feminists. However, it is important to highlight that women’s movements can be strategically positioned channels for pursuing a feminist agenda, yet it is also true that they cannot be the only ‘carriers of feminism’ (ibid, 9). Because feminists have to confront both social and political barriers within different contexts they have forged links with different actors, and also because of the incentives that are provided by gender equality as a global agenda it is safe to accommodate different development actors within the definition of feminist activists.

Snyder (2006, 25) expands the definition of the concept of feminism by highlighting the centrality of gender justice; she argues that justice is a prerequisite factor in pursuing women’s empowerment, and contends that this empowerment cannot be attained “within an unjust society, and a just society cannot be achieved without empowering women”. For Snyder, freedom and well-being of all the people must be seen as the ultimate goal of feminism; however she notes that there have been puzzling experiences where undemocratic regimes have implemented a number of gender equality policies while the so called democratic governments have failed to implement such policies.

The complexity of defining feminism within development discourses has not only influenced the prioritization of women’s issues but it has also affected the way gender activists position themselves within the global political terrain. There are a number of reasons that affect the articulation of feminist identity, these include the social constructions of what is conceptualized as women’s issues, but most importantly in some contexts feminism can carry negative connotations that may jeopardize the institutionalization of the feminist agenda as it has been associated with foreign cultural imperialism, and it has been viewed by some women and men as a threat to cultural identity. As a result many activists tend to avoid calling themselves feminists, yet even for those who are brave to call themselves feminists, their prioritization of issues may not necessarily put gender equality in their first goals.

Since the struggle for gender equality is still continuing at both the national level and the international level it is appropriate to acknowledge the relevance of feminism to the contemporary gender equality discourses. As Bryson (1999, 5) correctly puts it, “feminism remains critically important both as a political movement and as a political theory that can, by improving our understanding, enable us to develop effective forms of political action.” And it is therefore incorrect to assume “a post-feminist world in which issues of gender inequality have been comfortably resolved”. Feminist agendas are being pursued within different contexts and at different levels yet they all are affected by globalization of development issues, feminism of any form cannot therefore take place in isolation of what the international community perceives as development priorities, hence the need to locate gender equality politics within the transnational space. Significant within this analysis is the fact that global or transnational feminism embraces all other feminists’ strands interacting at a global space.

### **The Transnational arena and the Feminist Agenda**

Though feminist issues have been described as foreign interference by some pessimists, they have permeated borders across the globe and they have shaped both national and international scholarly and development thinking on women’s issues. Feminist activism has been pursued not only by women’s movements within national states but by different development actors at the transnational level in order to address patriarchal ideologies that have subjected women to perpetual minority status at different levels. According to Khagram et al (2002, 4) transnational activism refers to “forms of transnational collective action involving nongovernmental organizations interacting with international norms to restructure world politics”, on the other hand Ferree and Tripp, (preface vii) expand the definition beyond nongovernmental organizations and see the transnational arena as the intersection of the international and local which comprises actors within and outside the state. For these scholars transnational activism “brings feminists out of their local contexts to work across national borders, and feminist discourses (such as the definition of women’s rights as human rights) travel from the international level where they were first formulated to

offer leverage to local activists”. At the core of transnational activism is the creation and implementation of international norms, standards and practices. Transnational feminists therefore strive to “strengthen, implement, and monitor international norms” (Khagram et al, *ibid*, 4) that are meant to address women’s concerns and interests globally.

The diffusion or spread of feminist ideas across the globe has been facilitated by both domestic and international factors, and according to Khagram et al (2002), feminists within different contexts face a number of challenges in trying to engage patriarchal institutions and gatekeepers into dialogue on addressing gender inequalities. Domestic conditions tend to push some agendas to the margins of policy debates while others get prominence. As a result these barriers to the institutionalization of feminist ideas have the potential to move activists out of the domestic space and push them into the transnational space so that they can articulate their needs and interest within the space which may not be as hostile as the national space. According to Khagram et al (*ibid*), these domestic blockages are complemented by open political opportunities within the international space. These political structures act as incentives for collective action as they create what the authors call ‘spiral and boomerang’ models. These models suggest that the blockages or barriers to social change within the domestic society push domestic social movement activists into the transnational arena; in other words the combination of a ‘closed domestic opportunity structure and an open international opportunity structure initiates the boomerang and the spiral modes” (page 19). According to this view the spiral model is propelled by a closed domestic space which then pushes activists out of their space to forge links with transnational actors so that they can safeguard their existence and visibility domestically. In this model activists’ main goal is to bring transnational advocacy into the domestic space in order to bring about change. On the other hand, the boomerang model is believed to emanate from a repressed blockage within the domestic state and this forces activists to move to the international space where they will pursue their activities, in this model a lack of responsiveness to women’s demands is regarded as having the potential to push activists to work at the international level as the domestic space fails to respond to women’s needs. And as Hassim (2009, 243) also argues, linking political opportunities at local and international levels has allowed feminist activists to insert

some policies that are responsive to women's concerns. The presence of transnational social movements and structures within international politics help the domestic activists in pushing for gender equality by adopting global norms and practices that are meant to institutionalize equality agendas; and they use these to hold states accountable to the feminist commitments they have made.

Global norms, standards and practices are believed to exist within most debates in world politics (Khagram et al 2002). While there may be contradictory norms present, the tendency has been for some of these norms to get more acceptance than others and over time some norms get more prominence and influence policy debates, ultimately these get adopted by strong influential actors who frame borders of national debates and in turn influence even state actors in accepting them. These tendencies have been experienced also within the globalization of women's issues where some issues got highly emphasized while others got shaded out. The emphasized issues such as 'women rights are human rights' have thus become global norms that govern gender equality discourses. And feminists at all levels within and outside formal institutions have utilized these in their pursuit of gender equality.

A number of global tipping moments have been responsible for the internationalization of feminist agendas. These moments have largely originated from the transnational space where most UN member states and social movements' actors have participated in creating channels for transnational social change. For instance, Disney (2008), and Sikkink and Smith (2002) posit that the UN decade for women (1975-1985) as well as the global UN conferences on women have provided the context in which global feminisms have emerged and developed. For Snyder (2006, 48) the UN has acted as 'unlikely godmother' as it took the lead in creating spaces for women across the globe to fight patriarchy. In addition, treaties and conventions ratified by states meant to address gender inequalities pushed new and different actors into the transnational space. All these had a great influence on the institutionalization of women's issues and gender mainstreaming globally. Furthermore, Sikkink and Smith (ibid) argue that the signing of treaties and conventions on women's issues by governments has the potential to influence institutionalization of global norms and as

such can bring about social change, however, a direct link between ratification of treaties and conventions on one hand and the attainment of envisaged change has not yet been established.

At the domestic level feminist ideas have been able to enter the policy debates and shaped the way women's concerns are viewed. Tripp and Ferree (2006) have identified three related strategies that have influenced the spread of these global feminist issues and the adoption of international norms at the national level; firstly, in most countries 'women's policy machineries' have been created within state institutions, these policy units have taken different forms such as ministries or departments of women's affairs, secondly, advocacy networks outside of state institutions looking at specific agendas such as women and the law have been created; and these have been able to influence passage of some laws that are meant to address women's legal minority status, and thirdly, women's movement or organizations that embark on research on women's issues have also been established; these have not only managed to forge partnerships with other strategic actors within the policy space as well as outside state structures, but have also acted as information sites on emerging discourses, and in turn this has enabled them to attain 'political effectiveness'.

However Ferree and Tripp (2006, 12) note the contradictions that these strategies have had on the institutionalization of gender equality globally. Instead of reinforcing the process of addressing gender inequality they have displayed both empowering and disempowering effects. For instance, while women's policy machineries have been created as levers for the articulation of women's policy issues, they have been wrongly viewed as the 'end in itself' in that they were left alone to coordinate gender equality initiatives and as a result this has affected the momentum of women's mobilization; gender activists have left the whole women's agenda in the hands of these structures that are highly politicized and under-resourced, but more importantly the agenda has been subjected to bureaucratic and technocratic culture of the state. In the same manner, advocacy networks which have influenced the creation of these policy units within state structures have as well led to the marginalization of the

gender equality agenda as these feminists groups are characterized by a fragmented agenda and unclear mandates among themselves and this has rendered the feminists movement unattractive and foreign. This weakness is attributed to the common practice of these networks of combining both men and women paid professionals and unpaid activists.

On the issue of the knowledge-creation strategies, Ferree and Tripp (2006,14) note that feminists have influenced the theoretical and practical shifts within the gender equality discourses and changed the way women's issues have been addressed by introducing 'new words' within the gender discourses as well as new strategies meant to address gender inequalities. According to this view these activists within these structures have been able to open the space "for the development of transnational feminist theory and identity, creating the free spaces that foster ideological innovation and strategic inventions like women's policy machinery of the 1990s and the shelters for battered women of the 1980s". a number of new concepts and strategies such as 'gender mainstreaming' and 'gender budgeting' have become part of the global feminist language within the gender discourses and have been adopted by both state and non state actors. These ideas have been a product of transnational activism influenced in the main by international conferences such as Fourth United Nations Conference on women of Beijing (1995). This conference has been noted for its unique representativeness as both governments and the broader civil society participated to create these new ideas and strategies. These ideas have thus become central in pursuit of gender equality initiatives and they have been adopted as norms within domestic and international political space. The problem though is that in most cases the new language has been used without clear theoretical grounding by some activists within the policy space.

Though global or transnational feminism is currently getting significant scholarly attention it has not escaped some criticisms, and as a product of globalization it has been associated with Western domination; the physical location of most international non-governmental organizations that are main drivers of feminist change is viewed as an indication of a foreign agenda that reflects the ideologies of the developed

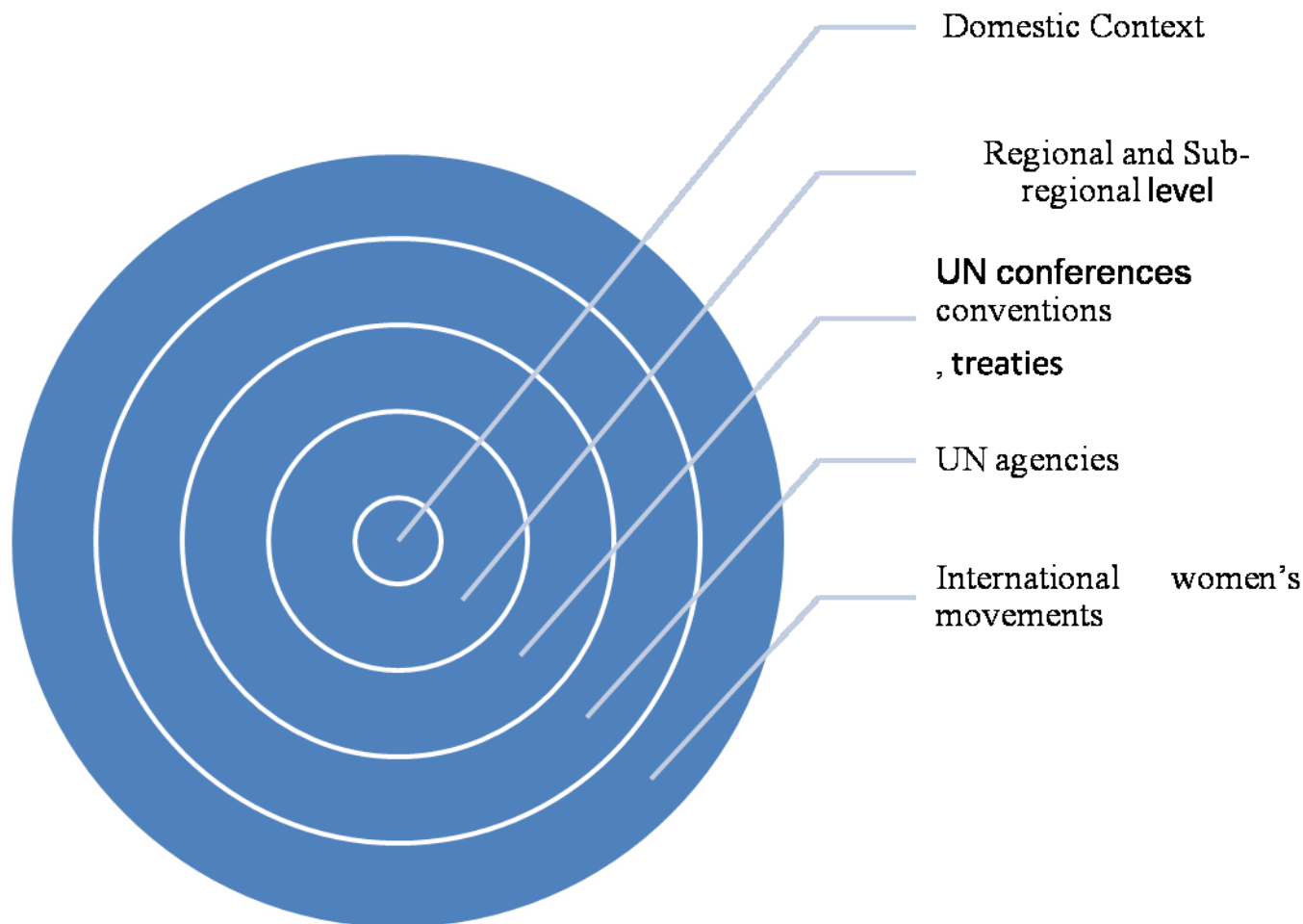


countries of the north (Sikkink and Smith 2002). On the other hand though some authors like Tripp et al (2008) have gone to lengths in trying to convince us that African women have been active participants in the internationalization of feminist ideas, this does not get us much far as in most of the third world countries a number of feminist issues have been introduced without consideration of the ability for implementation of such agendas. Furthermore, while there is consensus on the role that globalization has played in facilitating the spread of feminist ideas, there have been concerns on the impact of globalization on the autonomy of feminist activists and the originality of the feminist agenda. For instance, Khagram et al (2002, 20) question the ability of the globalization of gender equality agenda in empowering women; they argue that in some contexts the presence of elites within national states may be an opportunity to expand feminist support, yet at the same time these same group maybe difficult to mobilize at the transnational level due to a number of factors including cultural differences, but most importantly it is the fact that the expanded support simultaneously attracts expanded antagonism and resistance at both national and international levels.

The experiences in some contexts reflect that gender equality issues have been discussed at international forums without serious commitment as governments fail to domesticate some conventions while on the other hand non-state actors fail to hold such governments accountable. Further, proponents of transnational feminism tend to ignore the opportunistic tendencies of development actors in the implementation of global agendas. As this study will argue, gender equality agenda has been pursued for different political and economic purposes that have nothing to do with women's advancement (for example see White, 1992, Lazreg, 2004). The fact that gender equality became a condition within the donor community has given the opponents of gender equality the platform to link it to foreign ideological invasion. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study the transnational feminism theoretical framework is relevant as it helps us to understand how feminist ideas have travelled and entered the local space and how in turn these domestic conditions have shaped the place of these feminist issues within the policy debates. The study notes the opportunities created by transnational feminists in opening the policy space for women's concerns in Lesotho as well as forcing other actors, in particular governments, to address inequalities

within gender relations. The study uses transnational feminism to highlight the role of the transnational space in creating channels for change and as well as highlighting the need for strong partnerships between activists for gender equality to be a reality. The study uses the transnational feminist theory also to identify actors within the transnational space who in different ways shape and influence the place of women's issues within the mainstream policy debates. This analysis is demonstrated through the graph below.

**Figure 1. The Internationalization of the gender equality agenda**



The above diagram is intended to illustrate the intersection of the local and international conditions that allow feminist activists to interact at the transnational

level. It suggests that transnational feminism is not pursued in a linear pattern as it has been commonly viewed. Activists within national borders are part of the international community, they participate in world conferences, their governments sign and ratify conventions that are meant to drive a feminist agenda, and international norms set at the transnational level to influence policy on women's issues are thus a product of the interaction of different feminist activists across the globe. These norms are not imposed from outside but they are influenced by experiences of women within different contexts. And as Snyder (2006, 25) notes, domestic women's issues have been intertwined with global issues and through women's participation in the UN conferences and treaties, and as such women across the globe "became knowledgeable about global issues and the stances taken on them by governments". Snyder further maintains that as the transnational space shaped the women's agenda, women's issues also became global issues. Nonetheless, it is important to note that this internationalization of gender equality continues to suffer enormous challenges especially "changing the patriarchal attitudes of men and women and *creating a new feminist political culture*" (Disney 2008, 116); these remain core tenets of feminist struggles that need to be fought by feminists at the national and transnational levels. The transnational feminist agenda need not be pushed to margins for 'more pressing issues' as it has been the common practice.

### **Transnational Feminist agendas and democracy**

While gender equality debates picked great momentum during the rise of the democracy and good governance projects (Mid 1980's- 1990s), it has been noted by many scholars that there has been no direct link between democracy and the advancement of women. For instance Hassim (2009) sees little correlation between the democratic dispensation and the political presence of women as well as gender equality outcomes in general. Though she advocates strategic partnership with the state (Hassim, 2005) she acknowledges and supports Disney's thesis of 'dichotomy between state-as-friend and state-as-enemy'. But what seems more puzzling as noted also by Tripp et al (2008) and Htun (2003) is the tendency of even undemocratic regimes to be seen implementing gender equality initiatives that democratic governments are reluctant to commit to. This conundrum has been noted not only in

Africa but throughout the globe where countries considered as champions of democracy have failed to open the political space to accommodate more women. Tripp et al (ibid) further highlights this paradox by noting that undemocratic one-party regimes that constrained freedom have been in the forefront in initiating impressive policy changes meant to improve women's status.

Tripp et al (2008, 220) further note that in different contexts women have been active in liberation and democratizing movements yet democratization seemed not to feature as a factor driving policy change regarding women's rights. According to this argument, the commitment to pass women-friendly laws in a number of countries cannot be directly attributed to levels of democracy as both democratic and undemocratic regimes have shown readiness in this regard. This paradox is explained to emanate from a number of reasons, firstly, the whole world is experiencing ideological shifts which call for change in global norms, as a result governments implement gender equality interventions as a response to these changing norms, related to these changes is the pressure from both international and regional bodies that commit governments to implementing gender equality policies. Furthermore, gender equality has been used by donors as a condition for accessing external financial support and governments that are highly dependent on aid have seen this as an incentive, while on the other hand they want to appear as progressive in the eyes of the donor community, but at the national level women's issues have been driven in order to garner women's votes and support. Finally, in some contexts governments have embarked on gender equality measures simply to push away traditionalists and religious leaders out of policy debates.

While Htun (2003), Tripp et al (2008, 218) and Hassim (2009) have noted the paradox on the implementation of gender equality measures within undemocratic regimes; it seems the conundrum does not stop there. At one level there are some countries in which women's rights were expanded without pressure from women's movements while in some contexts these movements played a critical role in pushing the gender equality agenda within the political space. In Mozambique for instance, it has been noted that the changes were made possible not by the size of the women's movement

but by the strategies employed by women's organizations in partnering with strategic actors such as "political parties, national machinery, ministries, and donors, and the independence that they wielded in forming their agenda" (Tripp 2008, 219) Conversely, the women's movement in South Africa used the state as the site to bring social change and advance women's interests, yet in countries like Cameroon the thesis that the presence of a large and vibrant movement can lead to advancement of women's issues has been invalidated as in this country women's rights have not been effectively expanded. Lastly, one puzzle noted by these authors is the way some legal reforms have been easily implemented while some have been opposed and some legal inequalities have remained unchallenged. Even though the authors argue that this depends on whether the laws are meant to reach the public or private spheres, this study will show that in countries like Lesotho where the women's movement is extremely unorganized and small a number of legislative reforms have been successfully implemented within both the private and public space, and in fact in some cases it has been difficult to bring changes within the public space than in the private space.

Mula Htun (2003) takes the debate of feminist paradoxes within democracy discourses further by showing that transitions to democracy by themselves do not necessarily open the space for legal reforms that address women's rights. She argues that military regimes have on the contrary been able to introduce very liberal laws for the advancement of women. Htun draws a number of suggestions to try and solve this puzzle; for example, she argues that because of the nature military regimes come into power, they try hard to be open and legitimate to society, they consult widely on national issues, they engage both professionals and technocrats and this has the potential to open the policy space for different sectors of the population such as women. The example of this is Idi Amin's intervention of establishing a council of women (ibid,172), and as this study will show in chapter 2, both authoritarian regimes of Jonathan and military regime of Lekhanya created policy structures that were supposed to address women's issues. However, the conundrum gets more complicated as in both cases these structures have been created while simultaneously independent women's organizations were suppressed. But as the evidence suggests democratic governments have not fared any better as the creation of women's policy units under

these regimes has affected women's mobilization, perhaps we can echo Hassims assertion that "discourses of gender equality have rapidly become alibis for African governments to proclaim their modernity to international donors even as they avoid adopting an agenda for democracy" (2009, 243). Furthermore, as Htun (ibid) demonstrates the place of gender equality within the national policy debates will also be shaped by a number of domestic social and political factors. These include the power of traditional and religious institutions; the political culture and the historical journey each country has travelled. But what runs through most scholarly feminist debates on the institutionalization of the global equality agenda is the opportunistic character of states while little is said about the same character of non-state actors (see for example, Longwe and MacDonald 1997). This study will demonstrate how the transnational feminist agenda has also been manipulated by both state and non-state actors in Lesotho for both economic and political gains.

### **Transnational Feminism and Africa**

Global feminist ideas in Africa entered the policy space through African women's participation in international forums that were meant to address gender inequalities. As Tripp (2008) highlights, feminist activism is not an imposed agenda on African gender equality discourses; instead, it is central to women's mobilization within and outside state institutions. Of course the transnational space has had an impact on the way African women have organized to address gender inequalities, Tripp et al (2008, 194) cite a number of factors that have influenced the shifts in the way gender equality has been conceptualized and addressed. These are "women's movements, international bodies and foreign donors, regional bodies such as SADC". These pressures acted as incentives that compelled African leaders to adopt transnational norms. Tripp et al (ibid.) continue to show that African governments were generally responsive to UN efforts to create national machineries to advance women and to international treaties such as the CEDAW. However, the readiness and capacity to commit resources toward realizing the goals of these institutions were often illusive. This has been the biggest challenge in incorporating women's concerns into the state and policy apparatus. However, it is important to understand that African women's

movements have mobilized from both the domestic and through the transnational advocacy networks and space to effect policy change.

Whereas the spread of transnational feminism has been attributed largely to international forums and institutions, some feminist scholars have shown that this type of analysis tend to promote a European hegemonic ideology as it tends to overlook and undermine the role that regional sites of interaction such as the AU and SADC have played in shaping global feminist discussions (Ferree 2006). A number of African regional gatherings have had a great impact not only on governments within the continent but they have also influenced major thinking on women's issues at the international level. According to Tripp et al (2008, 221) this tendency to ignore African contribution emanates from the "marginalized position of Africa in the global context". This marginalization has not only led to the invisibility of African women's voice in global feminist discourses but it has significantly affected the way African women's contribution to discourses of the global women's movement has been perceived. Of course the global feminist influences have impacted on the way African women organized but it is equally true that African women have continued to contextualize their approaches and define their own agendas. And as Tripp et al (ibid, 228) continue to argue, "African women's movements have responded to the challenges of inequality by engaging regional and global actors in order to advance their own goals at home. They have been linked with international women's movements to lobby the UN and other multilateral agencies as well as foreign donors....they have relied on international treaties and conventions to press their agenda at home, and have engaged regional organizations to do the same". Given this analysis it is therefore safe to argue that transnational feminism is a product of both regional and international interaction of feminist advocacy, African women have strategically used their presence within international space to push for the adoption of new international gender norms, yet it will be remiss to ignore the structural domestic dynamics that shape a global agenda and the place of women's issues within the policy space within individual contexts, hence the need to take a holistic approach in analyzing factors that shape the institutionalization of a global agenda.

## **Presenting a feminist paradox! The Rationale**

Research on Basotho women and development interventions has been a rich minefield for outsiders. These researchers asked questions that were influenced by their preconceived ideas about Basotho and their way of life. In different ways the answers they got confirmed their curiosities without necessarily reflecting the true nature of Basotho women's political struggles. Since from colonial times to the present little is known about women's political interests and struggles and the ways in which the political context influences their choices. By not asking relevant political questions researchers have missed on understanding the role of politics in shaping women's advancement efforts as well as the extent to which different actors have operated in shaping the content and nature of policy debates as they related to political gender equality. Policy interventions that have followed from these studies have thus been void of the politics of gender equality, causing the depoliticisation of women's issues.

Feminist studies on Basotho women's struggles have focused mainly on the impact of economic dynamics such as the migrant labour system and structural adjustment programs. When migration and SAPs lost popularity within scholarly work the shift has been to the impact of the law and women's minority status. While these have been aspects of globalization they have been explained in purely economic terms. Further, gender discourses have tended to treat women's equality struggles in isolation without locating them within the broader global women's movement. The participation of Basotho women in international forums, the government's signature of international instruments on women's issues and the donors' funding of programs targeted at women have all been discussed without linking these interventions with the global feminist movement. But more importantly, there has been also a tendency to treat gender equality struggles as foreign by traditionalists. This study takes a different angle altogether as it sees gender equality issues in Lesotho as part of the global feminist agenda.

A number of policy interventions meant to address gender inequalities have been implemented by different regimes regardless of their democratic level; for instance, a



number of policy structures within government institutions have been created to address women's concerns under both democratic and undemocratic regimes. Furthermore, different laws meant to address legal minorities of women have also been passed by these 'unlikely godmothers' (using Snyder's concept); these laws have been directed to both the private and public sphere. There has been no attempt in current gender discourses to explain this conundrum, but what is more important is the fact that these discourses have failed to link these interventions to the global feminist agenda; the advocacy on legal rights has not been explained in terms of its interface with the global human rights discourses, instead Basotho women legal discrimination has been seen as a unique situation which has to be addressed in a unique fashion, hence some scholars have argued that this has been a misplaced strategy (Makoa 1997) which has not been able to open the political space for women. This study therefore contributes to feminist discourses that try to solve this feminist paradox; it explores the interface between the national political context and processes on one hand, and the articulation of a global agenda of gender equality on the other. This approach has so far escaped the scrutiny of both local and foreign scholars yet an understanding of the persistence of gender inequality depends largely on the analysis of how the political context operates to influence a global agenda.

The importance of context cannot be overemphasised as different political processes and dynamics have the potential to shape the nature of any power struggle including gender equality struggles. In fact political context influences the content of the development agenda to serve the needs of those in positions of power. This study looks at how different political moments influenced the nature of gender debates within the national development agenda. It identifies ways in which different development actors operated to define and address global women's issues under different political regimes from 1966 to 2005. The examination of local political context allows for the assessment of the ability of domestic dynamics in shaping an international agenda to suit the interests of those in political leadership; an approach that is lacking in the current gender discourses on Lesotho.

While most scholarly literature has largely focused on how the state acts in promoting women's issues or controlling them, there has been a tendency to ignore the role of other key development actors who interact at the transnational level to influence the nature of the gender equality debates. This study recognizes that there are a number of actors within both the domestic and international arenas that work in different ways to institutionalize feminist agendas, invariably their approaches and prioritization of women's issues shape the place of these issues within mainstream policy debates. In this way the study contributes to the growing literature that seeks to understand barriers to women's political advancement. Furthermore, gender equality discourses on issues like law, the economy or human rights have tended to isolate politics of representation and have dealt with women's issues in an apolitical fashion. The study starts from the premise that gender political equality is the key to any democratic policy process as it ensures the visibility of different groups within the political space to determine priority areas that would improve their lives. It therefore concludes that the under-representation of women in critical political structures, owes its origin to the way in which the global feminist agenda found its way into national development policy debates and to the way key development actors have operated to define the agenda and the strategies ensuing there from, while on the other hand it submits that unless women are equally represented within the policy space the agenda of gender equality will not be achieved.

Understanding continued gender inequality requires a systematic political and historical analysis of how different actors at particular policy moments define and attempt to address gender inequalities. Both local and international contexts have specific influence on any development discourses and initiatives including gender and development; the meaning they bring to the development arena is very critical. The importance of meaning is highlighted by Kardam as she asserts that responsiveness to gender equality is dependent upon understanding "how gender relations are defined in specific contexts and what the perceived sources of inequality are. Policy recommendations differ depending on how sources of gender inequality are defined" (1995:17). The study maintains that at different historical moments different global agendas have been pursued and the policy choices influenced by these events have in turn influenced the place of women's issues on the political agenda. Hence a need for

a critical look at how such historical events acted as tipping moments for some social change; but these moments need to be understood within the background of how global feminist ideas have penetrated the domestic policy space at different moments and the extent to which such ideas have been manipulated to serve domestic political interests, this approach enables us to understand policy intricacies that are in play in the prioritization and marginalization of certain equality issues.

Lesotho presents an interesting case for investigation as it embodies a variety of contradictions that tend to challenge a number of liberal ideologies. For instance, the high female literacy attainment has failed to open political opportunities for Basotho women as reflected by the persistence of gender inequalities within the leadership positions; and this has left many questions unanswered and a plethora of strategies have been employed to address what have been considered to be women's core issues<sup>15</sup>. Secondly, Lesotho has been largely ruled by a changing state that has varied from authoritarian to a weak democratic regime yet it has been able to drive critical feminist agendas, thirdly, these interventions have taken place without any significant pressure from either the women's movement or civil society organizations. Furthermore, the presence of a strong donor community has on the other hand failed to put much pressure on the dependent governments to implement critical gender equality agendas despite the conditionality of their assistance.

The study acknowledges that just like a number of discourses of development, the current gender discourse carries the notion of an imported or foreign agenda that has been implemented in a particular political context. The study is an attempt therefore to contribute knowledge on understanding how local/national political context operate to shape agendas that emanate from a transnational space. It aligns itself with Ferguson's (1990) assertion that the depoliticisation of a global agenda is problematic in the sense that local politics have the potential to influence the failure or success of such initiatives. In the same manner the study corroborates Makoa's thesis that gender

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<sup>15</sup> According to Qunta (1986) the creation of women's units in Lesotho in the 70s was meant to among others, promote a gender policy to address inequalities, but it took almost more than twenty years before such a policy was tabled to parliament.

inequalities in Lesotho must be treated as issues of political negotiations and struggles, but it goes further to argue that gender equality issues are a component of the transnational feminist agenda as Basotho have not been passive recipients of these issues but they have been involved at both national, regional and international space to shape the content of global debates.

The study provides a systematic analysis of the genesis and persistence of gender inequalities in Lesotho despite the purported enabling gender sensitive environment. Similar analyses undertaken by scholars like Makoa and Epprecht's cover the pre-colonial, the colonial period and the post independence (1966 to 1970); this study however covers the period from independence (1966) to 2005. The periodization and political analysis is based on the regime type, namely 1966 to 1970 first democratic rule after independence, 1970-1985 undemocratic rule characterised by the suspension of the constitution, 1986-1993; military epoch which saw the ban of political activities and lastly, 1993 to 2005 the period of a nascent democratic rule. This periodization takes cognisance of major political dynamics that have direct bearing on policy discourses. Staudt (1986) argues that analysis of different regimes is necessary as states pursue different agendas around women's issues. However, she highlights the danger of focusing only on states as for her, researchers "need to exercise caution about reliance on the state leviathan to transform what it produced or aggravated in the first place" (Page 330). Influenced by this thinking, this study does not only analyse different regimes but also recognises the role of women's organizations and other official development agencies operating under these political moments, and how these influenced their approaches in implementing the gender equality agenda.

The study also intends to contribute knowledge to the larger debate on women, gender and development policy by highlighting the level at which some African countries are operating within the global gender and development discourse, and therefore provides a critical understanding of the basis for differing performance of various states in advancing global issues that concern women. Finally, influenced by feminist agency approach the study attempts to bring women's voice into the debate and acknowledges women's agency in shaping both domestic and transnational policy

discourses. The study tries to avoid seeing women as victims of development but rather as agents who have shaped in various ways the implementation of transnational gender agenda as it is reflected in policy and practice today. Gender equality is seen as intrinsic to democratic governance hence the study contributes to the growing debate on the role of politics in advancing women's visibility in mainstream development debates.

### **Research methodology**

This study embraced a transnational feminist perspective by focusing mainly on how gender relations within the national political space have influenced the institutionalization of global women's issues. Because the political culture of Lesotho is characterised by deep seated patriarchal ideologies, both the voices of women and men in political leadership were considered. Though the study has extensively used historical data it should not in any way be viewed as a historical piece of work; rather the historical information has been used to provide a context for the study which provides a deeper understanding of the origins of the present day gender inequalities. The historical data has been utilised in periodising regime types that have attempted to address gender inequalities. The study should therefore be read more as a political analysis than a historiography work. This thesis is developed through drawing from both primary and secondary sources. The study is therefore predominantly qualitative with quantitative analysis restricted to representation of statistics of women's representation in leadership positions. The qualitative methodology has been used for both data gathering and analysis. A number of research strategies have been employed and these are: review of both unpublished and published literature, interviews, archival work and analysis of primary and secondary data relating to women's issues/gender equality within the policy debates.

#### **Interviews**

Data for this study was collected through in-depth one-to-one semi-structured interviews between March and September 2007<sup>16</sup>. A purposive sampling procedure was used to identify political leaders who formed key informants from different

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<sup>16</sup> Others were conducted throughout the first term of 2008 as I attended workshops and rallies of some of the political parties; in June 2009 I had to conduct about 5 more interviews as I was identifying some gaps.

institutions; these respondents hold strategic positions in both political and policy processes. They included political party leadership that has been in power (both the political parties' executive and women's league); these are Basotho National Party (BNP), Basotholand Congress Party (BCP) and Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD). These were selected to investigate the extent to which the global gender equality agenda has been pursued at party level as well as the extent to which this has been translated into government policy and practice. The chairman of the military rule from 1986 to 1993 was also interviewed to examine how the military regime addressed women's issues in its eight years of rule. Because of political parties' factionalism that characterise the political system in Lesotho some informants who had been in certain regimes had changed alliances or created new parties and as such some were uncomfortable to talk about their former parties. For example, the leadership of LCD had been part of BCP while the present BCP is made of people who felt cheated by LCD. In some cases some politicians who had been instrumental in the formation of LCD formed new parties and were very hostile towards the LCD<sup>17</sup>. These developments affected my study in that respondents were at times subjective in their information about a political party they had abandoned.

A number of respondents were drawn from government structures that have direct interaction with policies that have a bearing on women's political struggles. These included the Department of Gender within the Ministry of Gender, Youth, Sports and Recreation (MGYSR); this policy unit is charged with addressing gender inequality within the society, while the ministry of Local government was represented in the study because of its role in the introduction of gender quotas in 2005. The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) plays a critical role as it interacts with political parties who determine the presence or absence of women within the policy space. A special focus was put on women who head these units. However this selection depended mainly on the availability of such people hence the snowball method became very handy as respondents helped to identify the next respondent because they knew about the role they played at different times in policy development

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<sup>17</sup> The leader of Lesotho People's Democracy had been the deputy Prime Minister in the LCD government but left to form LPC, he had also been in leadership of BCP that won the 1993 election

(Neuman, 2006). In this process new leads were followed as they emerged from identified respondents. Women who have held senior political positions brought lived political experiences and the roles they played in the course of the evolution of the gender discourse. These were women who have headed the following units; a) Women's Bureau (1970s), b) Lesotho National Council of Women (1970s), c) Department of Youth and Women's Affairs (1980s) and d) Ministry of Gender Youth, Sports and Recreation (post 1993).

Furthermore, Gender activists from both academia and women's organisations working on human rights and the law (FIDA and WLSA) as well the Lesotho National Council of Women were interviewed to determine their role in shaping the content of gender equality debates as well as their influence on pushing gender equality within the national policy agenda. The ways in which the gender activists have interacted with state and other non-state actors has been examined in order to determine their level of autonomy and how that in turn has influenced their approaches in addressing women's political interests. In terms of feminist orientation these groups can be regarded as more organised and possess the advantage of professionalism which has enabled them to attract donor assistance. Their mandate has also enabled them to interact with other transnational advocacy groups, government and other civil society organisations and they have influenced a number of reforms that addressed women's legal status. Senior officers from the organizations were interviewed while consideration was also given to women who pioneered in the creation of these organisations though they were not involved in activism anymore.

In order to minimise the bias towards the legal oriented organisations, the pioneers and senior officials of the Lesotho National Council of Women (LNCW) formed part of key informants. LNCW has a longer history and exposure to women and development debates in Lesotho since independence. Some senior members of the Council have been nominated in senior political positions; one was the first female assistant minister during the military rule, while another was nominated into Senate during the BCP rule, and their organisation has been involved in a number of empowerment initiatives. It should be clear that the selection of women's groups was

largely determined by their involvement in policy matters at national, regional and international levels; otherwise it would have been difficult to select any women's group as they are many yet they do not necessarily engage the state on policy matters.

Mainstream NGOs involved in democracy and good governance were also interviewed to investigate their influence on the content and nature of gender politics through their programs. These are the Transformation Resource Centre (TRC) and the Lesotho Council of Non-Governmental Organisation (LCN)<sup>18</sup>. Similarly, these organisations were selected due to their stated policy statements on addressing gender inequalities within their democracy and human rights programs; they have desk officers who are supposed to deal with gender issues within this broad mandate. The LCN has a Women's Commission whose mandate includes coordination of women and children programs of the council's affiliates. As it is the case with women's groups the selection of these NGOs was based on their visibility in policy issues and their interaction with transnational advocacy agendas. As chapter five will show, these organizations have attracted a significant support of donors while on the other hand they have been able to hold government accountable on a number of social issues.

Finally, officials responsible for gender issues within the donor community were also interviewed. The multilateral (UNDP, UNFPA) and bilateral (Irish Aid, American Embassy) development partners who still operate from Maseru were selected, and adjustments were made where some agencies were unavailable or where new leads indicated the need to include such agencies. This was the case with the World Bank which referred me to Washington for information, and Washington referred me back to Maseru which later suggested I should talk to the Bank's office in Pretoria. I eventually decided to drop the Bank from my list. On the other hand I discovered that United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) had been very instrumental in the formulation of the national population policy as well as the gender policy. I then

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<sup>18</sup> Initially the ecumenical groups, the Lesotho Christian Council and the Catholic Justice, Peace and Democracy were included but were dropped at the analysis stage (details are in the Scope section of the report).



decided to include it and interviewed the officer responsible for gender issues. Though the European Union (EU) officers were interviewed it became clear that they did not have a program targeted specifically to gender equality, and it was eliminated from the analysis. These agencies are in fact regarded as the main development partners of both Lesotho government and civil society groups, and just as in the case of NGOs the gender equality desks are housed within the 'governance' programs. The investigation also considered project documents and funded consultancy work on women's issues. A list of all interviewees and related interview guides is attached as appendix 2; altogether fifty interviews were conducted.

#### Policy Analysis: Key Official Documents

The purpose of the document analysis in this study was to explore how the global feminist agenda has been conceptualised and articulated throughout Lesotho's development policy discourse across different political and historical moments. These policy documents were analysed from a gender perspective tracing when and how global women issues entered domestic policy debates, examining how the concerns were defined and how they evolved in meaning throughout the policy discourses, and elucidating how the shifts in the conceptualisation of women's agenda have thus affected women's political visibility within the national political agenda. Trends and shifts around the gender debate since independence were examined highlighting in each case the agenda driven.

A purposeful sampling of major development policy documents was carried out. These included national development plans and other major policies. According to the Lesotho first Five Year Development Plan (1970/71-1974/75), a plan is intended to set forth the Country's development objectives and strategies and indicate the path to be followed for achievement of the set strategies. On the basis of this understanding, the national Development Plans including Five year Plans and Three year Rolling Plans were selected. Following the last Plan (sixth), the major development policy documents have been the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) and the National Vision 2020. The formulation of these two has been described as the most participatory and therefore reflected the Basotho's definition of their development problems. The other crucial public pronouncement is the Constitution

(amended 1993), and the Gender and Development policy (2003), that was analysed in order to establish the extent to which it draws its mandate from both the local and international discourses. The list of documents analysed is attached as appendix 1.

### Archival Sources

With the anticipation that both men and women who have been in government's legislature and senior positions between 1966 and the period of reinstating democracy (1993) would rely more on their recollections rather than empirical information it proved fruitful to make use of archival sources. According to Ngulubi and Tafor (2006) archives contain information that can be used to hold governments accountable, on the other hand Neuman (2006) sees archives filling the gap that recollections present, and for him memory is imperfect and as such it cannot be relied upon. There are four sites holding archival records that were visited to explore records on government's and development agencies' pronouncements on gender equality. These are Morija Archives and Museum, the State National library, National University of Lesotho Archives and the National Assembly library which provided the daily Hansard reports on the discussions of the introduction of the 30% gender quotas for local government elections in 2005. The Transformation Resource Centre library and Professor Ambrose collection of events provided useful additional information.

### *The periodisation*

The study took a deliberate approach of periodization as Lesotho's politics have been characterized by a changing state; the intention was therefore to highlight how under each regime the women's agenda had been conceptualised and addressed if at all. This was categorised into four main critical periods relevant for this study and these include the post- independence democratic era of 1966 to 1970, the authoritative era of 1970 to 1986, the military regime of 1986 to 1993 and finally the 1993 to 2005 nascent democratic rule. Each period had significant political events that impacted on the articulation and institutionalization of the global gender equality agenda. 2005 has been chosen as the threshold because of the SADC head of states' declaration to attain 30% women's political representation by this year. It was also the first time quotas were used in Lesotho's politics, so it became relevant to determine the study's delimitations at this historical moment.

### *Change of focus and challenges: eliminating the church*

Due to the social significance of the church in Lesotho the initial intention was to include it within the study so as to examine its role in influencing gender equality discourses. However after interviewing officers responsible for equality issues in two ecumenical organizations, that have also been involved in international policy arena, it became clear that the findings were not going to be representative as they reflected the views of the mainline denominations only (the Catholic, Anglican, Evangelical and Methodist) yet the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement churches that seem to be drawing huge support from women are not represented in these groups. The voices of Christian Council of Lesotho and Center for Justice Peace and Democracy would therefore not be representative of the Christian community, while on the other hand it also became clear that religious institutions such as the traditional institutions had enormous influence even on the workings of the church itself; all these indicated a need for a separate study that would extensively determine the role of religious institutions in shaping the institutionalization of a global agenda.

### *Challenges*

Negotiating with people to talk about their recollections of their political past had its own limitations as memory maybe selective, however this was overcome by the use of archival records which helped to provide some factual data on policies, laws and dates. Another challenge was that most political activists had changed parties and their attitude towards the parties they left were not objective, this too was corrected by the use of records and triangulating their responses with those of other respondents. As it has always been the case with elections in Lesotho, 2007 elections were followed by political instabilities that were characterised by protests and ‘stay-aways’ that made it difficult to conduct interviews on agreed days. On the other hand in some cases the respondents were clearly subjective in their responses to policy issues because of their anger towards the ruling party which they had abandoned to form a new party that apparently had lost elections

## **The Structure of Chapters**

This section presents an overview of the chapters that follow and discusses why they offer important and complementary insights into how the process of globalisation matters for feminist agendas. Chapter one has presented the background to the aim and problem of this study and has located the investigation within the framework of transnational feminism. This framework gives an insight into how feminists' ideas travel through the processes of transnationalism and highlights the relationship between global gender equality agenda and local struggles for gender equality.

A number of feminist paradoxes characterize gender equality discourses in Lesotho as undemocratic states have championed critical feminist interventions despite their repression of democratic freedoms. This state feminism has seen impressive interventions in the area of education in particular. Secondly, like most countries, undemocratic and weak governments including a military regime have implemented women friendly laws and policies in both the private and public spheres, though selectively. Women's policy units have been created within state institutions and some women have been appointed into key positions within the government, a gender policy has been adopted, almost all international instruments on women have been signed while some have even been ratified. Lesotho regimes have worked with women's organizations, the mainstream non governmental organizations and the donor community in a number of issues that concern women. In fact the state in Lesotho has been visible in driving the global feminist agenda without much pressure from women; however, the state's dependence on foreign assistance has forced different regimes to implement controversial initiatives that at times they seem not to understand. Chapter two looks at how different regimes in Lesotho, since 1966, have attempted to institutionalize transnational feminist agendas and the extent to which their efforts have managed to prioritize certain issues and shaded out others. Lesotho actively participates in international forums that influence changes in global gender norms and practices, and on paper these are articulated widely, while in practice there is a mixture of successes. This chapter draws from feminist discourses that sees the state as both friend and enemy (for instance see Hassim 2009). It highlights the state's strategies that have constrained political gender activism and instead promoted political patronage which has allowed the undemocratic regimes to set parameters for articulation of gender discourses. The chapter highlights the puzzle of

institutionalizing transnational agenda within local politics of authoritarian, militarization and weak democratic regimes.

Since politics underpin success or failure of policy initiatives chapter three is an analysis of the political system and the articulation of the gender equality debates. In the case of Lesotho this approach becomes critical as the political history of the nation has been characterized by different types of regimes. The chapter draws its approach from the thesis that the agenda driven by government depends largely on what the ruling party regards as politically appropriate and relevant, this may present a challenge to commitments made by governments at regional and international forums. The chapter looks at how political parties have determined the place and content of the gender discourses within the national political debates; it further looks at how ruling parties are able to influence the institutionalization of the transnational feminist issues and how their conceptualization determines the choice of issues to be placed on the political agenda. Furthermore, the chapter looks at the role of electoral democracy in advancing the global feminist call for political representation. In order to understand the present day gender landscape as manifested by continuing gender inequalities within the political processes and absence of women in leadership positions, the analysis of the political context within which the women's agenda emerged and evolved is critical.

While women's movements in most Africa emanated from independence and liberation struggles in Lesotho such feminist mobilization has been influenced largely by economic factors such as the migrant labour system and the country's over dependence on foreign aid as well as the apartheid system within the neighbouring South Africa. These factors did not only shape the economic landscape of this tiny landlocked state but it also framed political debates including gender equality discourses. Basotho women have however participated at international forums addressing gender equalities and have been influenced by transnational feminism in their approaches while this participation has also influenced the global debates. The domestic blockages emanating from undemocratic rules and patriarchal ideologies have enabled them to interact at the transnational arena where their governments had

to comply with set international norms. Chapter four traces how Basotho women within the civil society community came to be active in advocating for women's advancement, it looks at their approaches in driving transnational feminist agenda within their domestic context. The chapter looks at how they have domesticated these global ideas and highlights what constitutes the nature of the content of their agenda in influencing policy, it conveniently looks at women's organizations that have participated in regional and international forums on women's issues. But it also recognizes these women's contribution in national policy changes. Two of these organizations, namely, WLSA and FIDA are significantly visible as both professional and knowledge-based advocacy institutions sharing information on women's rights within the country and the region, on the other hand LNCW is being incorporated in this study because of its long history within the women's movement in Lesotho and also because of its ability to pick up different women's issues despite their claim to be non feminist.

While women's organizations examined in this study are part of the larger civil society community, the dynamics of social mobilization within the domestic arena prompted a differentiated approach to the analysis of women's organizations and NGOs that seem to dominate policy debates in Lesotho. Chapter five takes a critical look at the mainstream NGOs in shaping the institutionalization of transnational feminist issues. The chapter looks at these mainstream organizations that have not only attracted enormous funding on democracy discourses but which have also participated in critical international forums on human rights. These organizations have been champions of democracy and good governance yet gender equality seem not to be treated as a human rights and democracy issue. The NGOs selected in this study have also taken government to task on a number of development issues; the chapter further examines the prioritization of gender equality within the mandate of these organizations. They have interacted with donor agencies and the government in a number of development initiatives hence their relevance in understanding the intersection of global issues and the domestic political contexts.

Global development issues have been able to spread throughout the world with the help of development agencies. In its practice the aid industry has been the core site of globalization, and inherently carried with it aspects of conditionality and dependence. The changing of global discourses on issues such as gender equality and gender mainstreaming in particular have been advocated and disseminated by donor agencies. And in aid dependent countries like Lesotho transnational equality issues have been funded by these agencies, in some cases they funded attendance to international conferences or financed research and advocacy work meant to provide knowledge on women's rights. Chapter six gives a critical analysis on the workings of donor agencies in institutionalizing transnational feminist agenda in Lesotho. The chapter recognizes the role that the donor agencies have played in enhancing the articulation of global gender equality issues within policy debates in Lesotho, and the extent to which these agencies have interacted with other actors such as the state and NGOs in an effort to institutionalize some feminist agendas.

Chapter seven summarizes main findings of the study by looking at how each development actor has played the role of advancing or restricting some aspects of transnational feminism. It highlights gender equality issues that have been prioritized within the domestic policy discourses and accounts for the marginalization of some of these global issues. Furthermore the chapter gives a conclusion on the paradoxes of changing global discourses and the manner in which they get translated within local politics. It highlights how despite the strong forces of globalization the domestic forces can determine politics of engaging policy issues. It concludes by looking into areas for further research.

## CHAPTER: TWO

### State and the Transnational Gender Equality Agenda

*Yet, these are the very same governments that have heretofore perpetuated the kind of gendered policies that disempowered women within gendered bureaucratic organisations. Should women work in, with, or against the state? Can state bureaucracies empower women? (Staudt K., 1997; 4)*

#### Introduction

This chapter looks at the role played by Lesotho's different political regimes in shaping the nature and place of global gender equality agendas within the domestic policy debates from 1966 to 2005. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section takes a critical look into debates around state feminism and tries to explore its intersection with global feminist agendas. Section two analyses domestic policy and legal interventions meant to institutionalise global feminist agendas by different regimes; it provides a policy and legal context within which the transnational feminist agenda has been pursued. The third section attempts to highlight government's attempts to align itself with international commitments to gender equality through the creation of women's policy units. The political motivation to establish these structures is analysed as well as the extent to which they have been able to open political space for the women's agenda. The chapter is therefore an attempt to unpack the feminist puzzle within the intersection of discourses of 'state feminism' and transnational feminism by looking at how Lesotho regimes have attempted to institutionalise feminist ideas as well as political motives behind such interventions.

#### State feminism

The role of the state in institutionalizing women's issues within national development debate has been the focus of recent feminist discourses (for example, see Staudt 1997, Hassim 2009). However, there is no consensus on both the capacity and political commitment of the state in addressing gender inequalities. There are some scholars who argue that the state can be used as an avenue through which women's issues can



be advanced (Waylen, 1996; Gouws, 2004; Hassim, 2005). These analyses contend that engaging the state from within its structures is likely to place the women's agenda on the policy priorities of the state. They maintain though that on its own, the state cannot be accountable to women unless there is a strong women's movement to make feminist demands (Hassim, *ibid*). Conversely, there are some who argue that the patriarchal state cannot be trusted to advance women's issues (White, 1992; Stuart, 1997; Goetz 1998). According to this view, the state has been opportunistic in that it has used women's issues to access funds from the donor community while in some cases it has used the agenda to pursue other goals to score political points.

Sequel to international conferences on women, governments committed themselves to address gender inequalities in their respective countries. A number of norms and standards guiding these feminist commitments have been instituted though with varying successes. A number of states' efforts to institutionalize transnational feminist agendas have included processes of policy and legal reforms as well as creation of women's policy units within governments' bureaucratic structures. Such efforts have been largely a product of global women's movement calls for governments to take practical institutional measures to address gender inequalities while in some cases there was also domestic pressure especially in countries that were experiencing liberation struggles. In most cases, these regimes have done this without a clear conceptualisation of the inequalities within their borders and have thus driven the agenda at the detriment of women's agency. For example, instead of reinforcing existing grassroots women's organizations, some governments have in fact competed with these groups for funding and have always had an upper hand as in most cases foreign aid is channelled through government departments.

Governments' efforts to integrate gender equality through state structures have been labelled as state feminism; the term that has been attributed to Helga Hemes (Mazur, 2007). There are differing views on what constitutes state feminism. While women's units within the state and activities focusing on women's issues have been generally described as attributes of state feminism, Valiente (2007:538) has argued that certain attributes need to exist in order to achieve state feminism, these include:

*formulation of policies that sometimes help some sectors of the female population....that these policies be implemented to a significant extend. Women's policy machineries can achieve different degrees of state feminism ...they may also include in the policymaking process the demands advanced by the women's movement (if such demands exist), and /or help women's movement actors gain entry into public decision-making arenas. (Emphasis added)*

Taking the argument further, Mazur argues that state feminism is not only the state's acting on behalf of women, but it calls for the women's policy agency to demand the presence of feminist actors and their agenda within the policy making processes. According to this view, "achieving state feminism, therefore, is more than the representation of women's interest or even demands of the women's movement groups. It is the representation of feminist interests and actors making feminist claims to produce feminist outcomes" (2007: 508). This view helps us to see state feminism as a strategy through which transnational feminist agendas can be translated within the local policy space. However this can work for women to the extent that it can be accessed by gender activists to demand governments' responsiveness. Otherwise, on its own, it can actually work against women's agenda. Hassim (2005) maintains that engaging the state is "not a misguided strategy" hence it can be argued that when strategically engaged the state can actually benefit the feminist cause. This has worked for South Africa as state feminism has become an avenue for opening the public space to women to pursue their agenda and South African women have actually utilized that space. Political representation of women in the South African legislature is among the best. As the UN secretary once remarked; 'it puts the UN to shame'. But this could not have been the case if the country did not have a strong women's movement that has a clear feminist agenda gained through exposure to liberation struggles.

It should be noted that as countries differ in a variety of economic and political systems the nature of state feminism will differ as well, in some contexts some characteristics of what constitutes state feminism may not feature, for instance women appointed to head women machineries may not necessarily see themselves as

representing feminist constituency, yet their presence within the government structures can be utilized by vibrant women's movement to demand accountability to women's concerns. This therefore means that a rigid standard definition of state feminism cannot be helpful in understanding state's role in intervening on women's behalf in the context such as that of Lesotho.

As earlier indicated, there are opposing perspectives on the capacity and commitment of states to address gender inequalities. For example, Lazreg (2004) argues that there is a general lack of political will from states to implement policies that address women's concerns. She argues further that the problem with third world governments is that their engagement with gender issues is driven by outside pressure; and as such, they do not own the gender agenda. For her, the space is 'made available to women for political reasons that have little to do with women's advancement'. Pessimists of state feminism argue that it is a political strategy that privileges elite women who are related to powerful men (Mama, 1997), yet, in some contexts, the space created by this phenomenon has been applauded for putting women in the public space. Strategies employed by governments to increase women's political visibility have varied across countries. There have been common tendencies such as appointment of women into non-portfolio positions, creation of women's units including offices for the wives of political leaders. The impact of these initiatives has varied under different contexts and they have received varying responses from the feminist scholarship. For example, the notion of 'first lady' as an aspect of femocracy has come under strong feminist attack. Yet, there are some who see these women as creating a pool of women that can be used to penetrate the political space and increase women's representation.

Because of the patriarchal nature of the state and its domination on policy processes, the women's agenda may get marginalized through choice of policy priorities. Even where gender policies exist, there has been a tendency for the gender agenda to 'evaporate' within the implementation stages as no serious commitment and expertise is provided. But because the agenda offers financial and political gains, governments have usurped processes of driving the agenda despite their lack of will and capacity.

This has led to the ‘ghettoization’ of women’s issues. As Escobar (1995:184 citing Mueller 1991:6) highlights:

*when the issues and political aims of the women’s movement become knotted up with the ruling apparatus, it is no longer on the side of women in the third world or first world. I want to be clear: this is not a damnation of feminism as in itself imperialist, but a recognition of the power of ruling forces to appropriate our topics, our language, our action for imperialist purposes which can never be our own.*

It should, however, be emphasised that in a context where there is no strong feminist consciousness and democratic rule, the state has actually manipulated the gender agenda. While at the same time women have benefitted from this opportunistic character of state. This has been due to donor pressure that also has a different agenda. However, Hassim suggests that this could be rectified through ‘creating linkages with power brokers within political parties in order to ensure ongoing engagement with the political system” (2005). This view is relevant only to the extent that the political system in question is committed to principles of good governance that include inclusion and representation as key to democracy. But what remains a challenge for feminist scholars is to establish the extent to which states take a deliberate and conscious decision to sideline the feminist agenda, or whether this happens because, the state is left with no choice as a number of dynamics work against the implementation of the agenda. For instance, governments might formulate policies, not because they really want to effect change, but primarily to respond to certain pressures. But it is also true that in some cases, they may recognise the significance of liberating while on the other hand the absence of strong women’s interest groups militate against principles of political participation as women concerns are not communicated within the political feminist perspective.

Since the powerful development agencies such as donors have decided to sponsor gender issues through national governments’ institutions, it is critical to understand

the context within which states can effectively respond to women's demands in a context where a women's movement is so fragmented that it lacks a common agenda, but most importantly to understand how an undemocratic government can be the champion of a liberal democratic agenda such as gender equality while on the other hand it is so dependent on donor assistance for policy change. States have adopted policies and strategies meant to institutionalise global feminist norms that include appointment of women into positions of power and drafting of women's policies. All these have taken place within the state's structures that are still controlled by the entrenched patriarchal ideologies as well as patronage politics. Unfortunately, even pockets of successes have been found in areas that do not challenge power relations within the decision-making structures. As Hassim (2005) has argued, the inclusion of the 'term gender equality' in state institutions and policies has failed to address issues of power such as redistribution of resources and decision making. She further shows that the result has therefore been the persistence of unchanged structural forces that perpetuate women's oppression. The following sections look at how different Lesotho regimes have attempted to institutionalise the transnational gender equality agenda through policy and legal reforms as well as through the creation of women's policy units.

### **Lesotho Political Regimes and the Feminist Puzzle: Policy and Legal Legacies**

Lesotho is a member of the international community and as such participates in the transnational space where it commits itself to certain global norms and standards through the signature of international instruments that are meant to address gender inequality. As highlighted in chapter one this arena includes international and regional conventions and treaties. The signing of these instruments has significantly affected the content of gender debates as well as the place of some women's issues within the domestic political agenda, yet gender inequality remains a major political challenge. At different moments, state regimes have claimed commitment to the demands of these conventions while their domestication has remained a critical concern. For example, though Lesotho signed the convention on women's political rights (International Convent on Civil and Political Rights- ICCPR) way back in 1974, the women's agenda of political representation has not formed core business of any of the

regimes that have ruled the country. Nonetheless almost all regime types that have ruled the country have selectively implemented very liberal feminist interventions regardless of their democratic status.

This conundrum was evidenced throughout the post independence rule. For instance, although during Jonathan's rule (1966- 1985) there was no policy to guide interventions for women's advancement; a number of projects targeted at women only were implemented. Government officials participated in international women's conferences in Mexico 1975, Copenhagen in 1980 and Nairobi in 1985. As a result of this participation for instance, the women's commission was created in the prime minister's office, and the CEDAW was signed though without ratification. On the other hand it was during the military rule (1986) that for the first time a woman was nominated to the position of a minister (assistant). This was a regime that had not only taken over government powers from a civilian rule, but it had officially banned political activities. Needless to say, this nomination attracted a lot of criticism from women's groups while the military leaders used it to boast about their gender sensitivity and to dismiss the influence of the 1985 Nairobi Looking Forward Strategies which the country had committed to implement. For example according to the ex-chairman of the military council:

*We did what no other government had been brave to do, we had seen how women were treated under BNP and we felt it was our responsibility to recognise their ability. We picked a woman who was already well known within the women's movement.<sup>19</sup>*

Some gender activists, however, saw this as 'a cosmetic appointment' (Shoeshoe 1991, 3<sup>20</sup>) which had nothing to do with any gender sensitivity. This sentiment has been shared by a number of gender activists who maintained that the minister did not serve any women's interests despite having been the founding member of a number of

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Major General M. Lekhanya, ex-military leader and current BNP leader, May 2007

<sup>20</sup> Shoeshoe was a women's magazine that was sponsored by some development agencies

women's groups. On the other hand, the concerned ex-assistant minister argued that being in the position of assistant minister meant that she was not allowed to attend cabinet meetings. She defended her role by showing that being in this position was in effect disempowering, she argued:

*I had no platform to push the gender equality agenda as I did not participate in the executive meetings; the only way I was able to garner support was to lobby certain men who seemed to be sympathetic to the women's cause to present any issue on my behalf that I wanted to push through. This I would do outside official cabinet meetings.<sup>21</sup>*

She further argued that the success of this depended on how individual men viewed the credibility of whatever she proposed. She highlighted that most men were not free to be seen pushing women's issues as they were labelled as 'stupid/weak'<sup>22</sup>. This situation was coupled with the fact that the military council had 16 men and Mrs Hlalele was the only woman in the council. In addition to the intimidating military environment, she was the lone voice on issues that would not get any support from the army that had different priorities altogether.

The signing of the CEDAW also has its own interesting dynamics. Firstly, it was during the military rule that the ratification of the convention was given prominent publicity. The regime committed itself to endorsing the document without reservation. However, the instrument was only ratified in 1995 under the BCP government and this was with reservations on issues pertaining to some aspects of tradition as provided for by the Constitution. It has not been easy to establish why different regimes have found it proper to safeguard discriminatory principles within the Constitution despite their pronouncement of upholding democratic principles of equality. However, looking at the political context within which this instrument was signed, there are a number of factors that could have worked against its adoption. For

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<sup>21</sup> Interview Hlalele, June 2007

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Hlalele, June 2007

example, during the military rule, there was no pressure on the army to adopt this instrument to influence government's decisions, either by women's groups or donor community. Furthermore, it would be probably difficult for the soldiers to challenge traditional institutions on matters that carried sensitive political arguments while their own existence as 'government' was highly questionable. It seems, however, that they may have brought the issue to the public domain simply to appease the international community from which the agenda originated. Secondly, every government that came into power after the signing of the Convention has maintained the discriminatory clause on the basis that this was in line with safeguarding culture. There is no evidence from the field or literature suggesting that there has been any attempt by any government to discuss with the traditional institutions the merits or demerits of abandoning the discriminatory clauses. Perhaps, these institutions have been used as scapegoats by patriarchal states that benefit from perpetual female subordination.

The implication of the failure to ratify the Convention without reservation has led to a number of contradictions. For example, the reform of a number of laws has met with resistance as in some cases the customary law has been applied. The customary law carries with it principles of male- dominance. In the same manner, issues of succession within chieftainship and monarchy have been a dreaded territory and women still act on behalf of their sons and incapable husbands<sup>23</sup>. Women's absence in leadership positions of these institutions are very critical as these are core sites of socialization for many people.

Finally the post 1993 civilian rule has seen visible state interventions on women's issues, however a number of paradoxes continue to characterise state's approaches, for instances, though the gender policy is said to have been derived from the principles of the Beijing Platform for Action (Gender and Development Policy 2003), it is worth noting that the policy itself became an official document eight years after the Beijing conference. Few of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for

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<sup>23</sup> Though King Letsie III's first child is a girl, she cannot succeed her father but her younger brother is already called an heir to the throne.



Action (BPFA) have been partially addressed. Furthermore, despite the government's commitment to domesticate UN conventions such as the CEDAW and ICCP (2003), there are no concrete mechanisms, except the quota legislation of 2005 Local Government election, in place to facilitate equal political representation and as such, women are absent in processes that shape the development debates and processes of their country. The commitment emanating from the 1997 SADC Declaration on Gender and Development on 30 percent representation of women in decision-making has as well been a highly dreaded area for the national elections.

As earlier indicated, partly due to the pressure from regional bodies in 2005 that the move to bring women into the political space through quotas was legislated, and this was during the time Lesotho was the chairman of SADC, and it had to be seen setting example for the region. This was done for the local government level while the national level still remains highly impenetrable for women. On the other hand some gender activists have argued that the drafting of the gender policy cannot be attributed to the SADC Declaration, but probably the BPFA and donor pressure, for example according to the national coordinator of WLSA<sup>24</sup>, the SADC head of states were influenced by the BPFA themselves. Yet, we cannot ignore the fact that the Declaration had demanded that states must put in place policy framework to inform feminist interventions and that within this call political representation is highly prioritised while the 30 percent quota is also explicitly suggested to be achieved by 2005. Similarly the tenth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing made the same demands; all these put pressure on government and for Lesotho, the election presented an opportunity to be seen as committed to gender equality.

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with Matashane-Marite, May 2007

*The Transnational Feminist Agenda within National Policies and Development Plans*

From 1970 to 1999, Lesotho adopted five year national development plans in addressing development issues. Goetz explains these plans as public statements that express “politically chosen priorities for change and progress” (1998:65). These plans can be used to guide various sectors in planning and prioritising issues such as those related to inequalities. Despite having acceded to UN conventions on women’s advancement as early as 1974, Lesotho’s first, and second and third five year development plans failed to raise women’s issues at all within their priority. This was so despite the purported women’s political contribution in putting BNP into government in the 1966 election. Furthermore, the government had created women’s self-help groups that saw many women involved in community road and dam construction, yet these did not feature in official documents. The same government had boasted of having offered them an opportunity to vote, yet, it failed to prioritise their issues in the national development plans. Most significantly, this government came into power during high male migration to South African mines and plantations, and as such, most development initiatives relied on the cooperation of women, yet their interests did not form part of these national development statements.

Interestingly not only did the BNP government drop women out of its 1970 manifesto, but its government also ‘omitted’ them in the first Five Year National Development Plan of 1970/71- 1974/75, except to attribute poor agricultural harvests to women. The Plan notes “...ploughing done by women and children is often nothing else than scraping the surface and yields are correspondingly low” (page 12). The government failed to link poor harvest to agricultural policy and the migrant labour system which did not afford the men to send money for agricultural inputs but instead blamed ‘women’s weakness’ equating them to children. Women’s time poverty and burden as a result of assuming household headship was not noted by the technocrats who designed the Plan.

The same Plan also highlighted its intention to increase the labour force by “creating employment opportunities for 4000 males and 2000 females” despite the fact that

most Basotho men had already found work in South African mines. It should be noted that when the government embarked on labour-intensive road construction as a way of 'creating employment opportunities' for women, they were paid with food parcels, yet when the men got retrenched from the mines in the 1980s and got employed in the Labour Construction Unit (LCU), money was then introduced. Women's participation in this construction earned them the name "*likhofu tse matsoele*" literally translated into 'breasted caterpillars'. Ironically, despite having been involved in construction for so many years, women-owned construction companies today are less than 5% while ownership and operation of transport services is predominantly in the hands of men. This suggests that their involvement in these initiatives was unplanned and served political interests at particular moments.

The Second (1975/76 - 1979/80) and Third Five Year Development Plan (1980/81-1984/85) did not treat women differently from the first Plan. However, the Third Plan highlighted women's multiple responsibilities. Yet again, they are blamed for 'inertia or lack of response to development initiatives'. The Plan acknowledges women's minority status that originates from the traditional society which has given men higher status. It goes further to note that:

*Women have extensive powers and responsibilities through reciprocal obligations and their position as mothers and housekeepers.... Due to the migrant labour system women have had to take on the increased burden of being household heads and farm managers in about 60 per cent of households.*

On the basis of this, the Plan recognized the importance of women in development and women were therefore targeted as a specific group for 'a number of programmes'. It should be noted that at this point, women appeared under the chapter on 'rural development' which at this time was a global development strategy embraced by donor agencies throughout the third world. This strategy was able to divide rural women from urban professional women who felt they were being marginalized (Motebang, 1995), and one gender activist and academic, Ntimo-Makara, argued that the gender equality interventions targeted at rural women failed to benefit from

transnational discourses due to the educational level of rural women who could not challenge political authorities<sup>25</sup>. Conversely some believe that the strategy was benefiting the rural women who form the majority of the poorest and that the abolishment of the strategy has impacted negatively on rural women as funds have now been allocated to urban-based women groups. The former minister of Foreign Affairs under the BCP rule, who is currently the leader of an opposition party, argued that rural women are being left out in the gender discourse as the urban elite women are the ones attending international and regional conferences and are the ones that interact with government and donors<sup>26</sup>.

Another interesting aspect of these two Plans is that, despite the creation of the Women's Bureau in 1979, the unit was not referred to in any of the Plans. This gives an indication that the unit was the creation of external pressure; hence the policy technocrats could not even acknowledge its existence in the policy documents. Its functions and mandate are discussed later in the chapter; suffice to note that the Bureau did not only oscillate between ministries but it lacked accountability as it was used by regimes to attract external funds.

It was only in the Fourth Five-Year Development Plan (1986/87-1990/91) that a clear statement of intent by the government to address gender inequalities was made. The Fourth Five-Year Development Plan came immediately after a number of significant historical moments. These are; the Nairobi Women Conference and resultant Forward Looking Strategies, a Military coup, Structural Adjustment Programs and resurgence of civil society movement as well as the end of the UN Decade for Women. It did not come as a surprise then when the Plan addressed women under a separate section. In fact, it was during this plan that the concept 'gender' was first used. The Plan highlights achievements made by women as a result of the UN Women's Decade (1976-1985). These successes, according to the Plan, are 'peace, equality and development'. The Plan, however, indicates that "further action by the government is

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Makara who is an academic and gender activist, June 2007.

<sup>26</sup> Interview Maope, leader of LPC, May 2007

necessary to reaffirm the status of women as priority area in the Fourth Five year Plan, and by so doing, provide a framework for renewed commitment to the advancement of women and the elimination of gender-based discrimination” (section 17.27). Among proposed activities to be achieved by the Plan are:

*A comprehensive and coherent national women’s policy, to accelerate the integration of women into the mainstream development programs, establishment of consultative mechanisms; supportive ties with women’s organizations, establishment of a Commission on Women and Development; intensification of skills-training activities and leadership training, establishment of a legal section for the purpose of investigating laws which discriminate against women; and establishment of research section responsible for receiving and disseminating information pertaining to women’s issues.*

It should be noted that few of these were realized during the time of the Plan. For example, the women’s national policy was accepted by government only in 2003, while most of these never came to fruition except the law commission which was conceptualised in the early 1990s. These include the creation of the Commission, the legal section, leadership training, the research section and a lot of others that were highlighted in the Plan. The Plan also mentions the Bureau of Women’s Affairs and the government’s intention to strengthen it so that it would be more effective; yet, the state minister who was responsible to oversee the activities of the unit, was not allowed by law to participate in cabinet meetings as she was holding a non -executive position of assistant minister.

The Fifth Five- Year Development Plan- (1991/92- 1995/96) was implemented within the global poverty reduction approach and during an era of democratic transition, while at the global and regional level the human rights discourse influenced major policy reforms. According to one BCP leader<sup>27</sup>, the 1990s called for a new way of

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<sup>27</sup> Shakhane Mokhehle - member of the BCP executive who became the Minister of Law and Human Rights after 1993 elections that BCP won.

looking at women. He emphasized that it was time to see women as full human beings like men. He argued that true democracy cannot be achieved if some part of the population is denied equality. He maintained that democracy is worthless without proper respect for women. According to him, “any future democratic government in Lesotho will *rely heavily on women to get votes in 1992*. There will be a clear obligation weighing on that government to stop treating women, who number half of the Basotho nation, as second citizens” (Shoeshoe, 1991). Mokhehle’s utterances on women’s votes speak volumes on how women’s issues have manipulated. Incidentally, according to the WLSA national coordinator, it is this minister who questioned the credibility of WLSA to be talking on behalf of Basotho women as he maintained it was a regional body not a local initiative, she reported that the minister refused to engage in any dialogue with the organization until it was locally registered as a ‘ Basotho agenda’<sup>28</sup>. Needless to say she later appreciated this attitude at the time the regional body was experiencing institutional and leadership crisis, the national chapter continued receiving donor assistance because of its national registration.

The Fifth Plan emerged at a time when the civil society was vibrant and the global development discourse was also emphasizing democratic governance as well as a shift away from ‘women’ to ‘gender’. The Plan acknowledges women’s contribution to family, community and national development in the absence of men who spend most of their time in South Africa. It further notes that despite this contribution, the Lesotho’s legal system recognizes a female as a minor who depends on a male guardian even for legal matters that affect her. It goes on to show that women occupy middle management positions in civil service despite their high educational attainment and that this influences easy upward mobility for men to occupy decision making positions. Enhancement of legal status of women was therefore identified as the priority for the future development of Lesotho. The Plan sees the marginalization of women as emanating from the law which fails to protect them from exploitation. This exploitation is seen at family and in business; (the Plan ignores the political marginalization and the impact of culture). Because of this, the government pronounced itself to address the situation through embarking on a comprehensive

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Matashane- Marite, May 2007

national policy on women and development, based on the ratification without reservation of the CEDAW.<sup>29</sup>

Similar to the previous Plan, the government highlighted its intention to fully integrate women into mainstream economic development. It however, emphasized its intention to shift away from ‘women- only’ projects since “these tend to perpetuate the subordinate status of women in the household”. Law reforms in favour of women featured again as priority area particularly in areas such as ‘inheritance, contracts and access to credit, marriage, divorce, maintenance, adoption, pension schemes as well as the review of all existing legislation with a view to challenging it to reflect the aims of the Human Rights Act’. It is worth noting that a number of achievements that were made came after the period of the Plan. For example, though the Law Reform Commission was initiated in 1993, it only became functional in 1997, while the law that addresses married women’s access to credit was enacted in 2006. The language in the Plan is highly influenced by the global human rights discourse hence so much emphasis on legal intervention with less focus on political marginalisation.

When Lesotho went to Beijing to attend the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, it had no gender policy except the draft that government had ‘hijacked’<sup>30</sup> from the women’s organizations. According to some gender activists, the commissioning of the drafting of the policy was met with a lot of frustration imposed by government officials in the ministry of planning. Among others, the authors of this document were accused of belonging to the opposition party and were not therefore trusted to be honest in their dealings. On the other hand, some gender analysts have reported that the drafting of the policy was a collaboration of different ministries and NGOs (Letuka *et al.*, 2004). The analysis further posits that the draft was circulated widely across the country before it was presented to cabinet. Nonetheless, a number of women politicians seemed to know little about the content of the policy. However, in

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<sup>29</sup> The ratification was done in 1995 with reservation clauses on issues that relate to chieftainship and religion, and the clauses have remained so

<sup>30</sup> Molapo, Marite-Matashane interviews May 2007

her speech at the women world conference, the 'first lady' who was head of the delegation to the conference, highlighted the government's commitment to working with women's groups and empowering women. She mentioned that the 'late signing' of the CEDAW was the result of political regime changes which later produced a government which had a "clear policy on women; namely; a non-sexist approach to manpower production and development."<sup>31</sup> The speech failed to disclose that the convention was signed with reservation and that the government was not interested in 'women' but in 'gender' and that it abolished the Women's Bureau for whatever reasons it may have had, but most importantly her government had no clear policy on as purported.

The Sixth National Development Plan (1996/97-1998/99) adopted the Sustainable Human Development approach and it was the first three year rolling plan. The Plan also came after a number of international and regional advocacy milestones in relation to women's issues, for example, the Beijing Women's conference in 1995 with its Beijing platform for action that committed governments to take clear steps to advance women's issues. In the Plan the section on 'Women's Participation' appeared under the chapter on economic and social development (Section 3.51). After highlighting women's contribution to socio-economic development (53% of households are headed by women, 72% of small enterprises are female owned, 45% of manufacturing enterprises are employees are women, 35% of 'headmen' and chiefs are female), similar to previous Plans this Plan underlines the impact of the law on women as contributing to women's marginalization. The discrimination, according to the Plan, is a result of the application of the customary law at local and central courts and civil law by Magistrates' Courts, the High Court and Appeal Courts. There is no mention of the socialisation of men and women by patriarchal institutions which is so central in framing leadership debates.

The Plan in Section 3.52 highlights the contradictions within the civil law that also treats women whose marital status falls under the community of property as legal

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<sup>31</sup> [www.un.org.esa/gopher-data/conf/fwew/conf/gov](http://www.un.org.esa/gopher-data/conf/fwew/conf/gov).



minors. Because of this, the government's priority is to take measures that 'will reform the law and remove obstacles to women's participation in economic activities, including access to financial resources for investment and operation of their businesses.' The Plan failed to see the discriminatory laws as a symptom of entrenched patriarchal ideologies imbedded in various traditional sites.

Though the seventh national development plan was drafted, it never became a public document for referral, and according to the economic advisor in the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development<sup>32</sup>, this was the case because government had just agreed to adopt the IMF-WB driven Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) as well as the National Vision 2020. The Vision 2020 (May 2004) document highlights that one of the democratic principles that Lesotho has achieved is 'gender sensitivity' (page 10). The document discusses 'gender equality' as a subsection of "a stable democracy'. It goes on to show that Lesotho women are able to gain upward mobility in different sectors of the economy because of their attainment of higher education. According to this document, Lesotho has a 'clear policy and legislation on gender' (page 12). This is emphasized despite the fact that up to 2006 women could not access credit without men's consent, and also despite the absence of women in corridors of power. The statement further highlights that as a sign of commitment by government to advance gender equality, "Lesotho has signed and ratified the CEDAW, albeit with reservation on certain sections that have constitutional implications regarding customary laws, the church and chieftainship". There is no explanation on this reservation and its impact on women. Because civil society groups, including women's organizations were represented in the drafting of this policy it could be argued that the change of the language within this process benefitted from their advocacy.

Nonetheless, the Vision 2020 policy argued that the main challenge for the government is to "uproot discrimination and appoint more women into areas of

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with an expatriate expert in the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, April 2007

responsibility and decision-making in both the public and private sectors. Another challenge is to uplift women without neglecting boys and men”. One notable shift, in this paper, from previous policies is the move away from legal intervention to issues of representation which had just emerged prominent within regional feminist advocacy. Yet again, it brings a new argument that has recently dominated the gender debates, namely, empowering boy children. This assertion is supported by Gill’s observation (1994:227) who argued that gender equality in Lesotho was reached through sheer necessity and as a result, there has been an increasing view even among women that “men, with their poorer education, their diminishing job prospects and their greater susceptibility to debilitating conditions such as alcoholism need more attention and input than hitherto”. This view has not only dominated the content of the gender discourse lately but it has affected the way in which issues of women representation have been discussed. Most politicians, including some women, have argued that there is no need for affirmative action in favour of women as women are their worst enemies by not electing each other especially when they are many in numbers and are more educated.

The 2003 Gender and Development Policy draws its mandate from the constitutional provisions that recognize every citizen’s human rights and freedoms. The policy emphasizes the ‘gender’ analysis approach and that it is guided by the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action and all the UN conventions and agreements of international conferences as well as regional and national instruments. The purpose of the policy is “to facilitate proper integration of gender issues in development to ensure full involvement, participation and partnership of women and men, girls and boys in both their productive and reproductive lives” (3). The policy is seen as a framework from which policy makers can address gender inequalities across different sectors. Priority areas identified in the policy are poverty and economic empowerment, education and training, youth, power, politics and decision-making, health, gender-based violence, civil society organizations, environment, and science and technology.

At another level a number of women politicians and gender activists interviewed for this study have expressed their concern that the policy is the property of government

department as there is minimal consultation. They are also concerned that the Department of Gender lacks vision as it sometimes embarks on issues such as advocacy, which should be left with the civil society. According to a number of women politicians, the department consults women's groups only if there is a demand from donors to 'show-off' that they have consulted other stakeholders. One woman politician who is also the president of the BCP women's league argued that this is done in a way that such groups are used as 'rubber-stamp'<sup>33</sup>. Another woman who was an ex-senator and founder of New Freedom Party, Mrs Majara also mentioned that the Department comes to women's groups if there is an international gathering to be hosted by the country, and women are encouraged to attend so as:

*to fill the conference hall and rubber stamp what the Ministry has already decided. The department is not answerable to women but to government and the ruling party as indicated by the choice of leadership of the unit.*<sup>34</sup>

Issues of leadership in government institutions was also highlighted by some government officers who maintained that the feminist agenda suffers from a leadership crisis as senior officers in the ministry are not appointed on the basis of their competencies but are mainly appointed on the basis of their political affiliations. The problem with this is that at the end no serious engagement with women's issues will take place. It also became clear that the contents and strategies of the policy are not known by most women.

On the other hand the director of the gender department and a senior politician of the ruling party have argued that the drawing of the policy was inclusive and that the ministry worked with a number of women's groups such as WLSA. They have argued that women politicians are not interested in policy issues. However, one FIDA official confirmed that women politicians are left out of major gender debates yet they are the ones expected to push the gender agenda on the national political front. She argued that this trend is also depicted in the SADC Gender Protocol which ignores women politicians. In her view, these women are the only hope if women's representation in

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<sup>33</sup> Interviews with Mrs Mateboho, the president of the BCP women's league, June, 2007

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Mrs Majara who was also a chief and founder of New Freedom Party, June 2007

leadership positions is to be achieved<sup>35</sup>. While these sentiments may be legitimate at times the Department is forced by the absence of a vibrant women movement to address certain ‘political’ issues, and then finds itself having to fight battles that should be the responsibilities of the civil society. This was the case with the issues of 30% representation for 2005 Local government elections which was contested even by civil society groups. The Department of Gender and the Ministry of Local Government had to push this agenda as though it was a government’s agenda, rather than being seen as the agenda of the women’s movement.

Though the ‘gender’ perspective was strongly emphasized by the post-1993 regimes, it took more than 5 years for the cabinet to approve the gender policy presented to it. It has been impossible to access cabinet records on the discussions on this policy, but it is possible that this policy was delayed on the basis of technicalities of usage of certain concepts that did not conform to dominant patriarchal perspectives on equality. As Harrison illustrates; “by their very nature, because gender relations are socially constructed, they are subject to change and influenced by other aspects of differentiation” (1995, 39). Similarly the Government Secretary mentioned that while the policy delayed at cabinet it would not have passed if it were to go through National Assembly<sup>36</sup>; this highlights how the political space is becoming narrow for feminist interventions, and gives an impression that this policy did not originate from the domestic political space.

As it has been the case in Lesotho, the ‘gender’ discourse became part of the development debate in the 1990s, not in the 80s as it did in the West (Connelly *et al.*, 2000:62). This approach is also referred to as the ‘empowerment approach’ that owes its origin from the socialist feminist perspective. The GAD approach identifies the link between women’s status in society and their material conditions as well as their position at different economic levels:

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with Ms forere, gender legal activist and official of FIDA, July 2007

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Sekhamane who is a senior government official (Government Secretary) above that of Principal Secretaries, April 2007

*Moreover, women's material conditions and patriarchal authority are both defined and maintained by the accepted norms and values that define women's and men's roles and duties in a particular society (Sen and Grown cited by Connelly et al). ... **The focus is on the relationship between women and men, not on women alone.** Gender relations are seen as the key determinant of women's position in society, not as immutable reflections of the natural order but as socially constructed patterns of behaviour- the social construction of gender- which can be changed if this is desired. (Emphasis mine)*

The argument has been quoted at length to highlight the significance of conceptualization of a political global agenda and the extent to which such understanding can affect its domestication within different political contexts. It became quite clear that there was confusion on why the emphasis shifted from women to gender in the context of Lesotho, even among officials in the Department of Gender. Some reported that the shift was primarily a result of the international shift from WID while others claimed that it was because GAD was also addressing men's interests. Also, some gender activists expressed their concern that gender has become a confusing term as it has diminished attention on women who are still underrepresented in key decision-making processes. According to Mapetla who is a gender activist and chairperson of WLSA governing board:

*through the GAD approach the Government of Lesotho recognized males and females differentiated socialization; and challenges of the male-dominant. Therefore it claimed that it did not view gender equality and equity not as simply a 'women's issue', and rather took a holistic approach to ensuring that both sexes contribute equal effort to the development of their homes, their communities and their country, receive the same protection and treatment before the laws of the land and share the same entitlements and opportunities society has to offer. Indeed, all the strategies described in this policy [the Gender and Development Policy] have been written from this perspective. But sometimes I doubt if the ministry understands this, not only do their statements portray some confusion but their approaches as well leave much to be desired.<sup>37</sup>*

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Mapetla, an academic and gender activist, July 2008

As this statement shows, the understanding is that GAD emphasizes on affording men and women the same treatment. However, the conception within the gender policy seems to emphasize that men and women are marginalized in the same manner by society, hence the need to ‘talk’ about both sexes. The policy seems to play down the fact that the gender relations put women at a marginal position when compared with men. The issue of ‘treating’ both sexes equally has appealed to men as it does not claim that women are marginalized. The adoption of the gender concept has been raised by male politicians who felt that it was less threatening compared to the use of ‘women’ or feminist agenda. For example, one politician argued that women’s groups that adopted the gender approach were easily accommodated as they do not ‘attack’ men. He mentioned that as long as women’s agenda of political equality is pursued by women groups that embrace a ‘*feminist*’ approach; i.e. that talk about ‘*women’s oppression*’; male politicians will not support it as it blames men for women’s subordinate position. He reckoned the best way to win the battle is through negotiating with men in a way that is less threatening<sup>38</sup>. This way of defining women’s political issues has shaped both policy and strategies meant to address gender inequalities and have narrowed the political space for women’s political rights.

The analysis has highlighted that Lesotho government policy statements on women became part of the state’s business only in the 1980s despite the country’s signing of international instruments from 1975. More significantly, there were already *ad hoc* projects targeting women that were not necessarily influenced by any policy directives. At the time women featured in these documents, the emphasis was more on their motherhood role and subsistence production. Domestic science became the strategy to integrate women into the economy while little was said about their social and political positions. The initial rural development strategy that informed most government’s business did not either open the political space for women or even improve their social status. The shift of focus in the late 1980s to legal advancement also paid less attention on women’s political advancement. Most of the political statements about women seemed more of a ‘suggestive rhetoric’ (Goetz 1998) as their presence within the political space has been minimal.

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with BNP leader, May 2007

While the first three plans were silent on women's concerns, except their focus on reproductive roles such as maternal issues, it can be observed that one key issue across the development plans is their emphasis on women's legal minority status. Women's absence in decision-making positions came only after 1995 and even then, the policy statements are not clear on concrete measures to correct this situation. The Plans and policies also seem to depoliticize women's issues as they fail to attribute women's marginalization to the patriarchal nature of the political system. Despite acknowledgement of women's marginalization within leadership positions, the policies treat this more as a legal issue than a political one. The absence of women from decision-making is highlighted without locating this within the narrow conceptualisation of democratic governance principles the high educational attainment of women is used as an excuse to the failure of government to address women's political invisibility. None of the statements questions the content or quality of education which fails to equip women with leadership skills and political confidence. In fact, one NGO activist questioned the ability of women to 'groom' political leaders. She argued that:

*women give birth to girl children; they teach them how to become good wives, why can't they instil leadership skills in girls so that they grow up looking forward to take leadership positions<sup>39</sup>.*

What this argument misses is the fact that the women that are expected to 'groom' these girls are themselves not in leadership positions and have not been groomed into leaders as well. They are members of the society that sees women as minors who can only be followers and submissive participants.

The shift to 'gender mainstreaming'<sup>40</sup> and empowerment have been adopted within a constitutional framework that endorses discrimination based on culture. The strategy

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Mokokoane August 2007. She was also the women's commissioner during the BNP government.

has been pursued within highly patriarchal institutions. In turn this context has enabled transnational forces to influence policy changes and gender mainstreaming has been adopted by different departments though without serious commitment to the idea. At another level committed activists could make use of this political opportunity to demand mainstreaming the political leadership.

### *The Transnational Feminist agenda and the Domestic Legal Context*

When the first national government came into power in 1966, there was no legal framework to guide government and women's groups to address gender inequalities except the Constitution which highlighted equality of all regardless, of sex or religion. However, the same Constitution endorses the minority status of women as provided by the customary law which treats married women as minors of their spouses while unmarried women are minors of their fathers or male relatives<sup>41</sup>. This instrument has suffered a number of abuses as different leaders have been able to suspend it whenever they wanted to. For example, between 1970 and 1986, the BNP government ruled without a Constitution which it had suspended after its defeat of the 1970 elections. According to Ferguson (1994:106), the BNP leader Jonathan, declared the state of emergency and suspended the Constitution and announced that "for the sake of 'law and order,' the present government would continue in power". In order to get donor recognition and assistance, the BNP government created what it called the Interim National Assembly, while the military rule that toppled BNP in 1986 as well ruled without a Constitution and instead, established a National Constituent Assembly which co-opted some civilians as members who were expected to pave a way for a democratic rule. The nomination of members into these undemocratic structures did not consider representation of marginalised groups to be core to a democratic transition.

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<sup>40</sup> Valdeaville E. (1995) defines mainstreaming as the process and strategies of making women's needs and perspectives an integral part of the overall development work of government, as opposed to a separate concern.

<sup>41</sup> Section 18 (4) (c)



According to Shoeshoe's editorial note (1991), it was the interim Assembly which rejected the motion that proposed a legal reform that was meant to review laws that discriminate against women. According to Wilkens *et al* (1988), this Assembly constituted nine women out of a membership of 93 who were not necessarily drawn from the women's movement. On the other hand, Maope (1984) argues that, though Lesotho was signatory to the 1953 ICWPR, the BNP authoritarian rule (1970-1985) failed to advance women's political representation as it had 15 ministers who were all men and among 20 Permanent Secretaries, only two of these were women. Ironically, despite these gender imbalances the government continued to enjoy the flow of enormous financial assistance from the donor community due to Jonathan's public attacks of the apartheid rule.

As earlier mentioned, the military rule as well ruled without the Constitution but with decrees. Interestingly, according to the Lesotho Government Yearbook and Diary of 1989, the military regime pronounced its policy stance on the constitutional right on political participation by highlighting that its main focus was to return the country to true democratic participation yet the same regime emphasised that:

*Party political activity, which has reduced government into monopoly of a few over 20 years of independence, **has been suspended until such time that a new constitutional framework can be drawn** (emphasis added).*

The manipulation of the highest law of the country lasted for 23 years as was vulnerable to opportunistic tendencies of undemocratic regimes. This Constitution was reinstated and amended after democratic elections of 1993. However, in 1995, the King<sup>42</sup> suspended it though his rule lasted less than a year. This highlights the vulnerability of the legal instruments under undemocratic regimes, and as such, this law cannot be trusted to protect the rights of marginalised groups such as women. In

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<sup>42</sup> The King has constitutional rights but not executive powers so he had to suspend the Constitution in order for him to make executive decisions

the absence of a strong civil activism women's issues have always been pushed to the margins of policy struggles under these circumstances.

Although the Amended 1993 Constitution of Lesotho and Bill of Rights guarantees equal rights for both men and women, the adoption of the dual legal system has marginalized the intentions and impact of the Bill. Women's legal position has also influenced perceptions of both women and men about women's political capacity and leadership. The stereotypes created by this position extend to the public space as women are not seen as full citizens and cannot therefore lead.

Democratic regimes of post-1990s have proposed a number of legal interventions proposed to address the negative aspects of the system on women with the intention to abolish laws that are discriminatory. These include the laws on inheritance, maintenance, 1992 Pensions Order No.12<sup>43</sup>, Sexual Offences (2003) and the legal capacity of married persons (2006). These changes have been implemented without revisiting the reservations made in the CEDAW. It should be noted that the dominant reason for keeping some of the discriminatory laws has been the preservation of culture (Mokhehle, Sekhonyana<sup>44</sup> interviewed by Shoeshoe, 1991; Motebang and Dyer, 1991; Gill, 1994). Motebang and Dyer (1991:14) state that before 1995, "there have been consultations between government and NGOs to find the best way of ratifying the CEDAW, *whilst maintaining positive aspects of Sesotho culture*" (emphasis added). In the same manner, the ex-minister of foreign affairs in the BCP government argued that he advised the government to sign the convention with reserved clauses related to custom and religion because according to him:

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<sup>43</sup> According to Hlalele, women who got their pensions before this date did not benefit from this Order. She has been fighting to correct this anomaly with the democratic governments but she claims she has not been heard. (Interview)

<sup>44</sup> These were leaders of the big parties; namely BCP and BNP respectively.

*I knew then that Basotho people, both men and women, were not ready to intervene with the principles of these institutions, and I don't believe they are ready even today*<sup>45</sup>.

He highlighted the respect and value that Basotho attach to chieftainship and that issues of succession in this institution cannot be dealt with instruments that originate from outside. He also argued it would not be easy for any government to convince religious leaders to change their leadership ideologies in relation to women using this law. There was no point; therefore, to ignore the clauses as in practice, the law would not be respected by these institutions. Another example of how culture has been used to justify some practices was during the discussion of the Sexual Offences Bill. Most male parliamentarians argued that the Act was interfering with family life and Sesotho customs. The issue of culture has been used primarily by politicians in order to maintain male supremacy within the political system. Both Mokhehle and Sekhonyana, for instance, argued that their parties were ready to recognize women's political leadership, but that must be pursued within the parameters of the Sesotho customs. When the BCP leader was asked about the party's policy on putting women in leadership positions, he was quoted as saying:

*We shall give women equality basing ourselves on the provisions of the Constitution, but we shall make sure that this does not affect our Sesotho customs and practices; we don't want our culture to be eroded by foreign practices* (Shoeshoe, 1991:4).

Ironically, another reason used to discourage implementation of effective gender equality measures has been the constitutionality of such interventions. During the discussion of the legislation of the gender quotas for 2005 Local government elections, most MPs argued against this measure on the basis that it was 'discriminatory' and therefore, 'unconstitutional'. On the other hand, the proponents of gender equality have argued that the country had no option because it 'has signed international instruments that bind the country to implement.'<sup>46</sup> This type of argument has rendered the gender agenda to be viewed as a foreign agenda that has to be

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Maope who is a lawyer and political leader who also served as deputy prime Minister under LCD, May 2007

<sup>46</sup> Rakuoane. Thabane, Khaketla – National Assembly daily Hansard report 2005

followed mainly to please donors and as a result, it has been more of a token and rhetoric as it lacks ownership by local policy makers.

Therefore, it can be concluded, that both the Constitution which is a supreme democratic legal instrument and cultural ideologies have been used to perpetuate women's subordination has been manifested significantly within the political culture. Both men and some women politicians have argued that women are not ready to lead because culturally, they are not meant to lead men. One BNP politician claimed that his party tried several times to push women to take leadership responsibilities but women shy away and prefer to push men for such positions,<sup>47</sup> he argued:

*Our party has the largest women membership, we did not even believe in having a women's league as women have always dominated. Similarly the BNP government has always believed in women's strength and a number of them have occupied senior positions; the problem is that women don't just want to contest the political space, maybe they are not ready. What else can we do?*

Although a number of legal interventions have been implemented to eliminate discrimination against women, there are still a number of areas that reflect continued gender inequalities. A great challenge remains for the legal fraternity to institutionalize and apply the laws to include women's political rights. However the presence of the laws by themselves will not bring any change. Women need to be present in decision-making positions so that they can motivate the responsiveness of these institutions. As the situation stands now, legal interventions have effected some significant changes but the political space seems to be narrowing as even some political gains are being lost. From this analysis it has become clear that one factor that has managed to influence the institutionalisation of a global agenda is the domestic legal approach which for intents and purposes is the prerogative of the state, and it is also clear that while undemocratic regimes cannot be expected to effectively

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with BNP leader and ex-chairman of the military council

influence legal reforms democratic ones need to be supported by a strong feminist activism that has clear mandate.

### **Women's Policy Units: Institutionalising the Transnational Feminist agenda**

Women's units were first created by governments globally to institutionalize feminist agendas in the 1970s. In most cases, these have been created as a response to global commitments to gender equality, especially after the women's conference in Mexico. These units, according to the UN definition, are institutions that deal with the promotion of the status of women (Squires, 2007). They emerged after the Mexico International Women's conference of 1975 and became part of the development agenda as a "result of the priority given to it in the World Plan of Action adopted at the conference" (Sawer 1998:112). From this event, governments were encouraged to create units or agencies to promote gender equality and improve women's 'status and conditions'. These units have adopted various nomenclatures such as women's bureaus, women's policy agencies (Sawer, 1998; Lovenduski, 2005) women's machinery or women's departments/desks (del Rosario 1997; Geislar 2004).

Women's machineries owe their origin from the theory of state feminism as they are units created within state bureaucratic structures to address women's issues. According to Waylen (1996), analysis on state feminism has concentrated mainly on western experiences and less focus has been given to third world experiences of engaging the state from within. Perhaps this might relate to the fact that in most third world countries, there has been a tendency to shy away from pronouncing 'feminism' as a strategy to address women's issues. While Valiente (2007:530) sees these units as 'a continuum of women's activism in different locations', Parpart *et al.*, (2000: 117) argue that the liberal-feminist theory that influenced the creation of these special units for women is "interested in reforms that will improve the condition of women and *are less concerned with issues of empowerment and changing the position of women*" (emphasis added). This perspective has been dominant and has influenced the implementation of the gender equality interventions across national governments.

Women who headed these units have been referred to as ‘Femocrats’ while the states’ efforts to address gender inequality through state-created institutions have been called femocracy. The origin of this concept is traced from Australian politics of the 1970s as feminists who went into the women’s policy positions were described as femocrats (Sawer, 1998). The concept has been popularised, ‘both by friends and enemies as well as more neutral observers’ (Yeatman, 1990 cited by Sawer *ibid*: 115). For instance, Mama (1997 cited by Ibrahim) sees femocracy as an undemocratic “female power structure, which claims to exist for the development of ordinary women, but is unable to do so because it is dominated by a small clique of women whose authority derives from their being married to powerful men, rather than from any actions of their own”. It should be noted that in the case of Lesotho, these units have not been necessarily headed only by women. At some political moments they were headed by men and as the leader of Basotho National Party (BNP) pointed out in an interview before 1993 elections, though his party supported the advancement of women, it did not support the idea that leadership of these units should necessarily be in the hands of women (Shoeshoe, 1991). In fact, it was during both BNP and military regimes that the Women’s Bureau was placed under structures that were headed by men; i.e. the Prime Minister’s office and the chair of the Military Council. Similarly, under the congress rule, the unit was initially placed under Ministry of Planning which was dominantly run by men. The only difference is that it was never under the Prime Minister’s office. Even under the LCD rule, the Principal Secretary, of the ministry of Gender who in practical terms wields enormous powers is a man.

Several views about the role of these structures in addressing gender inequality have been expressed. Some have seen them as a product of the dominant patriarchal ideology to marginalize women’s issues within the political agenda as they are controlled by male bureaucrats who dominate the state apparatus. Lazreg (2004:2) has argued that the space created by these units has been “constrained by their very nature; they are male-defined and dominated, and are usually made available to women for political reasons that have little to do with women’s advancement”. Perhaps, one would add that they have been created at the detriment of the women’s

movement agency as they shift donor attention to the state-sponsored initiatives. Some have however seen them as an avenue through which women can work through the state structures to push the women's agenda on the national policy debates (Watson cited by Waylen, 1997). The varied experiences of these units on advancing gender equality suggest that there is no single answer to their effectiveness and responsiveness.

If the basis for creating these units in some parts of the world was to engage the state from within so as to push the global gender equality agenda, this was not necessarily the case in Lesotho. It was more to respond to external pressure than as part of the local policy agenda. This view is supported by a number of public statements made by political leaders who made reference to the demand of donor agencies. For example, in his address to the donor community in 1984, the Prime Minister highlighted that Lesotho, as a member of the United Nations, has entered into a number of agreements that are meant to fight discrimination against women and as such, the country is bound by these agreements. Though he mentioned that his government created the office of women's affairs because it realized that women play an important role in development initiatives, his emphasis on the international influence might suggest the need to absolve government from blame for the non-implementation of the agreements. He also proudly argued that he was committed to women's freedom as he felt he had done women a favour. He announced, "I have since worked hard for women's enfranchisement" (Prime Minister's speech; 1984:37). The subsections that follow present policy structures that have been created by different regimes that have ruled Lesotho between 1966 and 2005. The analysis attempts to elucidate the extent to which these structures have managed to influence the place of the transnational women's issues on the domestic policy agenda under different political contexts as well as how they are themselves the product of the global feminist advocacy.

### *The Women's Bureau*

The first structure created within the government structures to address women's issues in Lesotho was the Women's Bureau which was created in 1979, four years after the Mexico conference and just a year before the mid-Decade of Women (Country Report 1981). The Bureau was government's machinery created to coordinate women's activities among others. This unit was created by the BNP government, which by this

time was unconstitutional as it had taken power by declaring the state of emergency in 1970 after its defeat in the polls. According to the Prime Minister and the commissioner of the Bureau, this unit was formed as a response to the 'arising awareness of the role of women in development' and *greater concern expressed by development agencies in Lesotho* (Gill 1991, 157). This sentiment is shared by Wilkens *et al.*, (1988) who argued that the Bureau was created as a response to a number of international conferences and interest of donors in WID projects. The Bureau was created without any domestic policy or legal directive and as such, lacked vision and direction on issues that it had to deal with. As Dyer and Motebang (1995, 10) noted, until 1985:

*there was no policy directive to enable the Bureau to be incorporated into planning structures, but neither did the Bureau provide an adequate lead to the government on the type of directive needed. The budget of the Bureau at various stages in its existence indicates that it was very much a donor-led initiative, responding to the international enthusiasm for 'Women in Development' which coincided with the women's Decade.*

Similarly, Wilkens *et al* (Ibid) further denote that until 1988, the Bureau had not drawn any significant Plan of Action to guide the government on the role the unit ought to play in order to allow women to participate fully in the development of the country. The Bureau was not the only unit that suffered a lack of policy directive. According to Van Dusen (1985), the ministries that accommodated this unit such as Ministry of Cooperatives, Rural Development, Youth and Women's Affairs, as well as Ministry of Interior, Chieftainship Affairs and Rural Development were not guided by any policy framework on how to address women's issues. According to this report, explicit statements about women's issues were instead spelt out in the Ministry of Health's policy and these were mainly on family planning, breastfeeding and pregnancy leave.



A number of gender activists interviewed for this study had differing views on the role of the Bureau in advancing women's issues. Some have argued that in addition to the ambivalence of the regimes on the role of the unit, another aspect was the politicization of the unit. They argued that it failed to institutionalize the women's issues because it lacked autonomy as it was controlled by male politicians who had a different agenda while women who headed the unit were also cronies of the ruling regime. On the other hand, some NGO activists maintained that the politicization of the unit was meant to weaken the existing women's organizations which were seen by the BNP government as being led by members of opposition parties<sup>48</sup>. Further, some have argued that the marginalization of urban and professional women led to the demise of the Bureau as rural women who were targeted by the unit were unable to engage the state to be accountable and more importantly, they were not consulted on a number of projects meant to benefit them.

The other aspect that needs to be highlighted is the political context within which the Bureau had to operate. Because of the political instability and patrimonial politics that have characterized the political landscape in Lesotho, it could be argued that addressing gender relations would not form core business of undemocratic rule as that talked straight to issues of democratic principles. In addition to coordination and policy roles that the Bureau had to play, it also had to act as a secretariat to the highly politicized Women's Self- Help group that was also created in 1979 (this is further discussed in chapter four). Other activities included organizing training in home economics-related activities for women. According to Gill (1991), these in most cases were inappropriate and unsustainable but despite their irrelevance, there were always donors who were ready to sponsor them. One example given was the administration of a Revolving Fund that was donated by Swedish Aid. A number of women's activists maintained that such funds never reached the women who had to benefit from them. Though rural women were the target of the development projects, a number of urban women became beneficiaries of such initiatives as they were appointed to administer and run such projects.

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Mosala July 2007

Some sympathizers of the unit have argued that the Bureau had some successes but was understaffed and tended to be marginalized by the government, in particular the military regime. What they fail to dispute though is that the Bureau failed not only in its coordination task, but it was unable to draft a women's policy, let alone to mobilize women to demand legal equality and political representation. In fact, on the issue of political representation, the commissioner of women's affairs made it clear that her office did not support appointment of women into leadership position through affirmative action, but that they should contest elections with men on the same footing (Mokokoane, 1984). When interviewed for this study, she still held the same sentiments that:

*Women can contest political positions without any favour, what is needed is proper political education for both women and men. The current calls for quotas undermine the very principles of democracy as there is no law that prevents women from participating equally with men<sup>49</sup>.*

Unfortunately, this is the view that is held by a number of women who occupy positions of power and they don't understand how other women cannot rise to these positions. These women ignore the core sites of patriarchy that socialize women into being submissive. They look at themselves without analyzing how some of them have actually benefitted from their relationships with powerful men. Finally, a number of studies have been written that show the successes and failures of the Bureau, and most of these have highlighted a clear failure. Hence, Dyer and Motebang (1995:12) conclude that "the Bureau was little lamented when it was dissolved in 1993".

#### *The Department of Women and Youth Affairs*

Similar to the Women's Bureau, the Department of Women and Youth Affairs that was created in the 1980s failed to coordinate development activities pertaining to women's organizations as well as to draft a policy on women's issues. The

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<sup>49</sup> Mokokoane interview July 2007

department's mandate was to co-ordinate development activities pertaining to women's organizations, formulate, appraise, evaluate and monitor women's projects, provide training in skills and appropriate technology and improve the economic and legal status of women and disseminate information on their activities. Though the department was established some years after organizations like the Lesotho National Council for Women; it failed to take any lessons from such organizations which had well-established policies and were already affiliated to the international women's movement. These organizations had experience in mobilizing funds and had embarked on various development projects and programs without government's support. It would seem that the department's failure to undertake its set mandate was a result of a number of dynamics including its approach on engaging women's groups and also due to lack of government's clear vision and political will.

According to the 1993 UNFPA report, the department's planning unit was managed by only two officers and it never had its own budget line. The department has also been accused of distancing itself from women's organizations and instead embarked on projects targeting women without consulting the intended beneficiaries. Furthermore, it did not conduct any baseline surveys to inform its programs. As a result, most of its efforts failed to change women's positions within the society. Another problem cited by most respondents is that the department lacked accountability as it was headed by people who knew little about gender issues. The ambivalence of the government on the mandate of the department is manifested through its "tenuous evolution" and its failure to make effective progress towards achieving its set objectives. The report further highlights the department's lack of clarity in defining its mandate, whether it was a coordinating or implementing agency, or a policy-making institution (page 43); this feature has characterised almost all women's policy units.

When BCP came into power in 1993, it saw the women's Bureau and the Department of Women's Affairs as products of the WID approach which it considered to be discriminatory. The government argued that inequality issues affect both men and

women. Influenced by this perspective, the newly formed government of BCP abolished the Bureau and Department of Women's Affairs in 1993. BCP approach towards women's issues is marred by a lot of puzzles and contradictions which have lasted for years. After dissolving the Bureau, the BCP charged the Ministry of Planning with all women's issues. The justification for this is not clearly articulated. However, this ministry was located close to external funding and the assumption could be that the aim was to convince donors that the government was serious about gender issues which were attracting lucrative financial injections. However, it has been reported by some government officials that a coordinating role was delegated to the Department of Sectoral Programming within this ministry, in addition to its other duties. This was tied between the desk officer of the sector and officers of other ministries which had projects that targeted women (Dyer and Motebang, 1995). The problem, though, was that the technocrats who were expected to drive equality issues were not in any way interested in women's issues.

For instance, it has been argued by some gender activists that "the Beijing preparations by government were done in a vacuum with no official/state commitment"<sup>50</sup>. Some have argued that the then Minister of Planning was very indifferent and hostile to women's participation in the Beijing conference as he questioned the significance of their involvement while he had no problem with civil servants, including men to attend.

The attitudes of the officials at this unit did not only frustrate the women's organization but also the donor organizations such as the UNDP which were trying to support Lesotho's participation in the conference. According to some NGO activists the agency found itself caught in between the animosity between government and women's groups and times it 'did not know who to work with'. The shift though came only in 1997 when a new ministry of Women's Affairs under Mamoshebi Kabi was created. This was later renamed Ministry of Gender, Youth and Environment in 1998 and soon after, it changed this nomenclature to Ministry of Gender, Youth and

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<sup>50</sup> Interview, Molapo June 2007

Sports in 2000/1. It later added 'recreation' to its name. When asked about reasons of the shift in the party's stance on having a separate ministry for women, it became unclear except to locate this change within the commitments of the 1995 Beijing Women's Conference<sup>51</sup>.

### *Creation of Ministries*

One other puzzle with the implementation of global feminist agendas in Lesotho has been witnessed in the creation of ministries. Ministries that focus solely on women's issues have not been created by any of Lesotho regimes. Though the post-1995 saw the creation of ministries whose names contain the word 'women' (1997) or 'gender' (2000), these have always been tied to other departments such as environment, sports and recreation and youth affairs. Though it has been argued by the director of the ministry that the post-2000 ministry emphasises the significance of 'gender' as its title begins with 'gender', one thing clear is that the unit in reality is a 'department' of gender within the ministry of many other things. It has been argued by a number of gender activists that in fact the ministry's interventions have been dominated by sports and youth issues driven enthusiastically by the Principal Secretary who is male (his current deputy is also a man).

Although the Ministry has been able to draft the gender policy, it has been argued that this was the result of the pressure from UNFPA and UNDP. Yet according to officials of these agencies their role has been to complement the work of the government of Lesotho through capacity building not to dictate on what to go into the gender policy. On the other hand, one activist who had earlier worked in the department as a political desk officer argued that the poor performance of this unit has nothing to do with the gender equality agenda itself. He maintained that this has everything to do with leadership of the ministry. According to him, one example of leadership incompetency can be observed in the appointment of junior staff members who are given tasks that they are incompetent to perform due to nepotism within the unit. He further cited another problem which influences implementation of feminist agendas as the politicisation of the unit by the ruling party. The government is seen to be working

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<sup>51</sup> Interviews, Matashane, Mapetla, Letuka, Makara, June- July 2007

with groups or individuals who are party favourites and as such, the ministry is failing to utilise skills and knowledge of professionals who are not party members. However, this has been disputed by WLSA officials who felt that they have been involved and worked constructively with the ministry and that their organisation operates from a non-political stance.

Another intervention that owes its existence to the transnational feminist agenda has been the creation of the gender focal points within different ministries who were, in most cases, junior female staff, who could neither take any decisions nor initiate any interventions. For example one of these officers in the ministry of Local Government was reluctant to allow me to interview her on the basis that she might get herself into trouble if whatever she says might not please her seniors. She admitted that she knew little about the origin of the quota system that her ministry introduced for the first time in the history of the country. She however intimated that her ministry was likely to reconsider the intervention as it was highly political and not accepted by a large number of politicians. This suggestion was vehemently disapproved by the commissioners of the IEC who maintained that the intervention needs to be strengthened so that it could be extended to the national level.

A number of my informants argued that the gender focal points were created due to external pressure from donors who were driving the 'gender mainstreaming' agenda. They stated that in most cases, these young women did not even know their responsibilities, let alone the relationship of their desks and that of the ministry they were working for. It became clear that they were never involved in policy processes within their ministries and would not, in any way, influence the responsiveness of their ministries to address women's concerns. At the time of my fieldwork, there was clear evidence that the Ministry of Gender had no functional relationships with these focal points. The limited role of gender focal points has also been observed in the case of Namibia where Geislar (2004:133) argued that they were 'appointed at a low institutional level and expected to be in accordance with their gender tasks in addition to regular workloads' It is this kind of approach that has masked the real gender

challenges as they mask the reality of the policy processes. The creation of these structures gives an impression that government is committed to the cause of women while in reality there is a lack of clarity on what should constitute the core business of these desks.

*Location: Proximity to resources or state control?*

One distinguishing feature of women's units in Lesotho is their lack of a permanent home and continuous affiliation to youth affairs. The units have been attached as appendices to various ministries that had their own different mandates such as Ministry of Interior and Chieftainship Affairs as well as Ministry of Rural Development. After the military take-over in 1986, the women's Bureau was returned to the Ministry of Rural Development. Within the same year, the minister responsible for women's affairs and the Bureau were moved to the office of the Chairman of the Military Council and council of ministers. According to the ex-chairman of the Military Council this move was justified because the Bureau:

*could get the attention it deserved, and also following in the footsteps of BNP which 'respected women', the military government was keen to continue where BNP stopped<sup>52</sup>.*

The other related characteristic of these structures is their politicisation under different political regimes. The interest of politicians to control these units is manifested through the location of the women's Bureau, initially in the Prime Minister's office and later in the office of the chairman of the Military Council. According to the commissioner of women's affairs (1984), the women's Bureau was created directly under the Prime Minister's office to emphasize its centrality to development. Others further maintained that it was placed under this office so that it could be 'under the fatherly protection of the Prime Minister' (Motsepe, 1984). While Sawyer (1998:116) has stated that this location has been common in many countries and that its purpose has been to afford them 'policy support of a more political nature', the same cannot be said about Lesotho where there was no policy guiding this

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<sup>52</sup> Interview with Lekhanya, May 2007

intervention; the intention was purely a political move that had nothing to do with women's concerns.

The sudden spurt of interest by rulers to control a relatively 'new' agenda that they did not even understand had political implications that resulted in marginalization of issues that could challenge power relations within the political space. Under the democratic rule, women's units have taken different names indicating ambivalence on the place of women's issues within the policy agenda. Perhaps the real reason might have been the clout that such a unit carried as it had a lot of donor support. In this sense, it was more of a political strategy than a policy issue. As had been shown in other contexts, women's issues were predominantly sponsored by donors and this appealed to most political leaders (White, 1992).

A number of views around the issue of the location of the women's units have been expressed by a number of informants of this study. For women who had been in the women's movement during the undemocratic regimes, the location was used as a way to frustrate existing women's groups which were not regarded as loyal to the ruling party. For example, it was stated that all funding that was meant to address women's issues was channelled through these offices primarily because of the mandate they claimed they were driving, i.e. that of coordinating women's activities. Donors therefore funded these projects through these offices; the problem though was a lack of both harmonisations of these interventions by donors as well as a lack of accountability on the part of government. According to one woman politician and NGO activists who was also nominated into Senate by the BCP government women groups that were regarded as a political threat due to their affiliation of their members to the BCP did not benefit from these funds<sup>53</sup>.

This location also marginalized certain issues that were regarded as political. Throughout the history of the gender discourse under different regimes, certain issues

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Mosala 2007



dominated the agenda. These included nutrition, health and small scale enterprises such as weaving and tapestry. Even when issues of political representation emerged in the 1990s, they were played down by governments and political leadership that felt women were not ready to take leadership positions while some believed that women must compete with men without any assistance. The seriousness and political commitment of the LCD government on opening the political space for women has not been tested as yet; suffice to say, the same intervention is absent at national elections<sup>54</sup>.

The lack of direction and mandate by different regimes has not only been the location of the women's ministries within the power structures, but also their attachment to differing sectors. Not only have these units been itinerant in character, but have also been amorphous as they have changed names and offices over time. They have been grouped with youth, culture, sports, environment and recreation. Their lack of a permanent home suggests some confusion regarding the real issues that needed to be tackled as regards women and development. Not only have the ill-founded policies influenced the creation of women's units, but this can as well be observed in interventions that try to create political presence of women within power structures. Because of the way women's political issues have been defined, women who get nominated into political positions have been confined again in those areas that are understood to be suitable for women. Tripp (2001:43) highlights this puzzle by observing that when women are appointed to ministerial posts they tend to be relegated to such traditional feminine roles as culture, social welfare, and women and children. They rarely get appointed to the key ministries such as finance or, foreign affairs. The same experience has been noted in the Lesotho case.

The democratic rule has seen women nominated to a number of cabinet posts such as education, health, social welfare, youth affairs and environment. Strategic ministries such as finance, foreign affairs or trade, have been the domain of men. Needless to say, few of these women who got some of these nominations were never accountable to the women's constituency. Unfortunately, the presence of these women in

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<sup>54</sup> Currently there is a call by political parties to reverse the Local government Act on the 30% representation and elections have been postponed to allow for the revision of the law.

leadership positions has masked the entrenched gender stereotypes and institutional barriers characterizing most public institutions. They have always been cited as example of governments' commitment to advancing women's political representation. Goetz (1992) observes that not only are there few women in the public domain to transform the unequal positions and status of women, but there are even fewer of them who are willing or capable of 'challenging the dominant agency practice'. Of course Goetz's analysis might suggest that women are not willing to challenge the male dominance. This type of analysis fails to consider that this is not the matter of choice but that structural barriers are set in place to prevent women from taking the lead. But more importantly is the fact that their appointment has always targeted descriptive rather than substantive representation.

### ***Conclusions: Transnational feminism, dependency and the undemocratic state***

The extent to which state feminist interventions has been able to open the space for the articulation of global women's concerns within the policy agenda in Lesotho has had mixed results. In fact, for some, changes that have been observed in relation to gender equality have been a product of a number of dynamisms. While Gill (1991) has argued that these have resulted from what she calls sheer necessity some have argued that the women's agenda has received attention only as a result of the country's over-dependence on aid. While gender equality is necessarily a global agenda it would be remiss of us to dismiss the fact that the agenda has received huge publicity from the donor community which also used it as a condition for countries to qualify for funds. This has worked against the same principles it was meant to implement as opportunistic states have used the agenda to enrich few bureaucrats.

The inability of women's units to provide effective change on the policy landscape within a bureaucratic environment has left key issues of the women's agenda unattended. Their approaches have been the reinforcement of prevailing male-defined prescriptions that erode lived experiences of women. None of the state institutions have come out clear to pronounce feminist consciousness as their priority and as a

result, this has led to confusion on the actual mandate of the units. Even as the gender policy was drafted by the Department of Gender (2003), there is clear evidence of the influence to avoid referring to 'women' as a marginalized group. The document is replete with statement "women and men and girls and boys'. Perhaps, this is a result of the misconception of what the 'gender' approach entails.

According to many respondents interviewed for this study, the women's units functioned more as government's organs than women's agencies. For example, though some women who were appointed to head these units were initially members of women's groups, they failed to influence governments' policy on institutionalising the global gender agenda and instead talked 'men's language'. Molapo, a gender and NGO activist<sup>55</sup>, for instance, argued that the woman who headed the WB never consulted with women's organizations and were, therefore, unable to articulate women's issues. Conversely, Forere who is a senior official member of FIDA argued that the main problem is that once these women get into these positions of power, they get isolated by the women's movement and this pushes them out of the gender debates that take place outside government structures; she posits:

*the nature of democracy in our country has divided the women's voice, while we expect these women to represent women's interests, we in turn isolate them and alienate them, and they are left alone to struggle within hostile patriarchal structures hence they have no choice but to toe the line and abandon the feminist agenda<sup>56</sup>.*

In addition, when these women enter the political space they are faced with myriad challenges that make it difficult to pursue the agenda within structures that are dominated by male politicians. Mama (2004) argues that these women face challenges that discourage them to sustain their political careers and at the same time pursue 'feminist agendas'.

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<sup>55</sup> Interview with Molapo, June 2007

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Forere July 2007

While a few women have been able to enter the political space, there still remains a huge challenge on opening that space to drive key concerns of the women's agenda. A number of women are still left out of the political processes and are unable to influence political issues that affect their lives. Women who have benefitted from the inclusion of gender equality within policy documents have not been able to influence the state's approach on addressing women's issues. The state on the other hand has opportunistically used the global feminist agenda to access donor money without bringing structural changes that would allow substantive representation of women within the political space. As Hassim, argues this inclusion has instead benefitted certain groups of women while the marginalized ones are left out of the process. She argues thus, "inclusion has rather been an avenue for reinforcing elite women's access to the formal political system while not (as yet) translating clearly into policies that address the needs of poor women" (2005:8).

The above analysis has highlighted the challenge that faces the institutionalisation of a global agenda within aid dependent and undemocratic political contexts. It has illustrated that even without domestic pressure for change; the transnational arena has the potential to pressure states to implement international equality norms; the challenge though is the extent to which democratic institutions and groups can use this to influence real change. Despite incentives that come with this global agenda and external pressure from the transnational women's movement political regimes in Lesotho have selectively implemented these norms, and what remains is the civil society women's groups to make their demands more aggressively using the transnational space.

While the transnational feminist arena has largely influenced the creation of women's units, the domestic political culture of patronage has also influenced the creation of these units as well as the nomination of women who headed them. Because of all of these, the state-sponsored structures have not been held accountable. There has been no pressure on governments' responsiveness to women's concerns. It has remained a puzzle why the Lesotho government has been able to avoid total ratification of the CEDAW despite a long history of the establishment of the women's units as well as

existence of a gender policy. This is an indication of a lack of ownership of the gender agenda as well as the lack of a consolidated women's movement which should have used its lobbying power to hold government responsible for compliance to the international commitment it is signatory to. According to one gender activist, the main problem lies with the unclear articulation of what actually needs to be prioritized<sup>57</sup>. She maintained that women don't have a common understanding of what are their main challenges. She argued that the legal agenda has dominated the gender debates primarily because the discrimination has been codified within the law, and as such, it has been easy to challenge. Other forms of discrimination are difficult to attack and thus, women lack a strong political issue to tackle. Institutional mechanisms to institutionalise global women's agenda into the whole government planning and implementation have been void of the feminist consciousness and the agenda has been driven largely as a political chip while women's issues have remained at the margins of policy debates

This chapter has highlighted policy and legal dimensions that have influenced the place of the transnational feminist agenda within the mainstream development debates in Lesotho. It has shown that the agenda was first pursued within a void policy context and as such, there was no framework to guide government's interventions. Another stage was the introduction of policy framework which however provided a limited space for the women's political agenda. This context was dominated by the global calls for governments to include women in their development planning. The third scenario is that of a context where clearer statements of intent were made and structures put in place. However, the very same initiatives worked against the clear articulation of Basotho women's own definitions of their problems as emphasis was placed on legal reforms without accompanying political freedom. Despite growing international calls for the prioritization of gender issues, national governments tended to use the agenda as an opportunity to score political points. Though women face a myriad of gender discrimination, different regimes have overemphasized legal inequalities. The domination of legal capacity has not been able to open the political space for women. In the same way, policies that have articulated the intent to address

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Kimane (Gender expert and academic), July 2007

gender inequalities have marginalized the agenda of political equality. What has also been clearly articulated is the fact that the state has been in the forefront in articulating the need to change gender relations. However, this has functioned to marginalize the women's agency as they operate outside the political leadership arena. The analysis has therefore highlighted the need to interrogate the extent to which state feminism can benefit women within unstable democratic contexts.

Though the intersection between pseudo state feminism and transnational feminism has relatively benefitted women in bringing their issues into the public space; that presence has not influenced the implementation of the feminist agenda of political representation within the political agenda under different regimes in Lesotho. A number of aspects have militated against effective prioritization of women's concerns within the policy debates. These include state conceptualization of the gender discourse as a global agenda, as well as its capacity to effect change within power structures that are by nature patriarchal and resistant to change. Another aspect is the political context which has been characterized by instability and patrimonial political relations. Lesotho political regimes have committed themselves to addressing gender inequalities yet they have not only failed to indigenize international feminist agendas but have also failed to influence creation of 'home-grown' policies to complement global initiatives. In spite of overwhelming donor assistance, gender issues have been marginalized within the national development debates. When they were considered, it has been due to their potential to attract financial gains. What has been clear is the fact that the absence of domestic pressure on governments has had a significant impact on how Lesotho's governments have treated the global women's agenda. The demands of women have come to the public space, not through women's own agency but instead, they have used the transnational arena to force government regimes to commit themselves to international norms, while on the other hand these regimes have reacted selectively to these demands.

Because national governments implement policies that in essence originate from the ruling political party constitution and manifesto, and also because there has been a tendency to ignore the power of political parties within policy discourses, the next

chapter examines the role that the political system in Lesotho has played in influencing the institutionalisation of the transnational feminist agenda.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *The Domestic Political System and the Transnational Feminist Agenda*

*Ruling party support ... can be a poised chalice for members of an ambitious women's movement, limiting their ability to make claims outside of the state-designated frame and imprisoning them in the system of political patronage (Hassim, 2009, 244).*

This chapter presents the analysis of the intersection between the domestic political system and the articulation of the global feminist's agenda. After introducing major debates on the relationship between the political system and the institutionalisation of global democratic principles, the chapter gives an overview of the political system of Lesotho with the intention of providing a background in understanding the political context within which global gender equality debates are being pursued. Within this analysis the nature of political debates and the place of transnational women's issues are highlighted; and the role that has been played by the ruling parties in placing the global women's issues within the political agenda is reviewed. The electoral models that have been employed are analysed as well as the extent to which they have been able to influence the institutionalisation of the transnational feminist agenda of women's political representation.

#### **The Political system, the transnational arena and women's political space**

The nature of the political system and the organisation of political competition have been attributed to the presence or absence of women's issues within the national political debates of any country (Hassim and Goetz, 2003). According to this perspective, the nature of the political system embodies the degree of democratic consolidation while the number and nature of political parties, their ideologies and membership define processes of political competition. Political parties are therefore central in analysing processes in the relationship between government's pronouncements on global gender equality norms on the one hand, and the type of the political culture on the other.

Different studies have argued that political parties are critical 'gate-keepers' (Matland, 2002 cited in Bauer and Britton 2006: 8) that determine the presence of



women within the political space as they may influence social change or maintain the status quo. For example, Lovenduski and Norris (1993) cited in Hassim and Goetz (2003: 8) argue that there is ample research evidence showing that political parties are generally unwilling to place women's names on party lists as candidates for elections; this then leads to women's underrepresentation within leadership positions. Ballington (2002) takes the debate further by arguing that both political parties and electoral models have the tendency of determining the place of women in political offices such as the national legislature. Similarly, Hassim and Goetz (ibid) maintain that certain types of electoral systems and the nature of political parties are able to open the political space for women. Based on the content of these debates, it becomes clear that there is no feminist inquiry on women's political development that can be complete without an analysis of the role played by political parties and electoral politics in shaping the place of the global gender discourse in any country.

The failure of political parties in different countries to create a feminist policy platform presents a big challenge to gender activists and women's movements in particular. Equally important is the fact that gender activists tend to ignore the role of political parties in shaping the transnational feminist agenda within local contexts and in turn run the risk of losing critical allies. For example, in Lesotho this study noted a clear animosity between women politicians and gender activists; the latter see women politicians as sell-outs who fail to represent women's interests while on the other hand gender activists are blamed for representing the interests of a selected few elite women who are only after donor money. As a result of these challenges the transnational arena has operated as a political opportunity structure from which feminists make feminist demands on political actors to promote women's representation within the political leadership.

Democratic institutions such as political parties and electoral processes have played a critical role in shaping the place of global women's equal representation agenda within local political debates. The ideologies and characteristics of political parties as well as their organisational structures do determine the prioritisation of issues that get prominence within the political debates, hence the need to unpack how they affect

policy choices as regards women's issues. In the same manner the nature of the electoral model used in a country has the potential to determine the nature of representation of women within the policy making structures. These institutions and processes have been the focus of recent global feminist activism especially after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995). Feminists within regional blocs have used this arena to force national governments to commit themselves to implement international norms that emanated from this forum. For example as one WLSA gender activists argued in the case of Lesotho:

*It was mainly the influence of Beijing Platform for Action that led to the declaration of the SADC heads of states to commit themselves to increasing women's political representation by 2005, not necessarily the initiative of the SADC leaders themselves.*<sup>58</sup>

This assertion confirms that international forums have created an opportunity for local activists to drive their agenda in a situation where political parties fail to open political opportunities for social change. This is more relevant where these parties lack "clear ideological agenda and defined policy positions" (Htun 2003, 174). There has been a tendency to focus more on governments and less on political parties in relation to implementing feminist global norms, in fact political parties have been viewed less as significant actors in world politics yet when they win elections they become implementers of both international and national standards. There are some scholars though who recognise the importance of political parties and their role in bringing change. For example Hassim (2009, 244) maintains that "the agenda for change is very much determined by what the ruling party regards as politically appropriate". This assertion assumes existence of power differences between the party and government and therefore suggests that political parties can influence governments' decisions on policy choices. However, it is important to treat this assertion with caution as contexts differ especially in countries that have pseudo democracy characterised by patrimonial relations. For instance, in Lesotho the study noted that the ruling political parties take instructions from government not the other

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with WLSA national coordinator May 2007

way round. For instance, according to the minister of Gender it has been easy for LCD government to implement quotas at party level because the government convinced the party that it has signed binding international conventions that require governments to take practical steps to increase women's representation. She argued that:

*It is easier to introduce certain issues at party level than in parliament as there are many opposing views, but at party level the party leadership is able to push a global agenda on the basis of its signature to international norms and because gender equality issues are controversial they are better accepted in an environment that is not as hostile as the legislature<sup>59</sup>.*

This assertion was supported by responses of opposition parties' leaders who in most cases kept on referring to the fact that the ruling party signs international agreements without considering the views of the 'nation' on issues that according to their understanding have cultural bearing hence no party has the right to be 'imposing' them on people. It is important though to note that political parties in Lesotho have not only been able to undermine global feminist demands but they have also been able to weaken the women's movement through the establishment of women's leagues. For example these structures have been unable to use the political parties as an avenue to contest inequalities but instead they have been indifferent to feminist demands if perceived to be against the parties' policy agenda; and to iterate Hassim's argument "ruling party support, ...can be a poised chalice for members of an ambitious women's movement, limiting their ability to make claims outside of the state-designated frame and imprisoning them in the system of political patronage" (2009, 244).

### **The Lesotho political system**

When Lesotho gained independence from Britain in 1966, it followed the trend of most colonial states by adopting arbitrarily the political system of the departing colonial master (Bauer and Britton, 2006). The country adopted the Westminster bicameral parliamentary model with the Lower House comprising of elected members

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with Lepono , Minister of Gender and Youth Affairs, July 2008

from constituencies and the Upper House made of twenty two Principal Chiefs<sup>60</sup> and eleven nominated members<sup>61</sup>. In this system, the King is Head of State and a symbol of national unity as he is expected to reign, not to rule. He takes an oath to abstain from involving the monarchy in politics. Being a constitutional Monarch, the king is the custodian of the Constitution (GOL, 1993: Chapter V). The Constitution clearly shows that the heir to the monarchy is the first- born 'son' of the King. Following the established pattern of the Westminster model, the Constitution further stipulates that the term of the National Assembly is five years. However, it is silent on the number of terms one person may serve as Head of Government. This has created a situation whereby leaders cling to power and hence cause discontent that has produced factionalism and patronage relations within the political landscape of Lesotho. This situation has been detrimental to both democratic consolidation as well as choice of policy issues.

One other aspect of the system has been the adoption of the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral model that was used from 1966 at independence to 1998 when disputes about elections forced the country to change to the Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP) electoral system. According to the FPTP system, the leader of the party with majority constituency seats becomes head of government and as such, Basotho National Party (BNP) became the first party to rule the country between 1966 and 1986 when it was toppled by the army. Under this model the democratic principle of equal representation has been undermined and the country was ruled largely through procedural democracy. The MMP model that was adopted for the first time in 2002 has been hailed for its inclusiveness by bringing to an end a one-party state as more parties have gained seats in the National Assembly (Matlosa and Sello, 2005). Under this model 80 constituency seats are contested under the FPTP system while 20 seats are allocated as compensatory seats based on the performance of the party at the national election. While the constituency seats are contested by candidates standing under their parties and some as independent candidates the MMP uses party lists to allocate these seats. Since its adoption the MMP has not only increased the number of

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<sup>60</sup> These are sons of King Moshoeshoe I

<sup>61</sup> These are nominated by the King on advice of the State Council and the Prime Minister

seats but it has increased the number of political parties represented in the national assembly, however the model has failed to open the political space to accommodate minority groups such as women, disabled and the youth and they have been underrepresented within the decision making structures. The role of electoral models in defining women's political space and their role in determining the adoption of international norms on representation are discussed later in the chapter.

Influenced by the global democratic principles of a liberal political system, Lesotho embraces democratic multi-party system which allows different parties to contest parliamentary seats. And since 1966, the number of parties has grown from three in 1966 to nineteen in 2005. Ironically, though the freedom to form new parties can be understood to indicate existing democratic right of association, this phenomenon in Lesotho has been the result of a number of factors including, absence of intra-party democracy and a lack of internal mechanism on conflict resolution. But more importantly, political office in Lesotho provides employment opportunities that offer competitive benefits in a country that has more than 40% unemployment rate. Being in Parliament, therefore, is an opportunity for individual enrichment for most politicians. To highlight this rent-seeking behaviour of political leadership Kabemba (2003: 26-27) argues that, "historically, political party leaders in Lesotho have done little to institutionalise democratic practice. Instead, they have focused on entrenching personality cults.... political parties' internal weakness in Lesotho manifests itself in the proliferation of political parties as a result of splits within existing parties". It is also noted that more than 50% of these parties have split from either BNP or BCP, hence their lack of ideological difference. He argues that these parties have no variation on policy, 'organisational structure or geographical dispersion, and hardly present any alternative sets of policies for addressing the socio-economic challenges facing the country' (ibid: 26). Of course this is evident in the way political parties have treated women's issues at both party level and in government as such parties come into power. Over the last forty years, parties that have ruled the country have been BNP (1966-1986), BCP (1993-1998) and the LCD which broke from BCP in 1997 to form government and it is to date the ruling party.

### **The Political Party System and the Transnational Feminist's Agenda**

While it is alleged that African women seem to prefer parallel politics (for example, Bryson 1994 citing Ali, Hay and Sticheter 1995) Basotho women participate in both formal and parallel politics; however their participation in the former type is located at the margins of political power as they are absent from the leadership of political institutions. Despite their large numbers within political parties they are grossly underrepresented in leadership structures and as such their voice is absent in shaping the gender equality debates within the national political discourse. Their participation in 'parallel' politics has actually limited their agency as they pursue different agendas hence their struggle is divided. This lack of a common policy agenda has affected the way women's issues have been viewed by political leaders.

One significant characteristic of political parties in Lesotho is their failure to recognise the relevance of equal gender political representation as part of the processes of global democratic governance. Women are grossly under-represented in the executive structures of almost all big parties despite their significant majority within party membership. As shown by proponents of representative democracy, 'claims for representation are part of the process of claiming membership of a polity; hence the debates they generate illuminate the way political actors understand democracy' (Lovenduski 2005:3).

Influenced by the global rights discourse on equal participation women's political representation entered political debates in Lesotho during the democratic transition from the military rule in the early 1990s, but waned out immediately after the 1993 national election. Before this period women's participation in political parties was seen more in their traditional roles as caregivers. A number of reasons can be attributed to the decline of enthusiasm on representation politics during the BCP rule; firstly the BCP government itself had no clear policy agenda on women's representation, secondly, the period was marred with instabilities which then pushed such 'unpopular' agendas to the margins of political debates. Experience of women who had been in exile or liberation struggle shows how they have translated such experience into fighting for women's political rights, however though the BCP had women who had been in exile for over a decade, the nature of the struggle the party

embarked on limited women's own struggle for equality. When asked about this indifference one women politician who had been in exile and became the first cabinet member in the BCP government asserted that being in exile did not necessarily equip women with gender advocacy and that male domination extended beyond the borders, she confirmed allegations that the party was rife with sexual harassment; though she declined to pinpoint perpetrators of these acts, she admitted that most male leaders in the party had serial sexual relations with young women in the party and being in exile made the situation even more intense<sup>62</sup>. This allegation was cited by a number of women politicians across different parties, and highlights the extent to which sex can actually be used as a controlling tool within political parties to silence women to demand or push a feminist agenda.

As a result of a lack of feminist activism within political parties gender equality issues especially political representation of women, have been marginalized within political party policy agendas. As Kabemba (2003) discovered, none of the political parties in Lesotho has taken conscious effort to institutionalise quota systems in order to increase women's representation in the executive structures of the party. It has been noted further that none of the political parties has taken a different approach on women's issues and they have in different periods reacted to women's representation to access donor funds or to buy women's votes<sup>63</sup> (White, 1992). The contradictions of political leadership commitment to women's political representation are clearly manifested within their official statements versus their practical actions. According to presidents of the women's league of the BCP and BNP, their parties draft good manifestos with statements of intent to empower women yet when they submit party lists to the IEC women's names always appear at the bottom of the lists, despite having agreed in principle to address women's absence from the National Assembly<sup>64</sup>. Though the positions of women in these lists have not been questioned either by IEC

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<sup>62</sup> Interview with Dr Raditapole, a political activist who was also in exile during the BNP rule, July 2007

<sup>63</sup> BCP women's league Secretary, BNP president of the Women's league –interview-March 2007, Mokhothu, IEC Commissioner –interview July 2007.

<sup>64</sup> This was the case in 2002 when Irish Aid funded election campaigns on condition that political parties include gender equality in their manifestos.

or women themselves, they have a direct bearing on the number of seats women may occupy in parliament. The IEC officials argue that the right to nominate women is the prerogative of the political parties and the Commission's duty is to accept the lists as they are submitted by party leadership. They claim that the Electoral Act has no provision for the IEC to question the lists. In fact, according to one of the Commissioners, political leaders do not take women's representation as a serious issue. She quotes one of the political leaders saying:

*Do you really believe this thing of yours will work? Do you seriously believe women will ever rule this country? I think you are too ambitious; you will do better if you divert your energies into something you can attain.*<sup>65</sup>

Although Rai (1997) in her analysis of gender representation in the Indian political system argues that the number of seats allocated to women in the legislature depend on the number of women candidates fielded for elections, the Lesotho case highlights the need to go beyond numbers. What has become clear is that the position that women occupy on party lists determine the number of seats they will occupy. For example, though the MMP model was thought to be representative, the 2002 elections results produced similar gender disparities to that of the FPTP model, and this was 'a major setback for women's representation' (Kadima cited by Kabemba 2003: 30). According to this analysis, LCD had placed more female candidates on the PR list while the constituency list was dominated by men. According to the MMP model, a party that obtains majority win in the constituency election does not qualify for PR seats. Because LCD won 79 seats of the 80 constituency seats, women candidates therefore failed to get compensatory seats. The opposition parties, on the other hand, placed more female candidates on the constituency list while male candidates dominated the PR list which incidentally they were able to qualify for. For people who know Lesotho politics, it remains a puzzle why the leadership adopted this strategy in placing their candidates. It was obvious in these elections that LCD had high chances of winning constituency seats. Consequently, it was obvious that the opposition parties would qualify for the 40 PR seats. One conclusion for this outcome

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<sup>65</sup> This was uttered during the discussion of 30% representation for Local Government elections of 2005



is that political leadership has managed to manipulate the issue of representation by placing women as candidates on party lists, though at unwinnable positions. This has happened despite the gender policy (2003: 18) framework which demands parties to “take deliberate measures such as legislated quota and zebra system to ensure equal representation in numbers of women and men including people with disabilities in the National Assembly”.

Politicisation of women’s issues has always been a manipulative strategy to win votes by parties in Lesotho since independence. During the first election at independence, the enfranchisement of women became a political contention for two main parties; the Basotho National Party (BNP) and the Basotho Congress Party (BCP). Whether the British were going to prevent Basotho women from voting seems unlikely as by this time, universal enfranchisement had already been accepted as a human rights issue. However, the political leadership decided to use this in their election campaigns as a political ‘carrot’ before the 1966 election. Weisfelder (2002) contends that “Jonathan shrewdly took the initiative in demanding full suffrage for women”. Consequently, different scholars have maintained that the BNP leader, Leabua Jonathan, was voted into power because he championed the campaign on women’s right to vote, hence the party has been referred to as ‘women’s party (Makoa, 1997; Motebang, 1997). Kadima (2006:28) as well advances that BNP’s support base has been mainly the youth, women and the Catholic Church. In fact, according to the BNP 1966 manifesto, the party claims that “BNP is in full accord with the conviction that the right to vote is the one and only effective means by which an individual is protected against any process of enslavement. Our party stands for equal pay for work in all spheres of employment” (McCartney, 1971). Jonathan was reported to have referred to this in most of his rallies even ten years later; hence reminding the women about the favour he had made for them. The extent to which the party held on to this conviction shall be discussed later.

On the other hand, the BCP leader; Ntsu Mokhehle, has been reported by some sources to have been against women’s voting for he feared the “conservatism” of women, if they were to vote (Weisfelder, 2002:36). Yet, one of the BCP veterans argues that their stance on women’s enfranchisement in 1966 was mainly an *ad hoc*

political strategy based on the prevailing circumstances. When responding to this issue, Mphanya says; “it lies more in the political expediency than it does of discipline”. What makes BCP’s attitudes more puzzling in regard to the women’s place in the party’s debates is the fact that it was the first party to have a women’s wing whose aims included ‘fighting for and protecting women’s rights’ (BCP Manifesto: 1966). The ‘conservatism’ that Mokhehle referred to has not been critically explained except for Weisfelder’s assertion that Mokhehle assumed that women’s ‘naivety would make them pawns of chiefs, priests, or other conservative influences’ (ibid: 97). Interestingly, Weisfelder’s scrutiny of the 1966 election results disputes the claims that women really voted for BNP and punished BCP. He disputes the notion that women constituted a larger majority of those who voted for the BNP as reflected by levels of correlations between the voting behaviour of women and the proportion of women who were present during the election, for him migration of men from different areas of the country had more influence on patterns of voting, and that if bread and butter politics had an impact that was not necessarily the BNP incentives or bribes but women’s own perceptions and lived experiences influenced their behaviour; he argues that:

*Women in the areas with highest rates of labour migration and greatest real dependence on income from the Republic of South Africa (RSA) voted little differently from men or may have leaned towards the BCP. Conversely, the BNP strength was concentrated in the more self-sufficient mountain constituencies where a higher proportion of males were able to remain home (p 100).*

In view of the above, it can be concluded that this voting behaviour highlights the capacity of women to make their own decisions informed by their lived experiences. When BNP lost the elections in 1970, there was no link made though about women’s voting behaviour. However, what appeared as an interesting development is that as the country prepared to hold the second elections, the BNP had dropped the section on ‘women’ in its manifesto. This happened despite BNP’s political strategy of involving women in food-for-work community development projects such as labour intensive road and dam construction<sup>66</sup>. In acknowledging the role played by women in these

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<sup>66</sup> Payment in money was introduced later to cater for the retrenched mine workers in the 1980s

construction projects, Jonathan labelled them as '*Khofu tse matsoela*', literally meaning 'breasted caterpillars'. This description was always received with ululations and dancing from his women followers. These projects were highly politicized as they employed only BNP followers, and these women performed tasks which traditionally were men's responsibility such as digging trenches and dams with the use of pickaxes and wheelbarrows, hence they were called caterpillars.

During the 1970s and 1980s, issues that received prominence within political campaigns addressed women's reproductive roles such as maternal and reproductive health as well as child care. This emphasis defined women's space in traditional patriarchal ways in order to maintain their subordination. Furthermore, this approach failed to locate these roles within the rights discourse which emerged as a global political issue in the 1980s. For example, the right to choose method of contraception was not given publicity in these debates, and of course within the private space men still controlled women's reproductive rights. While political parties promoted women's minority status by confining them to the 'motherhood' role within the political structures non-governmental organisations picked up the issue and women within and outside political parties embraced the introduction of contraception, according to one NGO activist, because of the ideological dominance of the Church and traditional leadership within the ruling parties, politicians were not free to openly encourage family planning even though this had become part of the population growth policy.<sup>67</sup> But more significantly is the fact that influenced by this patriarchal values political parties placed women within positions that extended their traditional roles as care-givers and this enabled them to maintain the status quo.

The 1990s ushered in discourses of 'women's rights are human rights' as a global feminist political issue which called for transformed political approaches as well as defining global norms on addressing women's rights. The manner in which political parties have been able to translate this feminist agenda has not attracted feminist research. Of course in the context of Lesotho political parties have not been the forum

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<sup>67</sup> Mosala –interview, July 2007

for feminist advocacy, and most respondents have indicated that patrimonial relations within these parties make it difficult for gender activists to champion women's issues that challenge male domination especially within the party leadership structures. But what became also clear is the fact that women within political parties are not active at the transnational level and as such it is difficult for them to use that space to push a feminist agenda.

The translation of the global women's rights discourse in Lesotho influenced the emergence of legal activism that was based on the belief that women's problems lie with their legal minority status as enshrined in the constitution.<sup>68</sup> However, this discourse made a minimal appearance on the political agenda of most parties. Perhaps it would be difficult for men in the political leadership who dominated most party decisions to champion an agenda that would challenge the same power base that has been guarded by men. Unfortunately laws reforms have been unable to penetrate the political barriers that have kept women at the lowest ranks of these institutions. The political parties' executives that are charged with identifying policy priorities are inherently male-dominated and cannot, therefore, be trusted with prioritising gender equalities.<sup>69</sup> But most importantly is the fact that women within these political parties do not participate in legal activism which has been pursued mainly by professional women who are in most cases not members of political parties and as such the agenda fails to enter the formal political space.

Manifestos of both BCP and BNP acknowledged the legal position of women and effects of the law on their rights as individuals. Both parties pledged to prioritise review of laws that discriminate against women while maintaining their stance that women would be appointed into senior positions based on merit alone. The BNP leader went further to suggest that even if his government created a women's ministry, it would not mean such a unit would necessarily be headed by a woman<sup>70</sup>.

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<sup>68</sup> Interviews; WLSA National Coordinator, Molapo, Kimane. May-July 2007

<sup>69</sup> Kimane, interview, July 2007.

<sup>70</sup> Retselisitsoe Sekhonyana (the then BNP leader) interviewed by *Shoeshoe* 1992.

On the other hand, the deputy- president of BCP argued strongly that development issues affected both women and men in the same way and as such; there was no need to have special programs or units specifically for women<sup>71</sup>.

In response to the international and regional demands for increased women's representation, the late 1990s and 2000 have been dominated with the politics of representation. Though political institutions such as political parties were targeted by transnational networks as avenues for addressing a global underrepresentation of women within decision making positions, these institutions do not interact at the international space hence they can afford to ignore calls for political equality. For instance, though the introduction of quotas was highlighted in both international and regional conventions in Lesotho these were played down by political leadership. The discourse of representation was not translated into practical steps at both party and government levels; and as a result the executive structure of all parties has remained exclusively male dominated. Political parties have refused to recognise women as a constituency and as such, they have failed to open the political space and increase the presence of women members. None of the big parties has voluntarily embarked on increasing women's political representation at party level and this has had direct impact on the nomination of candidates for national election.

Like most parties in Africa, political parties in Lesotho created women's leagues that have neither executive powers nor policy influence. BCP was the first party to establish this unit within its structures while despite large women following BNP formed this unit later in the 1980s. According to the party's women's league president this was due to the pressure from women who felt that their party was not giving them recognition while their BCP opponents were enjoying the status of being recognised. Most of these units do not have any links with national or international women's movement and as such, fail to create a forum for gender equality consciousness that would inform policy initiatives. The fact that there is a thin line between the ruling

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<sup>71</sup> BCP deputy- president- Molapo Qhobela arguing against calls for affirmative action- this was also cited by some gender activists such as Molapo and Ntimo-Makara.

party and government has made it more difficult for the leagues to demand accountability on equality matters from their party. Geisler cites countries that though democratic, they have had women's leagues that have failed to mobilise women around gender politics. These include Botswana, Zambia and Mozambique (2004: 88). Both the general secretaries of BCP and BNP interviewed for this study admitted that these structures do not have any power, even to determine the place of women candidates on party lists. It was reported that one of the long-serving BNP's secretary-general was bitterly opposed to the formation of the League and argued that women did not need a separate structure as they constitute the party's majority and they had enjoyed every benefits that the party offered<sup>72</sup>. As Makoa (1997) has indicated, for a long time, BNP did not have both Youth League and Women's League and there was no constitution to guide their activities. Although the LCD women's league that inherited the BCP experience is believed to be more organised and active, it however suffers the same marginalisation within the party's decision making and as such, gender equality has not been its priority. The league is not in anyway embarking on any programs to advance women's representation. According to the league's general secretary, the programs they have are on orphans and HIV and AIDS<sup>73</sup>.

*'Big' parties and women's political space*

Being a ruling party in government forces such a party to be aware of international instruments that need to be domesticated. In this way if it becomes difficult to institutionalise global norms at national level, it is however easier to implement these at party level hoping that opposition parties will have to copy and in turn this becomes part of the political agenda which will later be easily translated at national level and transform the political culture to accommodate gender equality issues as integral to the policy change. This is how political parties in Lesotho have come to buy-in global discourses. None of these parties have championed global feminist issues and are not members of any global feminist movements. Bilateral relations exist between the ruling parties of Lesotho and other ruling parties in the region, for example the ANC and ZANU-PF. Other than that the regional blocks such as the SADC Parliamentary

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<sup>72</sup> Interview with BNP women's league president, Mabathoana, April 2007

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Keketso, August 2007

Forum and the Commonwealth secretariat give women from parties represented in parliament the opportunity to interact at the transnational arena through women's caucuses.

Understanding the characteristics of political parties- their nature, membership and ideologies, is crucial in the analysis of the political system and the place of the global women's political representation within the national political agenda. As mentioned earlier, though there are close to twenty political parties in a country of two million people, only three parties have ruled the country since independence. The first party to rule Lesotho at independence was BNP. According to different sources, BNP was founded in 1959 at the advice of the Catholic Church which was worried of the BCP communist orientation (Weisfelder, 2000; Epprecht, 2000; Brytenbach, 1975; Kadima *et al.*, 2006). Similarly, Mokhehle was believed to oppose the role of traditional leaders in a democratic dispensation and as such there was a need for an alternative power. As such, the BCP did not have support of either the chiefs or the Catholic Church. On the other hand, the BNP enjoyed a huge support of these institutions. Their influence and loyalty on BNP has been observed in the composition of the first National Assembly. Brytenbach (1975:9) shows that 84.3 % of BNP MPs were Catholics against 9.4% BCP MPs... and all 11 sons of Moshoeshoe were BNP MPs'. This influence has had long-term gender implications as the party could not advance policies that would not be accepted by these patriarchal institutions. For instance, as argued by one women's movement activist, it was difficult in the 70s and 80s for the BNP to campaign for Family Planning<sup>74</sup> programs as the government adopted a cavalier attitude about it. The attitude has been attributed to the power the church holds over the party. This might also explain the lack of dialogue on issues such as abortion and homosexuality and the slow pace of institutionalisation of women's leadership in positions of authority.

In addition to the support the BNP has from the Catholic Church and chiefs, the party also has a large following of women most of who are illiterate and poor.

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<sup>74</sup> Family planning contraceptives are not provided at the Catholic Church Health Centers

Geographically, these women come from the rural areas. These demographic characteristics have been used to explain the women's inability to push for gender reforms within the party<sup>75</sup>. As earlier indicated uneducated women rarely participate at the transnational arena and as such their adoption of feminist ideas depends on the ability of democratic institutions to disseminate such issues. And in most cases political parties have not prioritised feminist issues within their policy agendas. Makoa (1997) argues that despite the support the women gave to the BNP the party failed to create structures to accommodate women and youth leagues. It only accommodated these groups after 1970. Since the creation of this structure there has not been an effort to develop a constitution to address women as a constituency. Moreover the party has not embarked on special political programmes for women despite the party being labelled the 'women's organisation' (Motebang, 1997). And in its history the party failed to change either discriminatory "laws, norms, customs and institutions buttressing the relationship between men and women remained intact" (Makoa, *ibid*: 22).

Although the leader of BNP<sup>76</sup> argues strongly that the party respects<sup>77</sup> women, the strategies used to place women in the party's leadership structures leave much to be desired. For example, during the party's national executive conference of 2001 that was preparing for the 2002 first MMP elections, the elected National Executive Committee (NEC) had no women members. The four women who were later added have been described as 'an after thought'<sup>78</sup>, and according to newspaper sources, these women were members without portfolio. It should be remembered that the party had received campaign funds from Irish Aid for including 'women' in their manifesto, yet, before even going to those funded elections, women were excluded from the executive that determines the candidates to be placed on the party list. In its 2001 manifesto, the party claimed that:

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<sup>75</sup> Interview with Mabathoana, L. Molapo May 2007

<sup>76</sup> Interview, Lekhanya, ex Chair of the Military council which ousted Jonathan out of power

<sup>77</sup> Both the leader of the party and the women's League president maintain that unlike BCP which calls its women '*basali*'- women, BNP calls its women '*mafumahali*'-ladies

<sup>78</sup> Public eye 6 April 2001 cited in Ambrose 2002



*Women all have the right to serve in all positions regarding the national constitution, even to get and take the parliamentary seats. The BNP prior and after election will try by all means to assist women in taking a leading role in decision-making positions in government. BNP will be transparent in encouraging and making sure that women stand for elections and are elected for government local elections (BNP Manifesto 2001 page 10).*

Of course BNP lost these elections and the extent to which this commitment was to be translated into practical measures cannot be tested, suffice to say the higher echelons of the party still remain male dominated and even with current factionalist claims within the party, the women's voice is not heard. In its history as a ruling party, BNP card-carrying women benefited from patronage politics that dominated the 1970s through the mid-1980s. Employment and educational opportunities were opened to party members while at community and village level development projects targeted BNP members only.

Although BCP was founded in 1952, earlier than BNP, it lost the first election and only got to rule from 1993 to 1997. Having been a member of the ANC Youth League, the founder of the party - Ntsu Mokhehle- embraced a communist ideology in addressing colonial oppression. Because of his educational achievements, Mokhehle drew his support mainly from the educated Basotho, and since he had no support from the Catholic Church, it became obvious for him to get support from the Protestant Church. BCP's attitudes on women's enfranchisement brought a lot of scrutiny and criticism. One of these had been the 'womanising' of the BCP leadership (Eppretch, 2000). In this analysis, Mokhehle had been accused by the Catholic nuns to have engaged in immoral sexual practices. The extent to which the nuns' claims were the Church's strategy to destroy him has not been investigated. And as indicated earlier allegations of 'womanising' by the BCP leadership have been made even by some BCP women. Mokhehle's and his BCP males leaders' allegations of women's sexual exploitation was cited by some BNP leaders who referred to the fact that BCP women were called '*thepa ea lekhotla*', which literarily means 'the party's property'. On the other hand, some BCP leaders argued that the concept meant that women were expected to serve the party and be loyal while the party leadership role is to protect

them. This notion is reflected in the women's league manifesto which stipulates that the league is answerable to the executive and all its decisions should be sanctioned by the executive that is on the whole male-dominated.

While the BCP was the first party to create a women's only structure through a women's league, this unit has not been influential on either policy issues or party's democratic transformation. For instance, the nomination of party candidates has been the prerogative of the executive. Makoa (1997:22) argues that even though BCP has the oldest and organised women's league, it was only in 1992 that a woman was elected to serve in the executive committee. Similar to BNP, women who served on the committee did so as ex-officio members by virtue of their presidency of the women's league.

The BCP manifesto at different times has always been clear on its understanding of women's role in development, even though it never initiated programs to groom women for leadership positions. In its 1993 manifesto the party begins by boasting that it was the first party to "send young men and women overseas to further their studies". The manifesto continues to pledge itself to 'strive for equality between men and women in the public service; protect women's rights by ensuring that the laws of the country do not discriminate against women, and that both men and women are treated equally in all spheres of life' (1992:8). In order to achieve this, the party proposed impressive strategies including "strengthening political governance, economic development which are currently in the hands of men; increase equal educational and employment opportunities to both men and women so that women can take part in decision making". It is clear that women's political representation was depended on women's educational attainment, and of course the BCP had large numbers of educated women yet this did not open the political space for women. The party does not in any way propose any affirmative action strategies to correct the gender imbalances within the party as well as at all decision making positions. Nonetheless, the BCP was the first party to appoint a woman to a full ministerial

position<sup>79</sup>. BCP women who had been in exile (some were in Botswana while some were in Tanzania) came back with high educational qualifications and some of them were able to access senior political positions<sup>80</sup>. The extent to which these women used their experience to drive the transnational feminist agenda while occupying these positions is the focus of a different analysis.

It is important to highlight here that the BCP drafted the above manifesto while it came back from exile and it may have been influenced by the women's movements in countries like Tanzania and Botswana where most of its members were based. But it is also obvious that the changes that were taking place in South Africa at this time had direct impact on neighbouring countries. On the global level this period was marked by the democratic wave that was juxtaposed with the women's rights discourse. On the basis of this background it is not surprising to expect the BCP to be more progressive in dealing with gender issues. However, evidence shows that the party retreated and shaded out key feminist issues during its rule. This can be attributed to a number of reasons including the confrontational and patronage style of party politics in Lesotho, but this highlights the complexity of translating a global feminist agenda through a patriarchal institution where women are grossly underrepresented in leadership structures.

Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD), an offshoot of BCP was formed in 1997 by Mokhehle who was experiencing a lot of pressure to vacate the leadership position. LCD formation attracted a lot of conflict as its usurpation of power was regarded as unconstitutional. Political and legal experts were called to prove the illegality or unconstitutionality of Mokhehle's act, but there was no evidence to that effect. LCD came into power after two critical international forums that brought radical

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<sup>79</sup> She was appointed as Minister of Health and Social Welfare

<sup>80</sup> The current BAC leader became the Minister of Health and later of Natural Resources, Mathabiso Mosala was appointed to Senate, and had been an NGO activist and a founder of the Lesotho National Women Council

transformation within the transnational women's movement. These are the Beijing World Women's Conference (1995) and the SADC declaration of heads of state on gender equality (1997). The impact of the proceeds from these arenas has been enormous as a number of interventions were implemented, but their impact at party level has not been significant. As reflected in responses of both men and women politicians their knowledge of the international instruments was very low and in some cases they claimed that such commitments were destructive to the culture of Basotho. As earlier argued because of the thin line between the party and government, it becomes difficult to conclusively determine the extent to which the party is committed to implementing the gender equality agenda and the extent to which it is able to influence government's policy towards women's representation. But what came out clear in the interviews is that though LCD implemented quotas at party level women politicians do not have a common view on the need for quotas as some of them accessed parliamentary seats through contesting at constituencies, and as such did not see why other women needed affirmative action strategies to get into corridors of power. This confirms the assertion that feminist agendas are not necessarily driven by women as not all women are necessarily feminists. In fact the LCD women's league president and the secretary general of the league emphasized their concerns with gender activists who seem to pursue 'feminism', for them:

*Feminism cannot work in this country because of the strong patriarchal resistance within the society; the best way is to make men 'buy-in' the gender approach as it also addresses about their situation.<sup>81</sup>*

The above assertion indicates the complexity of interpreting some global discourses especially by women who are themselves benefitting from the patriarchal political institutions. The LCD women's league president is apparently the Minister of Gender while the general secretary was at that moment the leader of the women's caucus in parliament. The role that these women are expected to play in transmitting feminist ideas is critical and if they themselves are not convinced about embracing feminist approaches, it would be difficult to realise serious commitment from the ruling party.

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<sup>81</sup> Interview Lepono and Rantso

Though the party has not been able to create programs to increase women's representation at the party level<sup>82</sup>, it has however, elected a significant number of women into the National Assembly and at local government. According to Kadima *et al.*, (2006) 14% of the LCD MPs were women after the 2002 elections. Despite protests by major opposition parties on the quota system in local government elections, the party insisted on women's participation through legislated quotas. It went ahead with elections and placed women even in constituencies that were open for both men and women. A total of 85% of its local government councillors are women. It should be noted though that this achievement was largely the result of the local network of Department of Gender and WLSA in disseminating the quota system's implications for women across the country. There is no evidence suggesting that the party's women's league, for instance, collaborated with these two units to support government efforts, in fact its members shied away and were absent during the demonstrations that were meant to support government on the 30% court case. Only WLSA and the Department of gender with few grassroots women's groups marched to the high court to show their support (this issue is further discussed in the section below).

### *Elections and the transnational feminist agenda of women's political representation*

This section explores the interface of the political party system and the electoral system in determining women's access to political space. Elections are seen here as an avenue for feminist to claim women's political rights by demanding equal representation within leadership positions. Globally elections have been used to increase the number of women in legislatures while in some cases it has been through elections that women have been marginalised within the political space. Both the global call for regular elections and women's representation have been driven by democracy and good governance advocates, yet elections have dominated this discourse while women's representation has always been treated as an 'add-on'. Of course being an international phenomenon women's representation has been

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<sup>82</sup> LCD introduced 30% representation at party level in 2006

implemented successfully in some context while in some it has not been integral to the democratic rights discourse.

Frequent, regular, free and fair elections have been set as precondition for sustaining democracy (Africa Commission Report, 2005). Elections in representative democracies have been used to legitimize governments despite the tendency of such elections to leave out some groups out of the national policy debates. In recognition of this anomaly, some scholars have been more cautious. For example, Huntington (1991) argues that frequent and regular elections are not enough, but that what should also be regarded as crucial is a smooth change of 'regime' within a stable political transition. Matlosa (2005) on the other hand argues that the presence of democratic consolidation can only be realized if elections contribute to the improved standard of living of the country's citizens. Unfortunately, elections in Lesotho have not been able to produce either sustained political stability or improved standards from more than five rounds of elections since 1966. Critical aspects of elections have been manifestations of instabilities and undemocratic practices that tend to exclude women who constitute more than 50 percent of the population from decision-making positions. This happens despite the fact that women's advancement has always been used by political leadership in election campaigns.

Post-independence elections in Lesotho have had a history that has been marred by disputes that have made it difficult to consolidate principles of democratic governance. The disputes have always been attributed to election rigging and not on deficiencies of the electoral model or the nature of the political system. Lesotho adoption of the FPTP electoral system has received wide political and scholarly scrutiny on the basis of its exclusionary tendencies; these analyses have focused on the model's limitation of leaving smaller parties out of the legislature. For example, commenting on the Lesotho's 1998 election results, Karume argues that the FPTP system seems simple to most people yet its outcomes have been controversial as in most cases, smaller parties have been left out of parliament despite having been voted by a significant number of voters. This was the case in 1998 as smaller parties won 40 percent of the votes, yet the LCD that had won 60 % took all but one seat

(Misanet.com/SARDC) therefore creating discontent that led to unprecedented political instability in the history of the country. In his review of the political reforms in Lesotho, Kabemba (2003: 6) also argues that this model has failed to entrench democratic principles but has instead “revealed further contradictions and divisions within Basotho politics”. He cites the 1993 election that allowed the BCP to occupy all the 65 seats of the National Assembly despite having won only 70% of the vote. The 25% of the votes that was won by other parties, in particular BNP did not translate into any representation in the National Assembly. Unfortunately, in both cases, the blame for this outcome was the ‘magic paper<sup>83</sup>’ and rigging (Letuka *et al.*, 2003). Incidentally, the model has not only been detrimental to representation of political diversities but it has also marginalised women’s representation.

Feminist discourses of electoral politics have argued that the FPTP model can only work for women if political parties are committed to placing women in winnable constituencies (as is the case in Uganda), and since most parties are dominated by male executives, there has been a strong call for Proportional Representation (PR) system which is believed to have the potential to open space for women. There is ample evidence to the effect of this model on women’s increased numbers in the legislature (Bauer and Britton, 2006; Geisler, 2004; Goetz and Hassim, 2003). Nevertheless, the proponents of the PR system caution that this model works in combination with deliberate efforts from political parties that embrace equal political representation as a principle for democratic consolidation. For example, Goetz and Hassim (2003, 9) advance two ways in which the PR has been beneficial in increasing women’s presence in the legislature; first, a closed list in which political parties adopt quotas for women candidates, “combined with well-established party systems which have formal, centralised rules for candidate selection”, and second, parties take a deliberate effort to reserve seats for women.

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<sup>83</sup> In both 1993 and 1998 there were claims that the party that had won elections (BCP in 1993, and LCD in 1998) used magic to make votes of other parties disappear.

In their analysis on *Women in African Parliaments*, Bauer and Britton (2006) present case studies of countries that have put in place measures to open the political space for women through appropriate electoral reforms that were complemented by political parties' commitment. These include South Africa, Mozambique, Namibia and Uganda. Using the case of Namibia, Bauer (2006) illustrates clearly that the close-list PR electoral system is more women friendly than the FPTP electoral system, she maintains that even though the adoption of the PR system was not necessitated by an intention to increase women political representation, the number of women candidates for the national assembly elections increased significantly as political parties were forced to place women on the party lists. Bauer argues that "in close-list PR electoral systems, political parties play a critical role in the task of bringing more women into political office because they compile the party lists for each election" (Bauer 2006: 92). She also cautions that the PR system has been successful where it has been combined with "some form of gender electoral quota" (Bauer 2005: 321). It is very important to emphasise that this system can and do work where there is political will and feminist consciousness within the political culture. The issue of political will cannot be over-emphasised as the Lesotho case will show below. In the absence of political commitment from political actors this system has been unsuccessful except when used with mandatory gender quotas. Experience has shown that under the FPTP system the use of quotas attracts negative criticism as women are seen as tokens and they have to stand on their own against patriarchal barriers in a constituency, while under the PR system voters vote for the party and they may not even know that they are voting for a woman.

As indicated earlier, the first elections at independence brought women into the political debates exclusively on their right to vote. There was little, if any, reference to their representation in the new first ever National Assembly even by the party that claimed to have advocated for their enfranchisement. The first woman to contest elections in 1966 under the banner of BNP was Agatha Griffiths (Letuka *et al.*, 2003, Ambrose<sup>84</sup>, Makara<sup>85</sup>, Molapo<sup>86</sup>) who was the wife of a paramount chief. Agatha

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<sup>84</sup> Interview with Prof. Ambrose who has written extensively on Lesotho political events, May 2007

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Makara, April 2007



received 24% of the vote and as such, failed to obtain a seat in parliament. Though her involvement could have been attributed to Jonathan's encouragement, it has been argued by some that she was used by the party because of her royal family background and the expectation was that she was going to use that background to win votes for the party (Letuka *et al.*, Ibid). On the other hand, it has been indicated that Agatha was placed in the constituency that was the stronghold of the Marema Tlou Freedom Party (MFP) which also had a royal following. This then suggests that she was placed in an unwinnable constituency. However it would be remiss of me to ignore the fact that at this particular era women's political representation was not only marginal in national contexts but also at the global level. The 1966 elections therefore brought no woman into parliament as the only female candidate out of 202 male candidates lost (Ambrose, 2002). The slim majority victory of BNP with 31 seats, followed by BCP with 25 seats and MFP taking 4 seats led to the first male-only national Assembly.

In 1970, Lesotho held its second FPTP elections with fierce competition between BNP, MFP and BCP. This time, BCP was determined to win and its manifesto indicated clearly that it recognised the role of women in the political debates of the country. On the other hand, though the BNP constitution had not changed, the content of the manifesto had left out 'women' as a heading, yet, the 'Youth' section continued to be addressed under a designated slot. Under this manifesto, women appeared under the section entitled 'Maternal and Child Welfare' (McCartney, 1971). This sudden emphasis on the reproductive role of women later worked to influence most of the BNP approaches to women's issues. The BNP manifesto emphasized its achievements that included "enfranchisement of the women of Lesotho under ordinary qualifications of universal suffrage, equal pay for equal work in all spheres" (ibid: 272). Either as a deliberate or genuine omission, the manifesto said nothing about unequal treatment of working married women on their entitlement to pension. Because the Constitution of Lesotho treated married women as minors, the BNP

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<sup>86</sup> Interview with Molapo who is not only a gender activists but also a political activist June 2007

government restricted pensions to men and single women. This situation prevailed up to early 1990s<sup>87</sup>.

Because the 1970 elections were annulled by BNP, much focus in scholarly work has been on the state of emergency declared by Jonathan and its impact on political development (Breytenbach, 1975; Weisfelder, 1977). Unlike in the 1966 election, this time, no correlations between women's voting behaviour and the victory of BCP were made except for Epprecht's assertion that BNP was 'ejected' out of power by both men and women. It seems quite ironical that with BNP's strategies of appeasing women through patronage relations in construction projects the same women turned against it to vote for BCP<sup>88</sup>. An inquiry into why women changed their allegiance (that is if they are the ones who put BNP into power in the first place) could highlight women's ways of punishing political leadership. But more importantly, it brings into question the presupposition that women constituted the majority of those who voted BNP into power in 1966, but more significantly this highlights the extent to which women and their issues can be manipulated by politicians to drive different agendas. Of course as the BNP leader defended the party's case the 1970s were marred by violent politics that led to different politics. Though at this time he was not the leader he maintained that the women in the BNP were already given enough attention through labour- intensive projects and there was no need for special treatment hence for him the issue of women's league was unnecessary.

Because BNP had refused to accede to the defeat of elections in 1970 and had therefore suspended the constitution, there were no elections in 1980 as it should have been the case. The party operated under an interim National Assembly of its nominees and ruled by decree from 1970 to 1986. This period marked a dark history for the

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<sup>87</sup> Matlelima Hlalele. Interview, 15<sup>th</sup> January 2008- the revised law has only catered for married women who qualified for pensions from the 1990s, while those who retired before the coming of the Act do not get the pension.

<sup>88</sup> A list of factors that might have contributed to women's voting for BNP proposed by Jenness include; accelerated employment on the mines of SA for Basotho males and the deferred pay benefits that would be enjoyed by the families of the migrant labourers, timely food supply by the SA government before elections, the pressure from the Catholic Church e. t. c.

country and most accounts have highlighted abuses of human rights and political manipulations by the BNP. Fox and Southall (2004) have described the period as characterised by ‘civilian dictatorship’ while Matlosa and Pule have described it as “the era of *de facto* one-party authoritarian rule marked by unstable civil-military relations predicated upon patronage and politicisation of the armed forces, both of which compromised professionalism and ethical integrity of the defence force”<sup>89</sup>. Though these accounts do not address women’s political place within the whole political impasse, it is clear that under these circumstances, it seemed impossible to engage the state on gender issues, which by themselves are very political. As Hassim and Goetz have argued, feminist policies are ‘unpopular’ and expensive to politicians and as such “prevent politicians and parties from making them central to their party platforms” (2003:8).

In addition to the politicisation of the military, the BNP politicised women’s groups by creating what was called ‘Self-Help’ groups. As earlier argued by one gender activist, these groups were created to weaken existing women’s groups as all funding was channelled to them and its membership was based on the party’s card-carrying<sup>90</sup> (the detailed account of the Self Help group is discussed in chapter four on women’s organisations later in the thesis). According to this source, women outside this group were labeled as BCP followers hence, they were marginalised.

As a result of the undemocratic rule of the BNP and the continent’s shift to the democratisation process in the 1980s, there was mounting pressure for BNP to call for democratic election. Matlosa and Pule maintain that, “in response mainly to donor pressure, the Interim National Assembly passed an election law and set a date for elections”<sup>91</sup> and in 1985, BNP went to polls alone as opposition parties boycotted the election on the basis that the preparations for elections were not democratic and it was clear that BNP was not prepared to relinquish power. BNP declared itself a winner but

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<sup>89</sup> ([www.iss.co.za/pubs/books](http://www.iss.co.za/pubs/books))

<sup>90</sup> Mathabiso Mosala- Interview July 2007

<sup>91</sup> ([www.iss.co.za/pubs/books](http://www.iss.co.za/pubs/books))

its reign was short-lived as the military staged a coup in January 1986. Given the undemocratic nature of these elections, it is clear that women's interests would not be BNP's priority. In the same manner, women from opposition parties would not organise for political inclusion as BCP leadership was in exile and the focus was mainly on its return to the country.

The military government was welcomed briefly by those who had suffered under Jonathan's hand; otherwise the army came across pressure to return the country to a democratic rule. Under this rule democratic representation was not even debated, even with the nomination of some politicians into the military council issues of women's political representation were not even brought up. The banning of political activities by the military gave no space to pursue feminist advocacy. But as mentioned in chapter two, the transnational feminist opportunity provided by the end of the Decade for Women as well as the 1985 Nairobi Women's conference ushered in discourses of women's rights which were picked up by NGOs (these are discussed in chapter 5), suffice to say the absence of political activity within this undemocratic rule made it difficult for political parties to engage in any political debate.

As a result of mounting global pressure for democracy and good governance and the ensuing civil society reinvigoration in local politics, the military government prepared for democratic elections that were then held in 1993. This election brought varying expectations and hence attracted a lot of scholarly analyses. For example, Southall advanced a pessimistic view about the contesting parties; "The great irony is that the passage of time has narrowed the policy gap between the two major parties to a barely discernible difference. All that now seriously separates them is their past and their present determination to seize the levers of power.... Yet, if the BNP wins, there will be allegations of a military 'fix'; and if the BCP wins, there is substantial prospect of trouble with the military." [1999; 9] Based on the history of electoral politics, Southall had all reason to uphold this view and subsequent political events proved him right.

The 1993 elections were historical in that they restored a multiparty democracy in which different groups participated in their preparations<sup>92</sup>. Furthermore, these elections were held at the time when the civil society and women's movement gained support from the international donors. One notable event of this era was the founding of a party by a woman politician- Kopanang Basotho Party (KBP), which advocated for women's rights. This party did not gain support from women and it has never won a seat in parliament. Factors that operated against KBP have not attracted feminist scrutiny. One explanation that can be made is that the country had been under dictatorship rule for almost twenty years, and KBP was new to voters. Hence, it was competing with a strong opponent that had been denied its chance to rule in 1970 and its leadership was exiled. It made political sense that voters would feel it was pay-back time and give their support to BCP with expectations that it was going to bring change. Choosing inexperienced party at this period would be gambling with votes and that might have brought BNP back into power. However, if KBP needed time and experience; it is ironic that more than ten years down the line the party's "written copy of the manifesto could not be obtained" (Kadima *et al.*, 2006:35). More fascinating is the fact that after the death of the founder of the party, the leader is now a man. Further inquiry into what it takes for a woman-led party to attract a following could contribute to a body of literature on political behaviour of voters. Suffice to say, the BNP-BCP politics have dominated the political party landscape in Lesotho and smaller parties seem to be failing to oust these two, and following in the set trend by the 'big' parties they too fail to institutionalise gender equality issues.

Another notable event of this period was the vibrancy of the women's movement in the preparations of the 1993 election. This activism has been attributed to the transition to democratic dispensation in both Lesotho and South Africa where the women's movement was fighting for the inclusion of women in the negotiation processes that were preparing the country for the first ever democratic elections. These elections held hope for many Basotho who believed that the BCP leadership had the ability to bring democratic rule. Inspired by this conviction, different sectors of the electorate engaged in dialogue on issues of policy prioritization. These included

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<sup>92</sup> The Christian Council of Lesotho had played a leading role in the safe return of the exiled BCP leadership.

women's organisations which saw this era presenting an opportunity to bring the gender agenda into the mainstream political debates. Women's organisations campaigned for the inclusion of women's issues in party manifestos (Gill, 1992; Letuka *et al.*, 2004; Molapo<sup>93</sup>). Just like in South Africa, women threatened to hold back their votes if parties refused to highlight the centrality of women's issues in their manifestos.

The attitude of the two main contesting parties- BCP and BNP, towards prioritising women's advancement calls for some scrutiny. BCP's stand was highlighted in the party's manifesto and the women's league constitution, yet the party leader, Mokhehle, made it clear that BCP expected women to 'prove themselves' so that they could be appointed into political office. In the same manner, BNP reiterated its stance that it supports women's advancement but that their nomination to office was going to be determined by merit only. Both parties admitted that there were laws that discriminate against women and promised to embark on a law reform. Because by this time the discourse of representation had not yet gained global ground there was no mention of the introduction of quotas to increase women's representation. The women's organisations emphasised the 'insertion of women' in party manifestos ignoring the marginal space that this agenda was pursued<sup>94</sup>. It has been shown in some countries that party manifestos alone cannot guarantee increased women's political presence. For instance, in South Africa, the Women National Coalition (WNC) forced the African National Congress (ANC) to institute a 30 percent quota in the 1994 elections. Also in Mozambique and Namibia, the women's movement campaigned for the inclusion of women on the party lists and this has resulted in a significant number of women elected into parliament (Bauer and Britton, 2006; Geisler, 2004; Goetz and Hassim, 2003). Another strategy that has worked for women has been that of having a women's manifesto which guides the movement in engaging

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<sup>93</sup> Interview with Molapo, May 2007

<sup>94</sup> Letuka et al (2004) have argued that their proposal to have some constituencies designated for women only was rejected even by some women politicians. Though the blame is leveled against women politicians, it also suggests the importance of strategic lobbying of women in political parties.

with the political institutions. This has been the case in countries like Namibia (Becker 1995).

The number of women of contesting elections is critical in determining the number of women that can find their space within the parliament. About 23 women stood as candidates for the 1993 elections as a result of the lobbying of women's groups. However there was no corresponding support from both political parties and civil society groups that was given to these women candidates. BCP won the 1993 election with a landslide victory with three (1.5%) women compared to sixty two (98.5%) men securing seats in the National Assembly (Motebang, 1995; *Work for Justice*, 1995). It should be reiterated that women went into this election aware that neither BCP nor BNP had committed to increasing their political representation. According to some informants, the 'gender concept' itself was not well understood and had an impact on the way politicians understood women's issues. Hence, the BCP made it clear that it was interested in development problems of both men and women, and according to this source, representation issues were not seen as 'pressing'; there were matters of urgency such as the army, corruption of civil service and review of laws<sup>95</sup>. The implication of this has been the silence of the three women MPs on issues of women's representation (Motebang, 1997). On the issue of women's representation, one of these MPs who was later appointed as a Minister of Women's Affairs in 1998, argued thus:

*I would like to see more women take part in running the government, but it should not be done in such a way those women groups proposed before elections...I disagree with this way of doing things because leadership and ability to encourage loyalty is something inherent in a person, or one has to work hard to earn it. I know they can do it. Women may not possess physical strength like men but they have brains. They do not only welcome challenges but they are actually the first ones to take up challenges. Unfortunately, they*

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<sup>95</sup> Mosala, Interview 2007.

*fall back and push men forward to enjoy the fruits of their toil*<sup>96</sup>. (*Work for Justice*) August 1995.

If this was the common view among BCP women politicians, it is not surprising that women's issues were marginalised in the mainstream political debates. In addition, the BCP rule was faced with a lot of opposition from the armed forces and this led to instabilities that included the assassination of Deputy Prime Minister as well as the 'palace' coup of 1995. The situation was saved by the SADC intervention and civil society. But if women's issues were seen as 'not urgent' before elections, they would definitely not be urgent at times like these. At one level some analysts however argue that BCP as both a party and government is judged harshly by feminist scholars as the 'gender' debates were relatively new and that the technocrats who were charged with implementation of these transnational norms were as ignorant (probably also uninterested) as the political leadership in engaging such debates<sup>97</sup>.

In 1998, when the country went for second democratic election after the military rule, the ruling BCP had experienced a historical split in 1997 that led to the formation of the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD). Because the new LCD commanded majority seats in parliament, it became government and BCP suddenly became an opposition. The political scuffle that this situation caused has been widely documented. And once again, women's representation was relegated to the margins as the 'pressing' issue was to seize power at all costs as BCP fought tooth and nail to claim the unconstitutionality of LCD. This election was the first to be administered by an independent non-partisan body - the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) (Morna and Tolmay, 2007). The Commission was given the responsibility to 'ensure that elections to the national assembly and local authorities are held regularly and... are free and fair and organise, conduct and supervise elections to the National Assembly in an impartial and independent manner (section 66 (i) (a) and (b) Second Amendment to the Constitution 1997 (Ambrose 2000). The IEC is not in any way

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<sup>96</sup> Mrs Kabi interviewed by *Work for Justice in August 1995*, MP after 1993, and later Minister of Communication and also first Minister of Environment and Women's Affairs.

<sup>97</sup> Puleng Letuka, interview March 2008



mandated to ensure political representation and this has prevented the Commission to force political parties to prioritise women's representation in their party lists<sup>98</sup>.

It should be noted though that in preparation for this election, most parties had clear statements on women's issues in their manifestos. For example BCP pledged:

*to devise ways and means of relieving women of the burden of poverty so that women should not only be advocates of advancement but should also be beneficiaries....development agenda of the new BCP government will include the following: (among others) a) establishment of the special National Commission for Basotho Women (NCBW), b) reviewing all the laws in order to achieve gender balance in land distribution, inheritance and independence in financial transactions and negotiations, c) educating the nation and instilling respect about the rights of women, and relevant international conventions.*

With such a pledge one could have anticipated a changed gender landscape. The problem though is that BCP lost in the elections and we shall not know the extent to which this was not only one of the rhetorical tools for election campaigns. The newly formed LCD similarly joined the bandwagon and presented a manifesto that was not very different from that of BCP, and made it clear that it intended to put more women in political positions. The election results though reflected a different picture as only three women in comparison with 76 men secured seats in the National Assembly (Letuka *et al.*, 2004; Ambrose 2000). As earlier indicated these elections were held within the dominance of the discourse of political representation which emanated from the Beijing women's conference.

The 1998 election will go into history for the unprecedented violence they evoked. Though opposition parties refused to accept their defeat citing vote rigging, it has

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<sup>98</sup> Interview May 2007, ICE communication officer

become clear that LCD had indeed won as reflected by the 2002 elections under MMP model, where it again won majority constituency seats (Kabemba, 2003). Even though the opposition parties claimed that the election results were rigged, it became clear that the problem lay with the FPTP model that allowed a ‘winner-takes-all’ situation. For example, LCD had won only 65% of the vote, yet it occupied 90% of the seats. The discontent with election results led to significant electoral reforms that have changed Lesotho’s electoral politics yet they have not changed the gender landscape. The reforms included the creation of the Interim Political Authority (IPA) and the introduction of the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) model. These initiatives were meant to provide a representative model that would minimise electoral disputes.

The IPA<sup>99</sup> worked hard to come up with a representative electoral model amidst a lot of disagreements, including boycott of the Authority by some parties. However, it was able to create consensus on the model to be employed for 2002 elections. Lesotho became the first country in Africa to employ the MMP model (Elklit, 2002; Fox and Southall, 2004). During the preparation for this election, the women’s question resurfaced as parties were urged to include a section on gender in their manifestos. This was used as a condition for accessing funds from Irish Aid for political campaign.<sup>100</sup> Most parties drafted impressive manifestos with distinct sections on ‘gender equality’; yet again there was no mention of practical steps or programs to be undertaken in increasing women’s representation. Furthermore, these pronouncements were made in a policy vacuum as by this time, the gender policy was still in a draft form. Therefore, most of these manifestos, if not all, were not informed by any policy framework that guided their proposed commitments. In addition, women’s representation on party lists did not get public debate and its coverage was very limited. According to Ambrose (2002), the women had neglected to lobby the

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<sup>99</sup> According to the Work for Justice 1999 #52; 7 the interim Political authority -IPA- was set up on 16<sup>th</sup> November, 1998 by an act of Parliament. It was expected to prepare for new national elections by May 2000. it was charged with reviewing the Lesotho electoral system to make it democratic and representative of the population of Lesotho. It could recommend changes in the existing laws and in the Constitution itself.

<sup>100</sup> Mokhothu interview June 2007 (first woman IEC Commissioner), had worked as Gender Officer in the Irish Aid and had been a human rights activist

inclusion of women aggressively. As it has been the case, women organisations failed to engage women politicians and as a result, they had no support within the political corridors to back them. On the contrary some gender activists from WLSA maintain that they tried to engage political parties on this agenda, but the leadership was not interested, and according to the WLSA national coordinator:

*This situation was frustrating because the big parties themselves saw the elections as special after the historical 1998 one and saw women's issues as secondary<sup>101</sup>.*

Despite this sentiment the organization agreed that women's organisations did not employ aggressive advocacy strategies to drive the agenda. For example, Ambrose maintains that if the lists for compensatory seats (40) 'had been required, as elsewhere, to list men and women alternatively, far more women could have been in parliament'. On the other hand both BNP and LCD leadership maintained that the parties had done their part through the manifestos, so the electorate made the informed choices in relation election of women candidates. What becomes clear though is that the failure to forge functional networks with women in politics and within the movement itself has been the main weakness of the women's movement in Lesotho<sup>102</sup>.

LCD won over two thirds of the constituency seats while other nine parties won compensatory seats. In his collection of daily events, Ambrose (2002, 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter) advances that "Overall, women improved their position in parliament on the constituency vote. In the previous parliament, owing to the death of two women MPs, their number had dwindled to 2. These 2 had been re-elected, and were being joined by 8 other elected women MPs.... Overall, the 40 compensatory seats added only 2 further women to parliament, making a total of 12 women members; LCD 10, BAC 1, BNP 1". These results challenge the globally held conviction that proportional

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<sup>101</sup> Interview Matashane-Marite, May 2007

<sup>102</sup> Interview with FIDA vice president, July 2007

representation electoral models can improve women's opportunities in accessing political space. The results however, corroborate findings that indicate the need for political commitment from political parties to embark on measures that complement the electoral models.

The final account of elections for the purpose of this study is the 2005 Local Government (LG) election. This election is historical in that it was the first election for local authorities to be elected into positions of decision-making. But these elections have been also unique in the sense that they had distinct eventful gender dynamics. First, it was the first time gender-quotas<sup>103</sup> were used; secondly this quota legislation was challenged in the High Court<sup>104</sup>; thirdly, the civil society was divided on the legality of the initiative, and fourthly, the debate on the legislation in the national assembly revealed the extent to which women's representation is a complicated issue as even some members of the ruling party did not support the intervention. The Daily Hansard records on the LG Bill (2005) highlight the attitudes of men (even some women) towards intervening on behalf of women. Generally, all those who opposed the Bill cited 'discrimination' as unconstitutional and against 'democratic principles'<sup>105</sup>, while those who supported it cited it to be binding as it originates from the international arena. For example, Thabane argued that:

*I didn't agree to the introduction of the Proportional Representation for 2002 national elections, and I don't agree with the quota system either. If I were to be asked as an individual, I would say that the system should not be adopted, and that with time, just as in summer plants become green and wither away in winter, this situation will also correct itself. The challenge though is that as government we have signed international agreements that bind us. (Translated from Sesotho)*

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<sup>103</sup> The legislation made a provision for one third of seats to be reserved for women; (LG Amendment Act of 2004, published as a Lesotho Government Gazette Extraordinary on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2005).

<sup>104</sup> Tsepo Molefe challenged the quota system in that it denied him the right to stand for elections in the women-only constituency; the High court upheld the law in that the government had the right to take special measures to correct imbalances in the society.

<sup>105</sup> T. Thabane –the then Minister of Home affairs and LCD government political speaker who later broke from the LCD to form a new party in 2006. (Daily Hansard 24<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> 2004)

These words were uttered by a prominent leader of the ruling party that was implementing the system. Some members of the opposition were as well unimpressed, and in fact, the BAC (this party also broke from BCP after 1998 elections) leader<sup>106</sup> was quoted in a local newspaper denouncing the setting aside of electoral divisions for women as ‘sexual apartheid’. He argued that the procedure was inconsistent with the Constitution, and announced that his party would nominate male candidates in divisions reserved for women. He challenged the minister to cite any country in the world where this quota system has been employed (*Mopheme*, 22 February 2005, cited by Ambrose 2005).

The NGOs umbrella, Lesotho Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (LCN), also joined the furore by claiming it supported the principle of increasing women in the political office, but was against the manner in which it was implemented<sup>107</sup>. As such, it went further to question women’s organisations such as WLSA, which was in the forefront in campaigning for the adoption of the system, to clarify its loyalty to the Council. WLSA, however, insisted its support and went on to encourage women politicians to stand for these elections. The Catholic Church also took part in the criticism as reflected in the editorial of its newspaper- *Moeletsi oa Basotho*- (16<sup>th</sup> January and 20<sup>th</sup> February, 2005). As Ambrose (2005) notes, “in a strongly worded editorial, it derided the Government “*hona ha se likhetho ke mantloane*- (these are not elections but they are just children’s play) and accused parliament of having made a law which, by forcing people to vote for women in certain areas, contravened the Constitution”.

Given this widespread resistance towards the intervention, one could have expected LCD to postpone the implementation of the Act<sup>108</sup>. However, the Ministry of Gender

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<sup>106</sup> Molapo Qhobela had expressed the similar sentiments in 1993 in response to women’s groups demand on inclusion in manifestos, at that time he was deputy president of BCP.

<sup>107</sup> Forere (FIDA Vice President), interview July 2007, Ambrose highlights as well that the LCN criticised the bill on the basis of unconstitutionality and argues that the proposal that LCN made would have yielded the same results they were opposing

<sup>108</sup> The Law Society as well ‘became friends of the court’ in the High Court case

“criss-crossed the country explaining the reservation of one-third of all constituencies for women on a rotational basis for three elections, after which the law will be reviewed” (Morna and Tolmay, 2007:69). One critical observation to make is that these elections critically reflected the deep-seated patriarchal attitudes within the society. It is also clear that LCD was as well responding to some external pressures, especially after the failure of the MMP to increase women’s representation in parliament. Being the member of SADC charged with leadership at the time, it had to be seen complying with regional standards, as at this point, some countries were already talking about 50/50 representation while Lesotho had not come even closer to 30% by 2005. Significantly too, is the fact that the LCD government influenced the party to place women candidates in both reserved and open constituencies. And this corroborates Hassim and Goetz (2003) assertion that political will from political parties come a long way in advancing global feminist agenda of political representation.

It should be noted as well that Lesotho became the first country in the SADC region using the FPTP electoral system to adopt a legislated quota for increasing women’s representation in politics at the local level (Morna and Tolmay, 2007:53). As the country had just adopted a mixed-member electoral system at the national level without demanding increased women’s representation, it became clear that the introduction of quotas seemed to challenge the *status quo*. One other aspect to note is that though the system was set for one-third of the constituencies, more women participated and won seats even in constituencies that were opened for both men and women. This resulted in 58% of women becoming councillors, with LCD having a total of 85% of women councillors (Kadima *et al.*, 2006:25). The LCD achievement can be regarded as reflecting a political will to address gender imbalances in decision-making, but there is also a need to determine the extent of support to empower these women who are faced with an intense patriarchal scrutiny. The next round of elections will highlight the gender dynamics and expectations that might work against the continuity of the system. One officer in the Ministry of Local Government explained that the implementation of the system involved a lot of stress that she thought she was

not prepared to endure again. However, the IEC Commissioner<sup>109</sup> felt that the stress was worth enduring as with time, people will get used to seeing women in positions of power and that the fact that women also won in constituencies opened for men suggests that with more support, women are ready to take up political office.

### **Conclusions**

The underrepresentation of women within political leadership has not been given serious attention until the 1990s. However, the transnational feminist women's movement has worked through international forums such as the Beijing Platform for Action to place women's absence from the political space as an international phenomenon. A number of international norms such as the introduction of quotas and reserved seats to address this political anomaly have been advocated, but as experience has shown this is one feminist agenda that has received intense resistance globally. Regional forums such as AU and SADC have as well complimented the international call for gender political equality by institutionalising these norms through committing member states to put in place practical measures that will ensure women's increased political presence. While national governments have been signatories to these norms they have however relegated this commitment to political parties which have in turn manipulated the agenda for political gains. This failure on the part of political actors has been attributed to the socialisation processes which inform the perceptions of masculinity and femininity within political discourses. The social construct of politics as masculine has contributed to both marginalisation of women's issues within mainstream political debates as well as to their underrepresentation within political decision making positions, and as Bryson (1999, 115) asserts, "unconscious discrimination is much harder to eradicate" hence transnational feminist advocates of representative politics need to target political parties for a transformative feminist agenda that will open the political space to accommodate more women.

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<sup>109</sup> Mokhothu; interview July 2007

The findings in this chapter highlight that political parties cannot be left alone to determine the presence of women in political positions. Male biased party leadership and the nature of the electoral system have confined women to the margins of national political debates and as such, the gender debates and their position within the mainstream politics have been shaped by these male-dominated institutions. Women issues have been, and are still used to gain votes by many male - dominated parties while their representation has been ignored. While transnational feminist movements have been able to penetrate national political space, and have succeeded in placing the equal representation agenda within domestic political debates there seems to be a corresponding need to identify a pool of women to be mobilised into grabbing political opportunities as they appear.

Transnational feminist advocates have also identified electoral reforms as critical for attaining equal political representation as part of global calls for consolidating democracy. But as the Lesotho case has indicated, on their own electoral reforms have failed to produce representative legislatures and as such, women's political representation has remained an elusive agenda. The local government elections showcase the availability of women willing to occupy political spaces once such spaces are opened with mandatory quotas. The fact that women won even in areas opened for competition with men supports the feminist call for electoral reforms that prioritise gender quotas as well as a political will from political parties. Lobbying and political networking with women politicians and among women's organisations is crucial if women wish to take their rightful place in national political agenda. The study has shown that women's movement leadership and the larger civil society also need to engage the political parties on principles of democratic governance that include gender equality. It also becomes clear that the concept of gender equality needs to be put to public debate so that politicians and the electorate may appreciate its centrality to the consolidation of democracy.

While chapter two looked at how different regimes in Lesotho have attempted to institutionalize transnational feminist agendas and the extent to which their efforts have managed to prioritize certain issues and shaded out others, chapter three



examined the role of national political actors and processes in shaping the place of this agenda within local political debates. This chapter has uncovered the extent to which local political discourses and contexts have produced the underrepresentation of women in politics as manifested in the legislature and other echelons of political authority. It has highlighted the complexity of institutionalising a global democratic agenda within the domestic political space dominated by patronage politics. The analysis has highlighted that procedural democracy tends to fail to effect political change if women politicians lack feminist consciousness. Furthermore, the chapter has challenged the notion that ruling parties influence government decisions on feminist issues but that in the case of Lesotho the government has been influencing political debates after participating in international forums and committing itself to international feminist norms and standards.

This significance of feminist consciousness appear to be critical in institutionalising global feminist agendas hence the next chapter traces how Basotho women within the civil society community came to be active in advocating for women's advancement, it looks at their approaches in driving the transnational feminist agenda within their domestic context. The chapter looks at how they have domesticated these global ideas and highlights what constitutes the nature of the content of their agenda in influencing policy; it purposively and conveniently looks at women's organizations that are part of regional feminist advocacy.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Women's Organisations and the Transnational Gender Equality Agenda**

*"It is therefore important to analyse under what conditions and with what strategies women's movements can influence the state and policy agendas" (Waylen G. 1995).*

#### ***Introduction***

This chapter presents the role played by women's organisations in influencing and shaping the content of the gender equality discourse and the place of women's issues within the mainstream domestic political agenda in Lesotho from 1966 to 2005. The chapter traces how Basotho women within the civil society community came to be active in advocating for women's advancement, it looks at how their approaches influence the institutionalisation of transnational feminist agenda. It conveniently looks at women's organizations that have participated in regional and international forums on women's issues. The chapter is divided into four sections; the first section looks at different feminist views on what constitutes a women's movement and then locates Basotho women's organisations within the broader transnational women's movement by analysing their characteristics and tracing the strategies they have employed to advance women's concerns under different regimes; in this section, women's issues that dominated the organizations' agendas are highlighted. Next, the nature of political activism of women's organisations is examined in order to highlight their influence (or lack of it), on pushing transnational feminist issues on the national policy agenda.

#### **Conceptualizing the women's movement**

Different scholars writing on the discourses of the women's movement do agree that it would be misleading to claim a universal, standardised definition of the women's movement in Africa. Goetz (2003:43) for instance, argues that women pursue their interests in different ways and as such, 'it is hard to identify a coherent "women's movement" in any country'. Naciri (1998:89), however, suggests a definition that is

fluid enough to accommodate varying spaces within the movement. Thus, for Naciri (ibid):

*[T]he women's movement can be understood as organisations concerned specifically with women's interests, dealing with issues such as literacy, social assistance for women and children or referring to women's liberation – re-evaluating women's identity and the status of women in society.*

Bennett and Bennett (1999) see these organisations as part of movement politics, which seek to empower women as they advocate policy change to benefit women. Key to these definitions is the fact that women are the main actors and leaders of these initiatives; they mobilise around issues that affect women and 'make gendered identity claims' (Beckwith (2004:5). On the other hand, Hassim (2006: 8) proposes that attempts to define what constitutes the women's movement 'should not be so prescriptive or inelastic that they exclude the kinds of organised activities that involve the majority of the poor women'. Further, recent feminist debates on women's movements have also argued that even though women's movements are not the only carriers of feminism, they are the best strategy to work through (Ferree 2006, 9) as they serve as spaces for the development of transnational feminism. It is through these spaces that local activists can gain knowledge about how their issues are being addressed at the global level as well as holding their governments accountable. While there is a consensus that women's movements can also be labeled as feminist movements, some scholars caution that not all women's collective action is by definition feminist while others argue that not all women see themselves as feminists. As a result definitions must not stifle forms of engagement with women's issues but must accommodate women's interventions that effect social change. Hence, Hassim (2006; 45) argues that "... strategies that are conceived around narrow conceptions of feminism may not be more successful in bringing about changes in the lives of women".

Most feminist research on women's collective activism has tended to ignore the role played by the transnational space in shaping women's strategies at local level yet women's issues within this space have been intrinsically linked to the global agenda. Women's organizations have been pursuing transnational agendas under varying

political and economic contexts, and they have used the transnational space to effect change in closed political contexts of their countries. For example Adams (2006, 208) posits that, “activists draw on transnational human rights and gender equity norms to change domestic laws and practices”. But most importantly, women’s movements have in various ways informed the transnational feminist agenda through regional activism. For instance, while regional activism in Africa is not as old as in other parts of the world African women’s organisations have made their mark on the transnational space, and as Adams (ibid) further notes, they have championed the issue of equal political representation in decision making positions and as a result a number of African countries have highest scores of women in national parliaments. Despite their different forms and strategies, women’s organizations in Africa have initiated some social change and have enabled feminist ideas to spread and inform policy debates. And as Snyder (2006, 48) posits, “despite differences among areas, countries, and regions, a global women’s movement does exist, thanks in large part to its unlikely godmother, and to the tripartite coalitions of UN civil servants, NGOs, and diplomats that made its adoption effective.”

The forgoing arguments enable us to locate various collective activities of women within the larger movement politics, without the danger of being restricted by standardised prescriptions of what a movement is. The women’s movement in Lesotho should thus be understood within the context of women’s collectives that pursue different aspects of the feminist agenda. In addition to their participation at the transnational space, these organisations operate under undemocratic and fragile democratic political contexts which increasingly shape both their choices of issues and strategies. As a result, an analysis of political conditions under which these groups function to influence policy becomes critical.

In this chapter, the focus is largely on women’s organisations that have been involved in feminist activism that intended to influence national policy debates at different historical moments. However in order to establish the link between democracy and feminist consciousness one women’s organization created by government is analysed. The analysis does not include community-based organisations which in most cases do

not have interest in influencing policy. Of course the limitation here is that mainly representatives of organisations based in Maseru were interviewed, this is based on their proximity to structures of power, their engagement with the state on policy issues and access to donor funding. But most importantly, these organizations are part of both regional and international women's activism while most other groups are community-based and difficult to categorise and are hardly represented in policy debates.

### *Characteristics of Lesotho women's organisations/ women's movement*

While women's movements in most African countries emanated from independence and liberation struggles, in Lesotho such feminist mobilization has been influenced largely by geo-political and economic factors such as the migrant labour system, the country's over dependence on foreign aid as well as the apartheid system within the neighbouring South Africa. In addition, Basotho women have participated at international and regional forums meant to address gender equalities, and have used opportunities created by this transnational feminist advocacy to inform their approaches and choice of issues. On the other hand the domestic blockages emanating from undemocratic rules have pushed these activists into the transnational space to influence governments' policy choices on women's issues.

As earlier mentioned, it is difficult to identify 'a coherent women's movement' in the case of Lesotho if we consider a women's movement in a conventional sense, yet we cannot dismiss the women's groups that have in different ways influenced the content and place of women's issues on the national policy agenda. In this study, such collective action is considered to signal a form of fluid women's movement even if the actors themselves may not define themselves in that way. Though there is an umbrella non-governmental organisation (NGO) body in Lesotho, different organizations are engaged in various activities that are meant to address women's problems. The focus of these organisations has been largely influenced by global women's issues as well as specific problems emanating from the domestic political context. While there is a lot of overlap and duplication of efforts that has affected the

voice of women on different policy issues, there are no organisations that focus exclusively on women's political empowerment as an aspect of democracy. However, women's groups do participate in civic and voter education not necessarily as an aspect of the gender equality agenda, and as such their efforts have failed to inform the democracy project. And as Kabemba (2003: 49) observed, the main challenge for "Lesotho's democracy is to have an electorate that is democratically oriented".

Principles of democracy such as political inclusiveness and accountability have been the preserve of few male-dominated elite groups that are urban-based. They have institutionalised some gender units'<sup>110</sup> within their democracy programs hence the feminist agenda has become a minefield for resource mobilisation. The role of mainstream NGOs is discussed in chapter five, suffice to highlight that the duplication of their work indicates the extent to which global gender equality politics have become a source of funding for the survival of these organisations. Below is a brief presentation of specific characteristics of women's organisations analysed for this study which will highlight the origins, objectives and programmes run by these organisations, the intention is to locate their mandate within the broader transnational feminist agenda. These are Lesotho National Council of Women (LNCW), Women and Law in Southern Africa-Lesotho (WLSA), The Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), and the BNP- state-created Basotho Women Self-help Groups,

Lesotho National Council of Women (LNCW) was established and launched by Queen Mamohato B. Seeiso in August 1964. According to its founders, it was established through the encouragement of King Moshoeshoe II who sent four women to Israel to learn about women's programs after his visit to that country. This international exposure has had long term policy implications on the approaches of this organisation. The LNCW president maintained that the king was very passionate about women's empowerment and believes that it was probably due to his influence that the first female minister was appointed by the military government that had given

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<sup>110</sup> Incidentally, both the UNDP and Irish Aid have suddenly put emphasis on this theme

him executive powers<sup>111</sup>. The Council is an affiliate to the umbrella NGO, Lesotho Council of Non-governmental Organisations (LCN), and is also affiliated to the International Council of Women. Members have stressed that the council is non-political, non-denominational and non-partisan. Its mission was to encourage women to work together, share ideas and form cooperatives. Key objectives of the council are:

- To provide life education and counseling;
- To encourage people to engage in self-help income-generating activities in order to eradicate poverty;
- To establish pre-schools, day-care centers and vocational training for all;
- To promote spirituality and evangelism and help the destitute and
- Advocacy and awareness training (this has been added in the latest version of the constitution, probably after 1990).

Key projects include establishment of pre-schools and day-care centers, vocational training, poultry farming, animal husbandry, and handicrafts production. The Council has also participated in forums that address human rights, health issues, gender, and HIV/AIDS. A number of milestones have been mentioned as signals of success by the organisation and have impacted on specific policy issues at different moments. These include the establishment of first pre-school in 1972, which spread nationwide and influenced government through the Ministry of Education to establish an Early Childhood and Care Development (ECCD) department in the ministry<sup>112</sup>. In 1982, the council started vocational training for people, especially girls, who missed admission into secondary schools because of their low qualifications. Because of this, a number of programs were initiated to accommodate these people including a non-formal adult education unit. According to the leadership of the council, the government has been reacting to these initiatives by setting its parallel programs rather than strengthening the existing ones.

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<sup>111</sup> The King was given executive powers during the army rule even though they later exiled him.

<sup>112</sup> The GOL has introduced free pre-school centers in government-controlled schools. This is good for poor parents who could not afford privately-run facilities but it has affected the intake in the private-run centers

According to Council members, the Council's programs on income-generating activities have created self-employment and self-sufficiency, though like it has been the case with most of these 'anti-poverty' strategies, they are of small scale and cannot, therefore, compete on a larger market. Its centers offer skills in sewing and knitting by hand and machine, home economics, spinning and weaving, carpentry, and tie and die. Its main source of financial support has been from external agencies with the exception of one local trust that is related to the royal family. Funds have been sourced from US Peace Corps, African Development Foundation, European Union, British High Commission, Swiss International Development Agency (SIDA), Unitarian Service Committee of Canada, US Agency for International Development (USAID), Skills Share Africa (Right Sharing of Resource offered a revolving loan) and Matsieng Development Fund (through the King and Queen).

According to the president of the Council, advocacy and awareness campaigns on women's rights entered the agenda of the Council after participation in international forums that called for full implementation of international rights conventions that have been ratified by government. It was however noted that there is no agreement on the role of some of these instruments in changing women's lives, for instance there were divided view on the ratification of CEDAW as some members felt it had cultural implications that would not be accepted by the society. As Gill reported in her analysis of the status of women, some women's groups were concerned that the instrument was not 'culturally' appropriate (1994). This view highlights the dynamics within the gender equality discourses as most members of this group are mostly old women who insist on preserving cultural identity. There were cases where the stance of women's groups that advocated for equality was labeled as unrealistic as 'men are heads' of the family and that women cannot be equal to men.<sup>113</sup> The fact that women's groups do not speak in one voice was highlighted by some gender activists such as Kimane and Forere<sup>114</sup> who argued that the slow pace of women's visibility in

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<sup>113</sup> Workshop on 'women's rights by Maseru senior citizens and Transformation Resource Center seminar on 'women in politics'

<sup>114</sup> Interviews June 2007



political leadership is a product of a lack of common language on some feminist issues.

Another notable feature of LNCW's work has been around campaigns on breastfeeding and maternal health, which have been promoted by the Ministry of Health and the royal family. The HIV and AIDS discourse is now dominating the group's agenda with emphasis on prevention. The behavioural approach to the virus has been supported by the organisation and members have participated in a number of workshops addressing prevention methods. Their work has also been challenged to address issues of orphaned children who have become household heads. Members have highlighted a number of constraints in their work to include market availability for their products, government's negative attitude and lack of implementation of equality policies on the minority status of women which has prevented women from accessing credit from commercial banks.

On the issue of networking, the Council feels that more progressive organisations like FIDA have benefitted from their ground work of instilling the spirit of voluntarism, except that such organisations do not show appreciation of this. They argue that there has been a tendency by young gender activists to look down upon the old organisations in that they were concentrating on 'welfare' issues that did not challenge patriarchal ideology, without realising the role that such organisations played in laying the foundation for voluntary and women's solidarity. This was supported by gender and NGO activists such as Molapo, Mokokoane and Hlalele<sup>115</sup> who argued that the spirit of voluntarism enabled the Council to grow and touched different parts of the country, while the contemporary organisations focus more on individual economic gains than social contribution; this was a result, they maintain, of the sudden interest of donors on women's issues. They argue that the caliber of young women in the movement is that of the elite whose interest is to make money through 'fat' salaries offered by donor funding, hence, their neglect of the poor grassroots women. The state support, according to these informants, has always been minimal.

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<sup>115</sup> Interviews, May-June 2007

Only king Moshoeshoe II came out clearly to support women's empowerment initiatives, though while he was given executive powers by the military, he did not embark on transforming the legal framework that discriminated against women.

Some members of the council mentioned that among other women's groups they were comfortable to work with was WLSA which, according to them, worked differently as it accommodated other groups in its advocacy. They also highlighted that WLSA 'avoided using the feminist ideology' and as such, it got support even from men. This view was also mentioned by one male politician<sup>116</sup> who felt that other women's groups, FIDA in particular, antagonised males and traditionalists by openly pronouncing a feminist approach.

There was concern that the government, just like some progressive women's groups, failed to recognise the role of established groups such as LNCW and this has contributed to the repetition of policy mistakes that could have been avoided. They argued that gender equality discourse is shrouded in high levels of ignorance and reactionary responses to foreign pressure. One such ignorance cited was the adoption of 'first lady' phenomenon. According to one member, the idea of 'first lady' in Lesotho is misused as this title is supposed to be given to the Queen as the King is the Head of state, not the wife of the prime minister who is a politician. According to her, this title applies where the first lady is the wife of the president. One would argue though that again this is a clear indication of misconceptions on the application of some gender related concepts. Firstly, presidents in some contexts are actually elected politicians, and secondly, the Lesotho's monarch is a constitutional king, and the Queen at times has to act on behalf of the king, while the prime minister's wife does not ever act in that office. As a result of this misconception this office has not been utilised to drive the feminist agenda. This confusion was highlighted by a number of respondents who argued that one key problem in gender politics in Lesotho is a lack

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<sup>116</sup> Interview with Maope June 2007

of common understanding on key concepts of gender equality discourses (Kimane, Hlalele, Forere, Ntimo-Makara)<sup>117</sup>.

The late 1980s saw the birth of knowledge-creation and advocacy organisations that tried to bring social change through research and advocacy, and as Ferree (2006, 15) argues these organisations have been instrumental in the spread of feminist ideas and production of new concepts such as sexual harassment. And as she also correctly asserted, these ideas have “spread without any accompanying feminist identity”. Two women’s organisations that changed the face of the gender debates in Lesotho were born within this context, namely; the Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA-formed in 1988) and Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA). Similar to other organisations of the time, these groups influenced transformation of the legal framework which allowed women’s issues to be given a new focus. These organisations introduced rights-based struggles which called for legal equality and respect of women’s rights as central to human rights (Snyder and Tadesse, 1995). On the other hand, they emerged at the time of a sudden donor interest on redefining the role of the state versus that of the civil society. But most importantly, they were influenced by the global third wave feminist networks such as DAWN which brought a “new shift in global women’s mobilisation dynamics” (Tripp 2006, 61). These organisations have been part of regional activism which has influenced the transnational women’s movement agenda in different ways.

At the national level, these groups emerged during a military rule that had banned political activism and ruled through decrees. This context was characterised by repressive laws and political impasse. Within this background these groups’ choice of issues and strategies largely befitted from the global feminist space than from narrow local political situation. And as the study will show it was easier to spread these feminist ideas as they were not threatening the status quo as they were not talking about regime change of the military rule but were demanding women’s legal rights that were not necessarily political.

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<sup>117</sup> Interview and personal communications with gender activists and academics

As Snyder and Tadesse (1995) alluded in other contexts, these groups relied on legal methods to address gender inequalities and were led by law professionals. There have been some criticisms levelled against this approach as the law alone has failed to open up the political space for women (Kimane<sup>118</sup>) On the other hand; law activists have argued that the law reforms have opened up the avenue from which women can claim their political space. As Hassim argues for the South African case, these groups could be used as a platform from which ‘to pursue substantive equality’ (2006:45). Both organisations are national chapters of regional groupings that focus on changing the legal status of women. For example, FIDA specifies its aims to include

- Promotion of legal status of Basotho women;
- Provision of public education and awareness campaigns;
- Lobbying for law reform;
- Empowering women to get involved in decision-making on issues regarding their lives;
- Encouraging women and empowering them to participate meaningfully in the democratisation process and
- Providing legal aid to women

On the other hand, WLSA which is a product of regional feminist activism operates in seven countries in Southern Africa focusing primarily on improving the legal status of women through activist research and lobbying. Its core programmes are action-based research that is intended to challenge and change discriminatory laws and practices that disadvantage women, and promote gender equality and women’s rights. It should be noted though that the organisation has found itself focusing on lobbying and campaigns outside its mandate due to a lack of strong women’s movement to address myriad issues that face women<sup>119</sup>. In the process, the research focus has been be

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<sup>118</sup> Interview with Kimane who is a gender activist and academic who was also a member of the Law Review Commission, June 2007

<sup>119</sup> Interview with WLSA national coordinator, May 2007

compromised (Kimane<sup>120</sup>). Furthermore, in some cases, there were seemingly unnecessary duplications of efforts while at other times this led to selective emphasis on certain issues for policy attention.

In addition to legal literacy and aid clinic programs, recently FIDA has expanded its mandate and runs programs such as a democratisation program, political empowerment of women project that intends to increase women's entry into politics (Sephomolo, 2007). Needless to say that this is quite a recent phenomenon that has also raised sudden attraction of donors such as Irish Aid, UNDP and American Embassy, and has begun to dominate most of their development programmes. The organization works together with relevant ministries and units such as the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, Ministry of Gender, Recreation, Sports and Youth Affairs. In the same vein, WLSA collaborates with these units as well as with parliament. WLSA's strength has been in developing the research skills of women's law researchers, conducting research on gender issues, particularly those related to legal rights; providing information on gender and the law and in turn, influencing policy and law reform. In addition, the organisation networks and exchanges information with other regional members. It has been able to produce a series of reports and books, and has cooperated and liaised with other organisations which are interested in issues relevant to women and the law.

Both FIDA and WLSA depend highly on foreign assistance for funding. Among major funders of FIDA, mention can be made of USAID<sup>121</sup> and the Global Fund. WLSA, on the other hand, has received funding through the regional office from DANIDA<sup>122</sup>, OSISA<sup>123</sup>, and Canada Fund<sup>124</sup>. The recent injection of new funding has

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<sup>120</sup> Interview Kimane who is a gender activist, June 2007

<sup>121</sup> USAID is an independent federal government agency established in 1961 following the Marshall Plan reconstruction of Europe following World War II. Its focus includes expansion of democracy and free markets. [www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov)

<sup>122</sup> DANIDA- Danish International Development Agency inside the Ministry of Foreign affairs of Denmark set up to provide humanitarian help and assistance in developing countries. In Lesotho it operated from 1980 and has supported WLSA on its core action research mandate.

come from Millennium Challenge Account which has mandated FIDA to push for the thorough revision of laws that discriminate against women, and to simplify the laws so that they can be disseminated to all women.

While it has been argued that the international environment triggered the creation of the post-1975 women's policy units such as the Women's Bureau and autonomous organisations such as FIDA and WLSA, the Lesotho Women in Self-Help group was largely a product of the national repressive and patrimonial political context. The BNP government that won the first elections in 1965 seemed to have created the group as a political reward for the women's vote that presumably put it into power, yet on the other hand it might have been a political strategy to win women who outnumbered men who were mostly in South Africa. But again the fact that governments have been pushed by the international women's movement to champion women's advancement the BNP government used this pressure for its own political interests.

Through this structure, it seems the BNP government attempted to consolidate its support from rural women who had voted against it in the 1970 election. However, according to the Permanent Secretary (Ntsane 1979), the unit was created due to government's acknowledgement of the significance of the rural labour force that was predominantly female and as such, rural women were identified as the main focus of government development initiatives. She quoted a number of development activities that rural women have made contribution; these included foot bridges, conservation works, forestry, feeder roads and dams, water and sanitation projects, agricultural and cottage industries. She argued that it was due to the recognition of the critical role played by rural women in development that the Government of Lesotho:

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<sup>123</sup> OSISA- Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa was established in 1997 in ten Southern African countries "to promote and sustain the ideals, values, institutions and practice of open society". In Lesotho it has support advocacy work on democracy and human rights. [www.osisa.org](http://www.osisa.org)

<sup>124</sup> Canada International Development Agency was formed in 1968 to administer Canada's official development assistance and among others in Lesotho it supported independent seminars on women's rights. [www.acid-cida.gc.ca](http://www.acid-cida.gc.ca)

*took the initiative to assist rural women engaged in self-help programs to organize themselves into permanent structure with a legal status as against existing unorganized self-help groups... the main idea behind this policy is to harness this national force on a permanent and continuous basis, to undertake not only infrastructural projects, as has been mainly the case, but also income-generating and cultural development programs for their self-betterment. The proposed national organization will be called Lesotho women in self- Help (LWSH).*

This organization had village committees which were answerable to the area co-ordinating committees while the latter reported to the Central Executive Committee. The established Bureau of Women's Affairs served as secretariat of the LWSH. Though the Bureau was located under the Prime Minister's office, both these institutions were administered under the ministry of Rural Development while the Central Planning and Development office was tasked to appraise proposals from village committees, which were to follow 'normal Government channels'. The PS advocated for the promotion of labour-saving devices to address time poverty for women, pipe-borne water schemes, better health facilities, education programs, functional literacy, leadership courses, and introduction of day-care centres. It can be highlighted here that there was a clear ambivalence on the location and function of these institutions. For example, there were already women's groups which had started day-care centres such as LNCW. Instead of supporting these groups, the government embarked on competing with them.

Although the LWSH targeted rural women, this was not anchored on any policy-grounding except that the whole government outlook was influenced by the rural development strategy which received huge support from donors. Nonetheless some political leaders have argued that this strategy benefitted rural women who are currently marginalized by a shift to urban professional women<sup>125</sup>. On the other hand some gender activists have argued that the unit was a political organ of the BNP that was expected to legitimize its rule, (as mentioned in chapter two and three this

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<sup>125</sup> Interview with Maope, Lekhanya (they are both political leaders who have served in different senior government positions) May 2007

constituency had voted differently as BNP lost the 1970 election). This view is supported by Ferguson (1990) who noted that the creation of this group served as a strategy meant to attract the rural electorate in general as the party had received low votes from the rural constituencies. This is evidenced by the fact that despite rural women's absence within the policy arena, they were often mentioned as development targets by senior government officials, including the Prime Minister's public statements. The creation of this unit highlights the manner in which political leadership can usurp women's issues to drive their own patronising agendas and in process marginalise women's political agency.

#### *Profile of women in the front of the women's movement*

In order to understand feminist movements' approaches to effecting change on policy it is important to establish the background of feminist activists who are in the front of the struggles. Most women who led the 'welfare' organisations of the pre-1985 were wives of prominent politicians, senior civil servants and businessmen. In fact, one member of LNCW mentioned that the formation of their group was influenced largely by their interaction with wives of colonial officers who formed housewives organisations where they exchanged ideas on being good housewives, and this led to the formation of Homemakers association whose members were the pioneers of the Council. Most of these women were also working in the public service and belonged to different political parties. Currently, most of them are members of elite 'Maseru Women Senior Citizens' group. The objective for creating this group is mentioned as a forum where they could interact after the deaths of their spouses, "*so as to cope with the lonely lives of widowhood*"<sup>126</sup>. They still run pre-school facilities as well as managing vocational schools. Key positions held by some members of this group include; first commissioner of women's affairs during the BNP rule, director of youth and women's affairs, first woman assistant minister, member of Senate, diplomats and some have been successful entrepreneurs. What is also of interest with this group is that some have been prominent in the BNP government while some have been active in the rival BCP politics; yet this political activism did not deter them from joining

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<sup>126</sup> During fieldwork, I attended one series of their workshops on women and human rights sponsored by the American embassy.



hands in pursuing women's issues. They have in different ways contributed in influencing policy on women's issues even if this was limited by the party's political outlook. This attribute is missing from formal politics and the political system is marred with conflicts; perhaps the presence of women within the political leadership could insert the missing tolerance.

On the other hand, women who have spearheaded the feminist human rights/legal agenda are professionals with legal practice and professional academic backgrounds while some have been senior officers in related ministries. They have university education and reside in urban Maseru. These organisations have lost senior officers to international NGOs, senior government posts, and in particular, to positions in the judiciary, for example, two members have been appointed as judges of the high court. On the other hand, some senior members have left the organisations because of the insecurity of their positions as some donors stopped funding the organisations due to a shift of focus by donor agencies. The same trend of losing gender activists has been observed in South Africa where skilled women activists have joined government departments. This "has harmed existing networks and organisations of civil society, and placed increased pressure on human, technical and financial resources of non-governmental organisations" (Albertyn and, Hassim, 1995:11).

***Politics of engagement: the women's movement's strategies vis-à-vis the global feminist discourse of gender equality***

This section analyses the strategies employed by women's organisations in their struggles for gender equality, their interaction with other actors such as state, donors and political parties to influence the place of a transnational gender equality agenda within the policy space.

Since women's interests are not necessarily the same, Basotho women organisations' characteristics have influenced the type of strategies they employed and the nature of issues they pursued. Initial women's organisations have been organised as

community-based groups operating at local level while some have formed part of an organised civil society by engaging in campaigns on human rights and legal literacy and organised around advocacy initiatives. One common strategy for these groups has been to organise outside formal politics; while those that are affiliated with political parties have operated on the margins of mainstream gender debates. Furthermore, because of their dependence on external funding, most of these groups view politics as irrelevant especially when donors demand that beneficiaries of their funding are non partisan. While they have been accused of responding to external forces rather than working through existing political institutions, they have managed to bypass these institutions and worked directly with the donor community even on issues that have not been part of the national debates (Gill)<sup>127</sup>. Of course this has sometimes brought up issues of autonomy as one senior officer of WLSA argued, domestic political institutions lack both resources and the space to drive women's issues, and as such despite their stance to become autonomous they are at times forced to embrace agendas preferred and supported by donors. The case in point is the introduction of 'gender mainstreaming' which entered the gender debates without a clear conceptual grasp of the shift from 'women' to 'gender' yet gender activists had to suddenly drop the usage of 'women' focused language in both their advocacy and research. She mentioned that at one point instead of conducting a study on 'women, HIV/AIDS and the law', they had to give the study a title: 'Gender, HIV/AIDS and the Law' in order to comply with the donors' demands. It was also mentioned that at times funding to attend conferences did not consider local priorities, for instance the issue of genital mutilation is not relevant in the Lesotho case yet some women were funded to attend regional forums on this issue.

In spite of being part of regional and international activism the agendas of these groups have been largely influenced by political ideologies of regimes that governed Lesotho since 1966; and the political climate under which these organisations pursued the gender equality agenda had an impact on the content and place of the women's agenda within the domestic policy debates. Nonetheless, the impact of the political opportunities provided by the transnational space cannot be ignored; the intersection

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<sup>127</sup> Interview with Stephen Gill who is a historian, July 2007

of these two forces have dictated the parameters of engagement of women's groups with the feminist gender equality agenda that have produced contradictions within the gender landscape in Lesotho.

Below is a critical look at how these women's organisations have interacted with the state and other non-state actors to influence policy as regards particular aspects of the transnational feminist agenda.

### **Welfare or 'bread and butter' politics**

Jahan's (1995) defines the global women's agenda as encompassing not only rights and entitlement but also, struggles against poverty as well as reproductive labour; and if this definition is anything to go by, then Basotho women's organisations' struggles are as old as the transnational discourse itself. Ordinary Basotho women have for a long time realised the importance of unity in tackling societal problems and formed groups around immediate family and community needs. While rights-based organisations were a product of donor influence of the 1980s (Kabemba, 2003), different groups initiated and run by women have been a common feature of communities even before independence (Epprecht, 2000; Mosala, Mokokoane; Molapo<sup>128</sup>; Letuka *et al.*, 2002). The groups include burial societies, savings clubs, *stokvels* and home-related activities. These initiatives are common throughout the Third World and have been supported by donors who embraced the development thinking of the 1970s and 1980s. This thinking advocated the 'add-on' approach, which was meant to bring women into development without necessarily challenging the entrenched patriarchal ideology within mainstream development (Momsen, 1991; MacDonald *et al.*, 1997).

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<sup>128</sup> Interviews were held at different times with these women who are regarded highly as stalwarts of the women's associations in Lesotho. Mokokoane was the first woman commissioner in the prime minister's office in 1979, while Mosala was the founding member of Hlokomela Bana, LNCW and was a senator in the BCP government. Molapo is both an NGO and political activist who served as a diplomat during the BNP government

One common description, albeit with some negativity, of these initiatives is that they were shaped by the welfare approach embraced by both the state and donors. Connelly *et al* (2000:55) maintain that 'women's organisations have worked for social-welfare causes, reforms, and empowerment over the last century in the South, just as they have in the North', while Saunders (2002:4) posits that the welfarism approach was an 'extension of the liberal ideologies of relief aid that was paternalistic and perpetuated existing gender roles'. In the Lesotho case, according to the OSISA report (2007), organisations such as the Lesotho National Council of Women and the Lesotho Homemakers Association were primarily concerned with welfare issues and with preparing women for caring and nurturing roles: 'These organisations commanded respect in society as they were seen to be preparing women to play their rightful role and were led by respected women, wives of senior politicians amongst others' (ibid: 52).

The agenda pursued by such groups has been criticised for not conforming to the feminist orientation and their activities have thus been labelled 'bread and butter' politics (Motebang, 1997; OSISA, 2007). These criticisms are based on and influenced by the practical and strategic gender needs thesis advocated by Molyneux (in Hassim 2006:5) who maintains that practical gender needs 'arise from the everyday responsibilities of women, based on a gendered division of labour, while strategic gender interests are those that women share in overthrowing power inequalities based on gender'. According to Hassim, Molyneux has admitted that to draw a distinction between these needs is difficult as women can address practical needs in a way that may ultimately influence strategic needs. This view is also supported by Connelly *et al* (2000) who argue that in their pursuit to address societal problems, women may drive a feminist agenda but clothe such an agenda in welfare language.

Responding to the criticism levelled against the 'welfarist' approach of most pre-1990s women's organisations, most founding members of these organisations argued that the organisations have succeeded in instilling a spirit of voluntarism and laid ground for collective solidarity. They maintain that instead of negative criticism, these

aspects should have been used as an avenue for political consciousness. The president of LNCW<sup>129</sup> asserted that during the 1970s, it was difficult for women to make decisions on their reproductive rights as men resisted the introduction of contraceptives because having children was, in addition to family regeneration, a way of controlling women's reproductive role. She attributes this resistance to patriarchal institutions such as religion and chieftainship, hence she argues that:

*You must remember that during this time, Lesotho was ruled by BNP which was dominated by both chiefs and the Catholics and these two institutions categorically embraced entrenched patriarchal principles that could not accept the introduction of birth control among Basotho women.*

Mosala revealed that one strategy for overcoming this barrier was to have advocates of family planning (who were predominantly from the donor community) attend Council meetings organised for village women groups. These meetings were used to educate women about birth control devices and how to use them in a way that men would not recognise. Mosala maintains that the pill became more popular as it could be used easily without men noticing, and that a favourite place to hide it was in the flour bin since most men did not cook. Corroborating this submission, one woman politician who is also a practising pharmacist<sup>130</sup> mentioned that the first place women used to hide the pill was under the mattress, but this place became dangerous as men discovered them easily and a lot of women were beaten up. They then designed a strategy of using the flour bin which proved convenient. Furthermore, the health personnel who worked at family planning centres, allowed the women to leave their appointments and record cards at the centres as women reported to be exposed to violence when men discovered the cards<sup>131</sup>. This approach cannot be dismissed as purely addressing practical needs as it actually allowed women to take control of their sexual and reproductive rights, a matter which is feminist and hence political. But more importantly, it highlights the power of collectivistic approach albeit

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<sup>129</sup> Interview with Mosala

<sup>130</sup> Interview May 2008; Dr Khauhelo Raditapole (Leader of Basutoland African Congress Party, and Member of Parliament).

<sup>131</sup> In some cases, trusted elderly women hid the pill for these women who would then go to take them everyday from their homes or hide them when they knew their husbands were going to arrive.

surreptitiously as well as suggesting forms of silent ‘resistance’ used by women to implement a transnational feminist intervention against patriarchal restraints.

Other stalwarts in the women’s movement identified the establishment of crèches around the country without government policy or financial support as another success feminist story. This socialist feminist phenomenon emanated from calls for working women for provision of facilities that would enable them to participate full in the labour market. Crèches and pre-schools are predominantly run and supported by women and address issues of gender politics *vis-à-vis* working women. Sending children to crèche has not only given financial liberty to those women who run them, but has decreased women’s ‘time poverty’ as they released women to join the labour force and earn an income, which in turn empowers them. According to one LNCW activist, all these efforts need to be seen as complementary to the whole issue of women’s political struggles and should not be isolated from the mainstream gender equality agenda. Viewing these initiatives from this perspective would help in uniting women into one strong front.

The above examples correlate with Geisler’s (2004: 207) observation that in the African countries, it was clear that African women were not only concerned with nurturing roles but that they ‘had ambitions beyond being mothers and wives’. The problem, she argues, has been that women have been pushed back into domesticity. One would, however, argue that the problem is actually that women’s strategies to address their problems have been viewed narrowly to the extent that they have been depoliticised. Geisler concludes that there are lessons that women have gained from these experiences, which have informed the larger gender politics debate. She argues that through their different strategies including addressing, for instance, gender violence which takes place in the private sphere, women have ‘finally merged the public and the private’ (ibid: 216). And Hassim (2006: 258) also argues that, “these different and vibrant arenas within the women’s movement should ideally add up to a strong and diverse social movement ... and that both the private and public spheres are increasingly governed by democratic norms”.

On the issue of collaborating with other non-state actors such as women's league of political parties to push the feminist agenda on the national political agenda, all autonomous groups claim their reluctance to be seen influenced by political parties' patronage politics. For example, the LNCW has been 'very careful', members noted. The Council's reluctance to get involved in formal politics has been attributed to a number of factors. These include the political climate that has been characterised by violence and factionalism and the council's preference to work with all women across parties, which was discouraged by political intolerances between and within political parties. It then proved fruitful not to work with political parties at all. Under different regimes, a number of political events impacted on the way the organisations perceived their relationship with political institutions and in turn affected their choice of engagement with such institutions. For instance, the post- independence era was characterised by BNP's aggressive strategies to convince women that they were done a favour by the party as it strived for their right to vote. Furthermore, the government's projects on construction that employed mainly rural poor women affected membership of women's organisations that could not offer similar incentives to these women. But more significantly, the creation of the women self-help group by government marginalised these organisations as the self-help group was 'highly politicised' and thus gained government's support and policy priority<sup>132</sup>.

Though the LWSH was theoretically established as a policy initiative, it never embarked or participated in any policy processes. Partly because in essence, they were not created for that purpose but only as a cosmetic political design, but it could also be because these were relatively uneducated women who could not engage basic principles of policy making, let alone a global agenda that challenged the very principles that they had grown to internalize as the way of life. Despite the authoritarian nature of the BNP government, donor agencies continued pumping money through these government's structures that were not accountable to the general women's constituency. It is quite ironical that despite the power that donors wield,

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<sup>132</sup> Sello C. (1991) in a circular inviting women's organisations to a 'National forum to the democratization of women'

they were unable to influence democratic accountability by working through units outside the state. The role that these donor agencies have played in shaping the place of the transnational feminist gender equality agenda in Lesotho is discussed in chapter six. Suffice to say the creation of LWSH presents another feminist puzzle where governments that are patriarchal and undemocratic embark on initiatives that are theoretically feminist in nature yet they are in essence disempowering the same women they were meant to liberate.

To justify government's intervention, the director of women and youth affairs argued that organisations such as the LNCW and its affiliates were not responding to rural women's needs as they were "urban-oriented" (Ntsane, 1981), and that the self help group was created as an avenue from which to address rural women's marginalisation. However, as illustrated in the preceding section the group was used as a political tool to strengthen patronage-client politics. Instead of strengthening or collaborating with existing groups, it actually took over many of their activities especially in the context of rural development. The experience of women's groups under the BNP rule highlight the extent to which a global agenda can be restrained by undemocratic political regimes and in the process shape parameters of engagement with that agenda. The members of LNCW who were BCP members argue that women's groups were treated with suspicion as BNP believed they were working with the exiled BCP (Mosala, Noko<sup>133</sup>).

Though in some context the military rule has been regarded as hostile to the thriving of citizens' participation, some activists felt that a sense of freedom was ushered in by the army after their take-over. This view is expressed despite the fact that the army abolished all political activities when they came into power through the notorious Order No.5 of 1986<sup>134</sup>. This perception is based on the fact that the army nominated a woman to ministerial position who was an activist and founder member of LNCW. As

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<sup>133</sup> Interviews with Ms Mosala a gender activists, and Ms Noko, a politician, May 2007,

<sup>134</sup> The Order prevented all political activities or gatherings. This according to the soldiers was meant to unite the nation that was divided by politicians.



mentioned in chapter two this position was not executive as she could not attend cabinet meetings hence her contribution was marginalised. The only way she could put forth her contribution was through lobbying support from some men in the military council who seemed willing to listen. Otherwise, her influence on the content of discussions was minimal especially in the case of a military rule that operated without a national mandate<sup>135</sup>. This situation highlights the extent to which nominations of some women into senior positions was only a token that may lead to the marginalisation of women's activism by authoritative regimes; what Makoa (1997) terms 'cleansing' or 'cosmetic appointment' (Shoeshoe 1991). On the other hand this nomination suggests ways in which a transnational agenda can enter the policy space despite the undemocratic nature of the ruling regime; it highlights the extent to which women's global issues have been able to permeate even illiberal states. It therefore calls for the local activists to take advantage of such small openings to make their demands

The BCP government that came after the military rule (1993-1997)) also nominated an NGO activist to a Senate position, while two of the women who went into the national assembly were also NGO activists. However the one woman nominated into cabinet position was not a member of the women's movement but had been in exile. Even though the government dismissed focus on 'women' only approach, it was during this rule that women's groups were visible in demanding the space for women's issues on the policy agenda that included participation in politics, review of laws, and in particular, their participation in world conferences on women, for instance, the 1995 women's conference in Beijing. In fact, the Beijing conference united women groups across the wider spectrum than at any time in the history of the country. According to some activists who attended the conference, the demand by the international women's movement for civil society groups to meet before the conference injected some momentum at regional and national levels, and in addition donors provided support for these organisations to attend the conference.

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<sup>135</sup> Interview with Mrs Hlalele July 2007

A number of liberal feminist interventions implemented by the LCD (1998-2005) government, as earlier mentioned in chapter two owed their origin from the efforts of women's organisations such as WLSA, FIDA and LNCW. The strategies employed by these groups in engaging government through the Department of Gender and the ministry of Constitution Law, Human Rights and Justice allowed them to insert feminist issues that transformed the domestic gender debates. On the other hand, the government has been praised by some for creating a climate conducive for the civil society to engage in a number of programmes without any interference. This does not in anyway suggest the existence of democratic consolidation as some activists argue that the LCD has been in power at the time when women's issues have been visibly become global development issues. In addition, the fact that donors have been championing gender mainstreaming in their programmes, government's overdependence on donor funding forces it to prove that it is committed to this developmental agenda. All this confirms the assertion that transnational issues have been pursued by 'unlikely' actors because of a number of factors that are both financial and political.

There are differing views on the political efficiency and influence of women activists nominated into power under regimes that themselves do not embrace gender equality as policy priority. It was argued by some activists that nomination of women from the movement has not benefitted the women's constituency as once they get into power they give loyalty to the ruling party. For example one NGO and political activist argued that the woman Senator, just like all party nominees, never pushed any feminist issues during her tenure in the House. It was maintained that she was driving the party's agenda more than the women's agenda. On the other hand, some have argued that an individual woman in a male- dominated structure was a lone voice, and that the attitude of BCP towards women's issues was based on little knowledge on 'gender' issues that had just been introduced within the mainstream development debates, and that it couldn't have been easy for one individual to influence the policy content<sup>136</sup>. This argument is supported by Goetz (2003: 29-30) who identifies about three variables that influence women's political effectiveness and the ability to use

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<sup>136</sup> Interview with Majara, February 2008

voice to politicise issues of concern to women. These are “the strength of the gender equity lobby in civil society, the credibility of feminist politicians and policies in political competitions, and the capacity of the state to enforce commitments to gender equity”. In the case of Lesotho, the problem is not only the matter of interaction between these factors but the basic question of the existence of elements of such variables; hence, it becomes unfair to place the blame on one individual woman. As Mama (2004) has argued as well; women within the political arena face various barriers to pursuing the gender agenda within ‘political systems that have historically excluded women’. As a result, feminist inquiry into the political efficacy of women in leadership positions needs to take cognisance of the interplay of numerous factors within the policy and political context.

### **Knowledge and Rights- based groups: Pushing for equality through the lens of the law**

The rise of autonomous women’s organisations globally and in particular Africa in the 1980s and 1990s has been attributed to changes in both international and domestic political contexts (Adams, 2006). In addition, this period ushered in new ways of organising through regional activism which promoted regional and national women’s networks and associations. Knowledge-based and human rights organisations in Lesotho must be understood within this context, and both their mandates and strategies were part of the larger transnational feminist agenda. Nevertheless, these groups pursued these global issues within closed domestic political contexts which in significant ways shaped the place of these issues within national political spaces.

The Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) and Women and the Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) surfaced towards the end of the military rule in the late 1980s, while internationally the human rights movement was beginning to make a discernable mark (Molyneux and Razavi, 2002). This resurgence also took place immediately after the Nairobi women conference which spurred interest in regional activism and influenced the creation of Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF), whose approach was to link law and development to empower women (Adams 2006). These

organisations have been in the forefront of legal activism and human rights discourse and their strategies have included research, advocacy and legal clinics for women.

According to the WLSA national coordinator, these organisations emerged at the time when the concept of human rights was being dismissed as foreign in Lesotho and that it was mainly used by state institutions to '*score points to be politically correct and to convince donors*'<sup>137</sup>. She also argued that there was little research done to inform policy changes except for few consultancy studies undertaken by foreign researchers. The only place that had begun this work was the Women's Research Collective driven by women academics at the National University of Lesotho. On the other hand, the government showed little interest on the work of this unit as well as on implementing the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies. The government only showed interest through sending their officers to world conferences and never bothered to either report on these forums or make follow-ups (Letuka, Matashane-Marite<sup>138</sup>).

Notwithstanding their significant contribution in terms of legal reforms (OSISA, 2007), these organisations have found themselves stretching their limited resources into political processes due to the absence of women's NGOs that focus on women's political concerns within the discourses of democratic governance. However, these efforts have been directed mainly at voter education during election campaigns while support for female candidates has been minimal and they have always diminished with the completion of the election process. Like most NGOs, they have operated at the margins of political processes and have tried to maintain autonomy for fear of co-optation by the state machinery and political parties. This view is shared by both WLSA and FIDA National Coordinators<sup>139</sup>. But by distancing themselves from formal politics, they have failed to penetrate the political institutions that would allow them space to entrench principles of political equality and democratic governance. As

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<sup>137</sup> Interview with Matashane- Marite, May 2007

<sup>138</sup> Interviews gender activists 2007 and 2008 respectively.

<sup>139</sup> Interview gender activists, May 2007.

earlier highlighted these organisations have the potential to open space for other aspects of gender equality including ‘substantive equality’ (Hassim 2006, 45).

Though some of the respondents have indicated that FIDA and WLSA use different approaches that may impact on the way their messages are accepted; both these organisations brought a new face to policy issues as regards women. Through their human rights and legal equality approach that is informed by the transnational feminist advocacy, they have been able to target one of the central sites of patriarchy-the law. At the time these groups emerged, issues of equality were already discussed, though in non-committal tones. Issues that dominated the policy discourse centred on women’s reproductive roles such as motherhood and family planning. In fact, according to one feminist newsletter, during the BNP government, legal capacity was never on the political agenda despite the party’s large following of women (Shoeshoe, 1991). According to this view, the military government was applauded to have done what all other administrations had failed to do. Based on a number of consultancy work by donor agencies and foreign scholars, the minority status<sup>140</sup> of women was always cited as the main constraint to achieving gender equality (Gill, 1994). In the same manner government’s approach was also informed by this notion as captured in the Fifth Five Year Development Plan (1991/1992 - 1995/6), the discriminatory legislation had to change because:

*...the enhanced legal status of women is the key for the future development of Lesotho. Despite strides taken in developing women’s potential by providing them with education and encouraging them into commercial enterprise outside the home, the law still does not protect them from exploitation in matters such as inheritance and business.*

A number of laws that discriminated against women were therefore identified. These included the law on inheritance, maintenance, marriage, divorce and pensions as well as the workings of the justice system itself. A number of studies were undertaken to investigate the impact of these laws on women. In most of these studies, the

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<sup>140</sup> According to the law, both customary and civil, women whose marital status falls under the community of property are legally minors and cannot enter into contract without the consent of their husbands- this has been the case until November 2006.

customary law was targeted as it was believed that the law was a product of the patriarchal ideology that dominates Basotho tradition. However, it became clear that both customary and common law had aspects that discriminated against women. For example, in their first research project on inheritance, WLSA researchers were surprised to find out that when applied in extended families, the customary law actually protects women than the general law. They learned that in practice, the customary law is more flexible as families can decide on who should inherit property (Steward, 1996). They found out that contrary to what most people believe, “property is increasingly inherited on merit. Sons and daughters who contribute most of family’s welfare are now most likely to be favoured as heirs” (Work for Justice Issue 71, nd: 4). Researchers felt that there was a need to reconcile the two laws, not necessarily to abolish any of them. As a result, this has led to the revision of the inheritance law by the government of Lesotho, where the new law now allows parents to choose the heir through a written will. This example is meant to highlight the extent to which a global women’s rights issue can be domesticated with the help of informed research of the local context.

A number of publications addressing legal issues have been produced by these organisations, some of which may have had direct influence on the practice of the law and policy. Under its name, FIDA has mainly worked on simplification of the law so that it is understood by people who are to benefit from such laws. These include; the laws on inheritance as espoused in the customary law and common law, the new Land Law; (this protects women from the erstwhile common law discriminatory practices of requiring women to be assisted by male relatives in order to acquire title to land); Marriage Law as governed by both customary and civil laws; the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (the Act is meant to consolidate and repeal all laws relating to sexual offences), and the Law of Equality of Married Counterparts which is meant to abolish marital power that husbands used to have over women (Lepono, 2007). Furthermore, the organisation is currently charged with simplifying the Protection and Welfare Bill which is meant to extend, promote and protect the rights of children. FIDA has been granted money to help GOL in addressing gender equality in the MCC funded projects. Added to this, FIDA is expected to train different levels of community on the Equality Act which still runs in contradiction with the inheritance laws. The

organisation has also been charged with training the police on sexual and human rights through a government initiated Child and Gender Protection Unit (CGPU). The creation of this unit is also attributed to the influence of the publications of FIDA and WLSA on how the justice system could be transformed to benefit women, especially those that are victims of domestic and sexual violence. All these highlight the significant role that research and knowledge-based women's groups play in influencing change in law despite existing discriminatory practices within political institutions.

On the other hand, WLSA has produced reports and books based on action research on a number of legal issues that affect women, these include; *Gender, HIV/AIDS and the Law - 2003-2005 Sexual Violence in Lesotho*, *Family Belonging for Women in Lesotho* (1998), *Beyond Inequalities: Women in Lesotho* (1997), *The Administration of Justice; the Delivery Problems and Constraints* (1997-2001), *Maintenance in Lesotho* (1990-91), *Inheritance in Lesotho* (1992-93), *Family and the Legal Status of Women in the Family* (1994-1996), *Property Dispossession in Lesotho*, and *Guidelines in Writing a Will* (Sesotho translation, 2006). All this information has been used by state and non-state actors interested in addressing women's issues. Because of their knowledge strength these organisations have been commissioned to provide technical support to donor and government funded programs within government and civil society.

In collaboration with UNFPA and the Ministry of Health, these organisations were able to place women's reproductive rights issues on the policy agenda. Having participated in the Cairo population conference in 1994 these groups contributed in 'engendering' the population policy and inserted a human rights perspective to this field. However, it has been noted that UNFPA had to push the government to prioritise this issue and ended up driving the whole process<sup>141</sup>. This intervention went as far as recognising issues of safe motherhood and access to family planning services and left out the right to choice on issues such as termination of pregnancy. As a result,

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<sup>141</sup> Interview with gender officer at UNFPA, May 2007; Maseru

abortion is still illegal despite high incidences of ‘backstreet’ abortion methods which have left many young women ill, some dead, while some have been jailed for ‘concealing birth’<sup>142</sup>.

Another policy that these organisations made a significant mark by providing expertise was the Gender and Development Policy of 2003. According to both WLSA and FIDA senior officers the process of drafting this document began after the Beijing conference on women but lacked institutional support from government. However, as a result of pressure from a number of regional and international feminist calls for institutional commitment by governments the process was given serious attention. A number of international norms on achieving gender equality were emerging as global priorities and they also forced government to take practical policy steps, for instance, the MDGs which specifically have benchmarks for achieving this goal contributed to change that led to the serious focus on women’s issues.

FIDA and WILSA worked with the Department of Gender in drafting and disseminating the policy. Even though there were areas of disagreement, it is believed that government relied on them for expertise. This came after government had rejected an earlier co-authored submission on the basis that the authors were “BNP Supporters”. Ironically, it was this dismissed version that government took and presented in Beijing in 1995<sup>143</sup>. The extent to which the policy is implemented has been left in the hands of the department and this has raised a concern on the government’s commitment and expertise in addressing gender inequalities.

Although FIDA and WLSA practise from a non-political or denominational position, they have engaged women politicians on a number of laws that have been brought to

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<sup>142</sup> Every week newspapers publish cases of women who have dumped fetuses, and in most cases they have been charged and sentenced to maximum of three months in jail or community service.

<sup>143</sup> Interviews- Ntimo- Makara, Matashane- Marite, Molapo, Mokokoane, these are gender activists who have participated in a number of national and regional policy forums.



parliament. According to WLSA officers, the organisation has lobbied women MPs to support these laws by sometimes holding workshops meant to clarify the proposed laws, so that the MPs can support their passage with some understanding of their implications. This assertion was supported by some women politicians who mentioned that they have benefitted from their interaction with these groups on legal matters. What became clear though is the fact that these women MPs lacked skills to disseminate such developments to their constituencies.

The past decade has seen increasing global and regional calls for equal political representation of women in decision making positions. And as Tripp (2006) posits, this feminist call was driven by both international and regional bodies. For instance within the SADC region the use of quotas to promote women's visibility and representation within legislature has been promoted through the inter-parliamentary Union and the SADC Parliamentary Forum. At national level the use of quotas has received mixed responses as even some members of the women's movement were divided on this issue. The high literacy rate of women has been used by both men and women as an excuse to counteract any form of affirmative action for women. While some sections of the population including politicians and NGOs cited the discriminatory nature of quotas, some activists argued that quotas perpetuate tokenism. Nonetheless, WLSA was instrumental in supporting government on the introduction of quotas for local government elections. The experience of local government in Lesotho<sup>144</sup> not only suggests that legislated quotas do make a difference in terms of politics of representation, but also that women's political efficacy can be enhanced through deliberate efforts to mobilise women around political leadership. Women's groups such as WLSA, in collaboration with the Department of Gender, employed aggressive strategies to lobby women to stand as candidates in these elections. While government had proposed 30% seats for women councillors, the number unexpectedly almost doubled. Although different groups,

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<sup>144</sup> Lesotho held its first Local Government election in 2005

including opposition parties and some civil society organisations<sup>145</sup> were against the implementation of this strategy, the women went ahead to contest the political space.

The role played by the Department of Gender and WLSA in mobilising women to stand for this election is an issue that shows that the state can actually be a ‘friend’ of women’s activism. Despite much criticism and opposition, WLSA used donor support to engage different constituencies through workshops and rallies, as well as using the media to justify the implementation of quotas. Among others, WLSA, for example, mobilised women to attend a court case<sup>146</sup> where government was accused of contravening the constitution by reserving seats for women. This case attracted a lot of attention and at the end the court ruled that it was government’s obligation to implement measures that are meant to empower disadvantaged groups, and also highlighted that government’s signature of international conventions is binding. The success of this intervention has been based on the application of international standards and use of existing democratic structures to safeguard women’s rights; while the domestic politics worked against this goal, it was the women’s movement group that used the transnational norms to effect change. What was interesting is that the agenda remained the matter of two ministries only (Ministry of Gender and Ministry of Local Government) and the IEC. There was no collective government involvement in the whole politics of the constitutionality of the intervention.

Finally, Lesotho’s qualification for the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) which saw Lesotho qualify for the largest grant ever, was partly influenced by women’s organisations such as FIDA and the WLSA. These organisations informed the MCC about the long awaited Bill that was ignored by parliament, which was to give married women power to apply for loans, among others<sup>147</sup>. The passing of the

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<sup>145</sup> BAC leader Molapo Qhobela was quoted by a local newspaper saying the strategy was ‘sexual apartheid’, while BNP said it was ‘against the law and LPC said ‘it is confusing’ (genderlinks.org.za/docs/). On the other hand, LCN was also against what they called the ‘way in which the matter was dealt with’.

<sup>146</sup> Molefi Tsepe V The IEC and others,- CIV/APN/135/2005

<sup>147</sup> Interview with senior FIDA officials, June 2007

Bill was then used by the MCC as conditionality on the part of government, and as a result, in November 2006, the Bill was enacted into law. FIDA has been charged with driving the process of ensuring that the Act is simplified and its principles are disseminated to all women who have to benefit from this law. It remains the responsibility of the women's groups to hold government accountable for the implementation of this law.

The above analysis has highlighted the role that the women's organisations played in institutionalising the transnational feminist human rights agenda in Lesotho. It has also shown how they have been able to shape the legal and human rights discourse within the military era and nascent democratic contexts. It has elucidated that the 'welfare' approach employed by pre-1985 women's groups cannot be missed as merely conservative but can be utilised as a base from which to advance global gender politics. These experiences highlight how domestic women's organisations have used the transnational space to influence the political agenda as well as institutionalising principles of democratic governance that include representative politics.

### ***Democracy, Political Parties and Women's Political Activism: a Missed Opportunity***

Analysing the context for feminist activism around equality issues in countries that have not experienced liberation struggle presents a complex exercise; the struggle against gender inequality should be viewed within the larger social movement politics. The same cannot be said for women's organisations in countries that have participated in armed struggle for independence or democratic rule. Lesotho falls within the former category of countries that attained independence without any armed liberation struggle. The impoverished labour reserve that Lesotho had become under British 'protection' gained political independence through a relatively smooth transition and this has created a society that lacks a sense of political activism at all

fronts. National liberation struggles against racial oppression in South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe have been cited as avenues from which women's organisations drew experience in their struggles for gender equality (Tripp in Bauer and Britton, 2006; Hassim in Hassim and Goetz, 2003). In her analysis on the political discourses and their influence on South African women's political organisations, Hassim observes that "women's participation in community organisations was encouraged as part of the process of expanding resistance at grassroots level" (2006, 14). She cites countries such as Brazil, Chile and Argentina as examples of countries which used the transition period from oppression to democracy as 'tipping' moments that opened opportunities for political activism even among minority groups. In their analysis of the relationship between the civil society and the women's movement in South Africa Hassim and Gouws (1988) argued that:

*The broader context of the transition provided a framework within which an articulate women's movement could make certain gains. The discourses of transition- the terms of the democratic society, the nature of new institutions, the values which would underpin the Constitution- were discourses in which the broader notions of social justice demanded by women could make an impact. This impact of the WNC on the constitutional debates as well as on the institutional framework for democracy provided immediate gains from collective action which sustained the organisation **in the short run**. (Emphasis added).*

The above assertion highlights the significance of the women's collective bargaining during the transition period in demanding their political space in a new dispensation. The analysis, however, does not show clearly how the transition itself motivated particular sections of the population, such as men and other gate-keepers, to 'bend' strong patriarchal ideologies that have made it difficult for other societies to 'hear' the women's voice. Conversely, in some contexts the democratic dispensation has not been necessarily beneficial to women's collective bargaining; for instance, in her comparative view of Southern Africa's women's participation in national liberation struggles, Geislar (2004) observes that after gaining independence, women had to fight for their emancipation from patriarchal ideologies, while on the other hand women's activism tends to wane. The lapse that has followed democratic rule has not been thoroughly investigated although there is a general understanding that women's

activism degenerates after democratic transitions, and this has worked against the institutionalisation of the gender equality agenda. However, it is a matter of fact that the experience the women took from the struggle has benefited their cause despite declining activism. For example, Iheduru (2003) also supports this view by illustrating that after 1994, South Africa was nearly confronted with “mobilization without emancipation”, but the type of mobilisation the South African women pursued - corporate feminism - saw them using opportunities offered by capitalism to climb the economic ladder. Black women’s corporate activism can be attributed to the liberation struggle that equipped these women with skills to demand their space within the male dominated space.<sup>148</sup> The struggle for gender equality in societies that men are main economic actors has suffered as women’s economic dependence affects both their position and voice in decision making. Basotho women’s dependence on migrant remittances, for instance, had direct and indirect implications for women’s political activism that challenges the patriarchal political space.

Geislar’s analysis (2004:30) highlights the feminist puzzle within countries that did not experience transitional politics which as a result have had different feminist political activism; Botswana is cited as an example where women decided to ‘opt’ out of formal politics. Lesotho, like Botswana, gained independence from Britain with little, if any, political struggle. The emergence and evolution of the global women’s agenda in Lesotho politics, thus, has to be understood within the context of a very limited ‘movement’ politics and mass activism. The struggle for political independence was not motivated by racism or class struggle, but was primarily the product of a global call for the abolition of colonialism in Africa. In the absence of race and class struggle, even during brief historical moments of transition, there was no uniting force which in the context of some countries like South Africa, united people in fighting for a common identity. The long term implication for this has been the proliferation of women’s organisations that have operated at the periphery of the mainstream political space, as well as inherent political factionalism that led to patronage politics. Their choice of engaging the political actors from the margins has

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<sup>148</sup> Corporate feminism is described as attempting to bring change in gender inequality within the capitalist system; it questions popular conceptions of the position of women in society (Iheduru 2003;477-8)

partly benefitted their cause while this autonomy has been blurred by their overdependence on donor financial assistance.

Women's political participation and their representation in decision making has been the focus of both democracy and gender equality debates, while women's organisations have avoided political institutions in their struggles to institutionalise global feminist agendas they have gained access to such spaces through transnational feminist advocacy. However, their impact has been minimal as formal politics have remained the domain of patriarchal actors and institutions. In the same manner these institutions have failed to benefit from women's collective politics. Randall (1987), for instance, argues that women exercise their political influence in different ways that are not regarded as part of formal politics. She highlights that even though women's groups are depicted as apolitical they have characteristics that conform to basic democratic principles such as regular meetings, elections, and resolution of disputes among members. Regrettably this has not been used to inform the consolidation of democracy and Lesotho politics are characterised by a deafening silence of women in critical democratic debates.

Historical literature on women's political activism prior to independence in Lesotho has been documented by among others, Epprecht (2000) and Makoja (1997). These accounts have highlighted political activism of few individuals such as Manthatisi and Mantsebo<sup>149</sup>. On the other hand Epprecht has also highlighted the role played by Catholic nuns in campaigning for BNP which won the first democratic elections of 1966. However, his argument does not show how the nuns' actions could be understood in isolation of the whole Catholic Church's stance towards the BCP<sup>150</sup> or the whole communist ideology that BCP advocated for in its campaigns. Other scholarly work on women has concentrated mainly on the impact of socio-economic

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<sup>149</sup> Both these women were chiefs and their documented experiences need to be located within the patriarchal institution of chieftainship. In fact, Mantsebo was the regent who acted as paramount chief on behalf of Moshoeshoe II because she had a daughter who could not traditionally inherit chieftaincy.

<sup>150</sup> According to Mphanya (2004), the BNP was founded with encouragement from the Catholic Church which feared BCP which was regarded as promoting principles of communism.

dynamics such as the migrant labour system on women's survival, economic dependence and family disruptions (Gordon, 1981, 1994; Wright 1993; Walker (ed.), 1990; Showers, 1980; Murray, 1977, 1981; Mueller, 1977; Matlosa and Pule, 1997). The place of women's political activism under democratic and undemocratic regimes and how these contexts influenced women's engagement with the gender discourse has not attracted academic scrutiny, and as such, little knowledge exists on the relationship between women's activism and democratic governance.

Women's organisations and political activism have been linked to factors within the domestic space especially the political system which manifests entrenched patriarchal attitudes while the global democracy project presents an opportunity to effect change within this space. Due to the low levels of activism and political consciousness, political gender equality issues have benefitted from the participation of women's organisation in both regional and international feminist advocacy. State interventions and donor pressure have also contributed in opening this political space but much still needs to be done. Though Hassim (2006: 43 citing C.Hendrics) has argued that the terms of women's political activism are set by the state, it is also true that the level of democratic maturity as well as feminist consciousness are critical in informing the content of political activism, and this calls for a vibrant women's movement that has a clearly set political agenda. As Becker (1995: 50) posits, "the extent to which male-dominated state will promote policies that improve or do not improve women's situation critically depends on the pressure exerted by women's movements within and outside the political apparatus of the state".

While the democratisation process in different parts of the Third World tended to give an impetus to the formation of civil society organisations and women's involvement in mass action (Geislar, 2004; Tripp, 2006), in Lesotho, the mushrooming of NGOs in the late 1980s under the military rule (Letuka *et al.*, 2002; Selinyane, 1997; Kabemba, 2003) tended to direct women's activism more to global women's issues and less to the domestic situation. Of course mainstream civil society organisations became the only political mouth-piece of the people as the military era had no space for representative politics and this had its effect on the way women organised their

struggle. However, the demands on the return to democratic rule had no feminist agenda hence it was a lost opportunity for women's political collective. Nonetheless the military rule as indicated in chapter two selectively picked up global feminist issues without engaging women's organisations. Probably the military participated in international forums and had to abide by international norms, and as Kardam (1994) notes, the guidelines in the Forward Looking Strategies produced a lot of pressure from government donors on national governments to give serious attention to women's issues.

Women's collective activism under democratic regimes has been also characterised by continuing conundrums as women's groups have tended to rely more on the transnational space while the state also responded more to international and regional norms without opening the political space for women. Similarly women's organisations have pursued these global issues without engaging democratic institutions such as political party leadership, as a result political parties have remained resilient to international feminist norms. One gender activist argued that they have organised outside of political parties because of fear of being labelled to be partisan<sup>151</sup>. In fact it became clear that the donor community have contributed much on this approach as some activists mentioned that donors require that the organisations must not be seen working with any political party, women's groups have thus been forced to avoid political parties even at moments when they would be strategic partners. Equally, the political leadership has been intimidating for these groups as they clearly opposed some feminist demands, especially those targeted at putting women into power, for example, one a member of LNCW, who was the first woman to be nominated into cabinet mentioned that she was once accused by a male politician for encouraging women to take part in leadership issues while she refused herself to stand for elections; her response was that the political context was too hostile and destructive particularly for women who 'respected' their families. She cited an example of the first woman who stood for the 1966 elections (Mrs

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<sup>151</sup> Interview with the founder of the Hlokomela Bana (women's organisation working on the welfare of children) and president of LNCW.



Makotoko), who was humiliated and insulted during election campaigns. As a result, she maintains that women who venture into politics:

*Must be brave and determined to face men's attacks that can be sometimes personal, but more importantly they must be knowledgeable on United Nations' calls for equality if they are to make significant change.*<sup>152</sup>

It is on the basis of the above perspectives that politics have been regarded with prudence by women as individuals and in groups. In as much as some of these women were active members of main political parties, they did not see these as avenues for driving a feminist agenda. In fact, almost all interviewees argued that political parties cannot be trusted to advance women's issues as they have not shown serious commitment to advancing gender equality within their structures. Women's experience with political leadership as individuals and in groups has in a way influenced the organisations' strategies on engaging political institutions on women's concerns; ultimately this has prevented the agenda to benefit from the democracy processes.

Women's organisations have tried to work autonomously from both government and political parties despite their weak bargaining power and had mostly relied on donor funding. This strategy has not only marginalised their voice but they have failed to build alliances with strategic actors such as the political leadership. As Bauer (2006:97) argues, 'seeking power within a political party is a viable strategy'. By employing an apolitical strategy, women's organisations have isolated women in political parties while the latter have treated them with suspicion. Bauer continues to argue that those women's groups that by their nature lack political power, political parties should be seen as offering an avenue for gaining political space, yet, it seems this strategy has been avoided by most women's groups. This argument was supported by some activists who believed that unless women in political parties embrace the gender equality agenda, women's groups cannot easily win the struggle (Mosala, Forere<sup>153</sup>). Yet, on the other hand, some activists argued that the level of

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<sup>152</sup> Interview Mrs Hlalele 2007

<sup>153</sup> Interviews with gender activists 2007

political maturity in Lesotho cannot benefit the cause of the women's groups (Mokokoane<sup>154</sup>). Others argue that political parties are not committed to gender equality as manifested by their lack of specific measures to empowering women at party level, so they maintain that these would not benefit their groups. This argument is supported by Kardam (1994) who argues that one main reason why the agenda to advance women's interests has been slow is the manipulation of the agenda by political parties, as political leaders use it to achieve other goals.

The fact that there has been only two historical moments that can be regarded as democratic in Lesotho in the forty years of independence suggests that it is being too ambitious to expect that some democratic principles can be embraced by undemocratic institutions. These are the period after independence (1966-1970) and the era that marked the end of military rule and return of exiled BCP elites (1993-present). Politically speaking, there is not much to record on women's organisations' political activism during the first democratic regime under BNP. There are, however, snippets of their activities that related more to welfare concerns as the president of LCNW <sup>155</sup> pointed out, the agenda that dominated the 1970s was influenced by a WHO nationwide study which was meant to identify the 'main problems facing women and children in Lesotho'. The study concluded that the serious issue that needed immediate attention was nutrition. This was not unique to Lesotho as in most Third World countries, nutrition became a new channel to access donor funding. Escobar argues that "Food and Nutrition Policy and Planning emerged as a sub-discipline in the early 1970s....What usually goes unnoticed is how a new sub-discipline introduces a set of practices that allows institutions to structure policy themes, enforce exclusions, and modify social relations"(1995:117). Understood from this perspective, activities of women's organisations were highly shaped by this new thinking. Nobody was talking about politics of power-sharing or representation to address the same problem of hunger. So, women's groups found themselves as 'messengers' of the new development focus and women's reproductive roles were exploited to advance this new thinking.

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<sup>154</sup> Interview with gender and political activist, August 2007

<sup>155</sup> Interview with Hlalele July 2007

On the other hand, the thriving of the 'self-help' groups made it difficult for other groups to claim their space. Because of this, the period offers little knowledge on political activism of women, except to highlight the extent to which women's efforts can be constrained by authoritarian and patrimonial politics. Their exclusion from the political processes affected their agenda and had to find themselves driving the agenda that was set by others. As Beckwith (2004:9) argues, "the specific strategic dilemma faced by women's movements is women's exclusion from political power, often legally and occasionally underpinned; this exclusion has shaped women's movements strategies".

The democratic rule that came into power in the 1990s could have benefitted women's groups struggle if politics of representation were seriously integrated within the democracy discourse, but this agenda was always shaded out hence it only gained prominence after 2000. This lack of interest in representative politics is also evidenced by limited studies on women's political activism as well as advocacy on women's political rights. In her analysis Lovenduski (2005) argues that it was only towards the end of the twentieth century that political issues such as equal political representation permeated the policy space. She mentions that there was a sense of ambivalence in most countries towards formal political representation in that, gender issues were discussed without locating them within the framework of representation in decision-making. In the case of Lesotho, politics of representation were shunned largely by big parties that dismissed them as 'foreign'. On the other hand, women within political parties could not come out publicly to support issues that did not form part of the parties' priorities. According to one woman politician, who also became the member of Interim Political Authority (IPA)<sup>156</sup> after the 1998 political riots, her association (Phaphamang Basali), proposed ways of bringing women into the political positions to the BCP government, but this was turned down by even the BCP women who accused her group for pursuing the agenda of the opposition Marematlou Freedom Party (MFP).

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<sup>156</sup> Interview with Morrison who is a politician and activist, May 2007

A number of women, especially from BNP, have argued that women's political efficacy has also been influenced by party allegiance more than the feminist agenda and as such, the agenda has suffered marginalization. The changing climate of political development has not benefitted women as they rallied behind political leaders without an agenda of 'feminist politics'<sup>157</sup> and have missed a number of political opportunities from which they could have asserted their demands from the state. The groups have failed to take advantage of "opportunities provided by different political regimes" (Alvarez 1990; 36 cited by Becker, 1995), and they have, therefore, allowed the state apparatus to dictate terms of 'engagement'.

The fragmentation of the women's movement and lack of one voice on gender equality, as well as a lack of common understanding of the agenda, have been cited as affecting the pace of achieving gender equality. The politics of representative democracy have not been conceptualised as core to the whole gender equality agenda and as such, women are still divided on the ways through which women should be brought into the political space as leaders<sup>158</sup>. The change of regime in 1993, the change of the electoral model in 2002, the adoption of the gender policy (2003) and the general wave of democratization within the region, as well as the donors' shift to politics of empowerment, are opportunities that should have been seized by a vibrant women's movement to drive the feminist agenda of political representation so that Basotho women are able to influence major decisions of their country.

### **Conclusions**

The foregoing analysis has highlighted the limited space within which the women's movement in Lesotho pursues the transnational gender equality agenda. It has

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<sup>157</sup> Goetz and Hassim (2002: 307) define this to refer to the struggles against inequalities in power between women and men

<sup>158</sup> Some interviewees described affirmative action through quotas as '*ho nka ka kiribae*' literally meaning to take women on a 'wheelbarrow', while some felt it was a necessary measure if it is temporary

acknowledged that the movement is characterised by fragmented associations and as such, makes it theoretically and practically difficult to push a feminist agenda. However, these organisations strive to change women's lives through using regional feminist advocacy. They have been successful in influencing patriarchal institutions to institute liberal legal interventions. Their lack of political activism is located within the broader political culture of a neo-patrimonial undemocratic state that has characterised Lesotho's political system. However, the chapter has also recognised the extent to which these groups have been able to use the transnational space to place feminist issues on the domestic political space. Despite minimal engagement of political institutions these women's organisations have been able to push strategically aspects of the global feminist agenda, and in particular the human rights discourse has been used to transform the legal minority status of Basotho women. While laws are enacted by state institutions women's human rights groups have been in the forefront in creating knowledge to inform these interventions. Their limited emphasis on political representation has to do more with the nature of the domestic political culture and less with the transnational norms. Paradoxically, feminist policy interventions instituted by the state have also affected the vibrancy of the women's movement as at times these groups expect government to effect changes while at the same time the state may lack capacity to implement such changes. Furthermore, the overdependence of both the state and women's organisations on donor funding impacts on the content and nature of gender debates.

While chapter three analysed how the domestic political culture has shaped the place of the transnational feminist agenda within the policy space, chapter four looked at how local gender activists within women's organisations have influenced and were influenced by global women's movements in institutionalising the feminist agenda on the one hand, and how the national context affected their initiatives and choice of strategies/issues in institutionalising change on the other. The chapter looked at two human rights autonomous groups, one income-generation and advocacy group and one single party-affiliated women's group to determine their role in influencing the institutionalisation of global gender equality agendas. The chapter has illustrated that transnational opportunity structures affect choices and strategies of local feminists within the women's movement. Yet at one level it has highlighted the conundrum presented by the domestic political culture which has narrowed the political space for

women's groups to organise and push a feminist agenda while at another level these groups have missed the opportunities provided by the democratic openings. Because women's groups discussed for this chapter are also members of the larger NGO sector, the next chapter looks at how mainstream mixed-sex NGOs within the broader civil society have dictated terms of engagement in relation to the institutionalisation of transnational feminist agendas in Lesotho.

## CHAPTER 5

### **Civil Society and the Transnational Gender Equality Agenda in Lesotho: Mixed-Sex NGOs and the framing of feminist discourses**

*“The civil society is as deeply masculinist as is the infrastructure of state relations”. (Rai, 1996, 18)*

The chapter looks at two dominant mainstream (mixed-sex) local NGOs working around democracy and human rights, and examines the extent to which they have engaged the state to place gender equality issues on the political agenda, and also hold government accountable to standards and instruments it has signed to address gender inequalities. These organizations are officially recognized as main actors in the development industry as they have been able to influence some crucial national development issues. They are socially significant within the civil society community and have co-opted women’s organizations as ‘affiliates’. After introducing the rationale for interrogating NGOs’ workings, the chapter examines the conceptualization of civil society and presents a historical analysis of its emergence and then locates its origin within the democracy and good governance project. Applying a transnational feminist analysis the chapter unpacks the place of women’s political presence within the democracy discourses as espoused by these local NGOs. The chapter then analyzes the autonomy of these organizations within the background of financial dependence on donor agencies. The role of these NGOs in advancing women political presence is critically explored so as to highlight the marginalization of politics of representation that are so central to democracy and good governance discourses. The chapter delves into the NGOs definition and prioritization of women’s issues and shows how this shapes their approaches to institutionalizing global gender equality issues.

#### **Introduction**

Existing research on gender and civil society tends to focus on the role played by women’s organizations within the civil society community in advocating for changes in laws and policy. The role of mainstream non governmental organizations (NGOs) working on human rights and democracy has not been expanded to accommodate the

workings of such groups on global gender equality issues. Furthermore, this has happened within the institutional context where gender equality has emerged as a policy priority both internationally and nationally. However, it has become clear that the sudden global eminence of gender equality within the mainstream development debates since the 1990s has given an impetus to development actors such as local NGOs, to change their approaches in order to accommodate the gender equality agenda within their programs. The chapter is not looking at the internal gender relations within the civil society organizations but mainly to understand global ideological influences on the general NGOs approaches to addressing gender inequalities, it does not either look at the role of women within these NGOs as in most cases they are not in the leadership of the organizations, in addition, it has been argued that in most cases women within the civil society organizations may not necessarily represent interests of women at the lower ranks of society but in most cases they concentrate on issues that affect women who are already in relative positions of power. On the basis of this, it is important to understand how mixed-sex organizations that are active at both the national and transnational levels have engaged the state in committing itself to the institutionalization of transnational feminist norms that are integral to the principles of democracy.

Because of global ideological shifts and the influence of international women's movement through both regional and international bodies, as well as financial incentives that come with 'gender mainstreaming' a number of NGOs whose initial mandate had nothing to do with women's issues as a group have come up to claim their place within gender equality advocacy. As Goetz has argued, unlike women's groups the mandate of these groups is not concerned with gender specific problems as their workings do not necessarily "reflect women's needs, interests and behavioural preferences" (1997, 7). In the case of Lesotho such organizations have been very vocal on issues of democracy and human rights. They have championed democratic processes such as elections and conflict resolution. In this chapter the role of two local mixed-sex non-governmental organizations is analyzed within the context of the international democracy and good governance discourse that encompasses political participation and representation. It examines debates around issues of gender equality from the point of view of these NGOs, highlighting in the process their definitions of



women's issues as well as their efforts to hold governments accountable to standards and agreements they have acceded to in relation to addressing gender equality as an aspect of democracy.

The chapter begins from the premise that NGOs within the civil society community other than women's groups are well positioned to push a transnational equality agenda. It recognizes the critical role that such organizations have played in driving critical principles of democratic governance as well as their advocacy and intervention on some policy issues that affects the marginalized. And as Skkink (2002, 302) maintains, these organizations take part in restructuring world politics by creating new norms and discourses. Unlike women's groups discussed in chapter four whose concern is specifically with women's needs and interests, groups for this chapter focus on a range of development-related and in particular governance issues and as a result they have attracted tremendous donor attention; the inclusion of 'gender equality' that is 'attached' to democracy and good governance programs emerged largely as a response to international pressures. Their approach to institutionalizing transnational gender equality issues can therefore be located within the context of donor dependency. Important also is the fact that women's groups discussed in chapter four are affiliates to these groups hence the need to examine how this affiliation might have influenced the way feminist issues have been prioritized. In addition, their relationship with governments has always been seen as oppositional hence it is necessary to investigate how this has influenced their approach to engage government on commitments to a global equality agenda. While democratic institutions such as political parties are key to the democracy project the approach of NGOs in working through these avenues to open the political space has not been thoroughly investigated within feminist discourses.

### **Conceptualizing Civil Society**

The concept of civil society has been debated extensively with the view of placing certain collectivities within social movement discourses. A number of definitions of

civil society<sup>159</sup> have been advanced in order to broaden our conceptualization of a civil society, (for example see Mamdani 1995). The descriptions have tried to accommodate both grassroots organizations as well as organized groupings outside of the state apparatus. However, it is generally accepted that the civil society occupies a diversity of spaces and that it involves multiple actors and it is influenced by societies' intentions to bring about social change on issues that affect them directly. For instance, Hassim (2006, 360 citing White, 1994) states that civil society could be seen as "an embodiment of social virtue confronting political vice". Masterson (2007, 206, citing Tailor 1990) also advances an expanded definition of civil society by stating that it is a "web of autonomous associations independent of the state, which binds citizens together in matters of common concern, and by their existence or actions could have an effect on public policy". Furthermore Britton and Fish (2009) give examples of collectives that make up a civil society community as organizations, movements, trade unions, civics, political parties and associations that hold a transformative agenda. This categorization expounds the broad space that the civil society occupies and therefore suggests that there cannot be one particular collective that can claim monopoly of such space within the movement discourses. However it is also important to note that some of these collectives are difficult to locate within the social movement as they operate at ad hoc levels, while some are not 'organized' entities and fail to neatly fit the formalized definition that is independent of the state but also able to engage government on social and policy issues.

Notably most of these groupings tend to work on the periphery of political space and on survival needs and are completely not interested in engaging the state or even to 'capture' the state. They do not even engage other non-state development actors but see themselves as independent of political actions. Because of this fluid nature of social groupings in the case of Lesotho the choice of the two organizations for this study had to be influenced by their visibility in policy debates, their engagement with different actors and the fact that their democracy and governance projects encompass

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<sup>159</sup> The definition adopted by INSTRAW covers trade unions, women's organizations or citizens' movements, that exist outside of the state or private sector, and which have potential to provide alternative views, policies and actions to those promoted by the government or private firms [www.un-instraw.org](http://www.un-instraw.org) (viewed, 14/09/07)

gender equality. In addition to being popular with donors, they also form part of the regional civil society network and draw their mandate from the international human rights framework.

It is important to highlight that the conceptualization of civil society need to be located within specific political contexts and historical moments that have a critical impact on any social action. Political context and processes have the potential to shape the nature of policy priorities and debates, as such civil societies' actions cannot be treated as apolitical as they are as well affected by political decisions. Though the levels of engagement with the state vary across contexts, it is important to acknowledge both 'confrontational' and 'gentle' activism as integral to the whole analysis of social movements. Reasons for the emergence of such public action vary according to contextual dynamics operating to determine the development discourse. In the same manner tactics and approaches employed by social groups will be largely determined by the nature of the political culture. For example, in some cases social action towards service delivery maybe shaped by the nature or level of democratic maturity, while in some cases these maybe a product of what is happening globally. In both cases the strategies to engage the state will vary, yet in essence the objective is to negotiate or challenge the public space. Viewing civil society in this way enables us to locate pockets of social action in contexts like Lesotho, within a broader social movement discourse.

For the purpose of this study Camerer's (1996 cited by Liebenberg 2000, 71) definition is adopted as it accommodates groupings that, though distinct from the state, they interact with the state on national issues and are also able to "form links with other interest groups and do not in any way seek to set themselves up as an alternative authority to the state". As indicated earlier the NGOs that have been selected for this study have been dominant in a number of national issues. But what is of relevance is the 'insertion' of the gender equality component in their organizational mandates. Their levels of engagement on gender issues is of relevance as they are the most recognized groups by both the government and the donor community which puts

pressure on them to utilize their “assumed comparative advantage of participation, impact, and efficiency (Mayoux 1998,179).

### **The Emergence of the Civil Society and the transnational space**

Understanding the history of how and why civil society groups have been established is important as it helps us to identify “how patterns of exclusion became institutionalized, and this helps in identifying critical points for change” (Goetz 1996, 16). An analysis of the emergence of the civil society is therefore a critical contribution to the growing literature on social movements’ organizations that have played a critical role in both international politics and in the transformation of global gender equality norms and practices (Khagram, 2002, 4).

Though social movements scholars may put varying emphasis on the relevance of the concept of the civil society, there is however a general consensus on the context and reasons that have prompted the emergence of the civil society globally. In a number of countries the transition era from authoritarian rule has been cited as a common factor, yet even countries that were not necessarily undergoing some regime transformations have experienced the mushrooming of social groups and NGO-ization of the civil society community. Though Mamdani traces the emergence of the civil society from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it is generally agreed that the concept gained more visibility in the 1980s. For instance, Masterson (2007, 203) states that globally the concept gained significant ground from mid-1980s. This period was marked by the collapse of communism, and a sudden interest of the donor community to channel funds through non-state actors who were regarded as less corrupt. Howard (2002, 204) further notes that civil society organizations and groups became significantly visible in instances where states moved from one party rule toward multiparty democracies; he argues that they provided “the crucial internal impetus to complement the prevailing favorable international conditions that emerged for democratic transitions at the end of the bipolar era”.

On a broader front the emergence of the civil society has been attributed to global economic and political transformations that changed the whole development discourses which shifted focus from the state to civil society groups as convenient implementers of development projects. As Chandhoke<sup>160</sup> posits, in addition to the demise of authoritarian regimes in the old USSR, ‘the demise of state-sponsored development in the poor colonial societies’ contributed immensely to the emergence of civil society groups (also see Zuern 2000). According to this view these events prompted intellectuals and social practitioners to identify new development actors to fill the void left by the weak state and implement development policies. In the context of the donor community the civil society became an avenue through which to bypass ‘weak and corrupt official agencies’, and grant funds to NGOs. And Selinyane (1997, 30) argues in the case of Lesotho that these groups were seen as appropriate “funnels for dispensation of aid”. The civil society emergence within global development discourses can therefore be attributed to the democracy and good governance thesis which was assumed to be the vehicle to attain development in the third world hence NGOs were entrusted with representing the marginalized sectors of the population.

The democratization wave that dominated the development discourse following the collapse of communism and resulting restructuring of international politics affected Africa as well (Gymah-Boadi 2004). Because of the nature of the authoritarian African states it became significantly important to export the concept to the African context. For instance, in the case of South Africa, Habib (2006) posits that civil society emerged in response to structural factors such as the democratization process and globalization’s neo-liberal manifestations. Though Matlosa (2006, 45) argues that authoritarian military rule in Lesotho, ‘*by default* gave impetus to other types of social mobilization, namely civil society organizations to fill the void left by the banned political parties’, this emergence followed a global pattern where the focus was to replace the incompetent state with citizens’ groups that were believed to be representative of the interests and needs of the society. While women’s grassroots groups were a phenomenon traced as back as pre-independence (Epprecht 2002),

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<sup>160</sup> [www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-open\\_politics/article\\_2375.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-open_politics/article_2375.jsp)

mixed-sex organizations working around human rights and democracy entered the development debates in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Kabemba, 2004). This was the case despite the country's long history of authoritarian rule from 1970; this would therefore support the claim that the creation of these organizations was mainly the product of international influence, as the national context offered no political space for such social action. Of course, human rights abuses by the military regime influenced non-state actors to apply international norms to force government to return the country to civilian rule. However, even with the end of a military rule Lesotho has suffered uneven democratic reforms including the marginalization of women's political concerns within the NGOs human rights mandate.

The context within which civil society groups emerged has rendered them to be viewed with hostility by some rulers within semi-democratic states. This has been the case in many African states where opposition parties have seen these organizations as their allies while ruling parties see them as oppositional agents. This relationship has forced political leaders to want to control the NGO community or divide them. However this is different in countries like South Africa due to the uniqueness of the climate from which these groups emerged, for instance, Habib (2006) posits that these organizations have enjoyed special relationships with the democratic state, while Hassim (2006, 361) argues that the civil society in South Africa has remained the third important development partner in the triad of "state, market and society" since the country's attainment of the democratic rule. It is this type of relationship that has also created the space for women's voice in shaping policy discourses that have made South African women's voice to be visible. Clearly the South African context poses a different experimental ground for civil society workings as compared to other countries in the region, especially those that have not engaged in political liberation struggle.

The role of NGOs within the civil society in pushing global issues within domestic political agendas cannot be underestimated. While international NGOs offer financial resources and expertise to support the institutionalization of global agendas, local NGOs use these spaces to persuade national governments to account for the

commitments they have made at international forums. As Thompson (2002, 119) posits, NGOs enable the spread of global norms as they “clearly have a great deal of persuasive ability in promoting state adherence to international norms”. For instance, through monitoring and advocacy on women’s rights states have responded, albeit in a slow pace, to the commitments they have made. The mixed-sex NGOs bring to the agenda new voices and broad perspectives that complement women’s movement claims on gender equality.

Lesotho’s lack of social mobilization and feminist consciousness has resulted in the relationship that is based on suspicion more than partnership with the state. Most interviewees from the NGO community felt that their presence poses a threat to the state while government officials claimed that the weakness of the civil society emanates from its partnership with opposition parties. They argued that local NGOs do not play their role of representation but have formed alliances with opposition, and they have thus lost focus of their mandate. This view was also shared by some members of the civil society who pointed out that some individuals within these organizations have joined the society as a way of using it as a platform to advance their political ambitions against the ruling party. All these may explain governments’ ambivalence on working with the civil society organizations on the development agenda. This type of relationship does not only affect dialogue between these two actors, but it affects levels of engagement on issues that government may not consider to be of relevance especially if proposed by the NGOs.

Recent debates on civil society have questioned the relevance of these collectives within a democratic dispensation as in most cases their vibrancy has waned away once the democratic transition came to an end. In some cases the expectation that the civil society must continue with strategies of the transition phase is explained as unrealistic, according to Zuern (2000 105), it would require tremendous reconfiguration for the civil society to shift its strategies and tactics; ‘such a smooth transition from the role of reactionary protester to proactive policy maker is hardly realistic’. Yet in some cases the civil society groups have actually been able to change their approaches once democracy has been attained. For example Habib et al (2006,

400) note that civil society of post-transition eras are different in their focus; they argue, “what is distinctive about the movements in this period is that unlike the antiapartheid counterparts, they do not collectively share a common counter hegemonic political project with a focus on state capture”. This lack of shared vision has been noted in different contexts as well. Furthermore it has been found that post-transition civil society have been able to reposition themselves “away from confrontational style of their early years in favor of a focus on consensus, moderation, more thoughtful policy debates and other modes of constructive engagement” (Gyimah-Boadi 2004, 100). He continues to argue that the period after the collapse of an authoritarian rule or the first democratic elections has ushered in new challenges to civil society organizations. While the democratic rule has to strengthen the initiatives of these groups, they have instead lost focus and failed to influence the consolidation of democracy. Due to the weak democracy in Lesotho NGOs have the opportunity to assert claims for political representation within processes of consolidating democracy. The global environment is also providing incentives for this cause while on the other the multiple actors within this space offer resources for collaborative work.

What has been the major challenge for NGOs from the political feminist point is the place of women’s issues within the democratic agenda. Consolidation of democracy has been pursued in gender blind fashion as the women’s voice has been excluded from the mainstream political discourses. The democracy and good governance project has treated women’s rights as secondary to the human rights claims instead of seeing them as an integral component, in fact Schild (2002 citing Paider) argues that the tendency has been to view the main struggle as that of human rights while feminist demands on women’s rights have been seen as a ‘deviation’. Gender equality has been ‘pushed’ to the margins because it is not seen ‘as urgent as democratic rule’ during the transition period, ironically, it has suffered more marginalization as it has been unfortunately pushed further to the margins as boundaries of political discourses shift to other ‘priority’ areas, such as HIV and AIDS, poverty alleviation, climate change, and so on.



Though in Lesotho the NGO community does not seem to be interested in capturing the state, there is however no clear ideological agenda or vision on a number of issues including gender equality, there is instead spontaneous reactions towards particular issues of interest, either propelled by shifting global paradigms and development focus or to a lesser extent national/or local crises, such as displacement or political tensions emanating from elections. In most cases these reactions correspondingly do appear to be of interest to the donor community as well (relief, rights, peace, and democracy); their engagement with poverty reduction for instance has been one such a case as it came at the time the IMF and World Bank were spearheading the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) approach. The same can be said about the sudden interest on gender issues which coincided with the prioritization of gender equality within donor agencies' programs and projects. Incidentally, in the current dispensation most agencies such as the UNDP, are talking about women's political empowerment, and all the NGOs interviewed for this study are embarking on 'empowering' women politicians without clear programs to implement this feminist agenda. As has been the case with different global issues NGOs have applied a technical approach to the institutionalization of global gender equality issues, they have operated more as competitors with government instead of partners, and have thus suffered institutional support, while their strategies have relied on an unclear feminist agenda.

The section that follows presents the analysis of two local NGOs studied that are a product of global discourses of democracy and good governance.

### **Mainstream (Mixed-sex) NGOs in Lesotho**

The selected NGOs for this study namely, The Lesotho Council of Non-governmental Organization and the Transformation Resource Centre are regarded as very popular with the donor community in Lesotho (Kabemba 2004), they have been recognized as critical civil society actors within the public discourse as they serve as key stakeholders in policy forums and participate in major political processes in the country. But most importantly is the fact that they participate in shaping global politics at the transnational space as members of regional bodies such as SADC-Council of NGOs. This recognition suggests that they have the power to shape policy discourses and choice of policy priorities within their country. Because of this status a

number of external financial assistance has been channeled through them with the hope that they were going to address critical issues that affect marginalized sectors of the population. In fact some activists have argued that these have been mostly trusted compared to the corrupt government bureaucrats. And their emergence during the military rule worked as an opportunity to spread democratic principles. However, one notable institutional feature of these organizations is the dominance of elitist male leadership with women occupying middle management positions; this situation perpetuates patriarchal tendencies and jeopardizes the institutionalization of the feminist agenda. As Mohamad (2002, 375) argues, a feminist agenda within a male dominated civil society is “always in a danger of being emasculated because of the prevalence of male-biased, male-defined strategies of mass mobilization”.

Lesotho Council of Non-governmental Organizations (LCN) was officially launched in May 1990 with the objective of providing supportive services to the NGO community, through networking, leadership training and development, information dissemination, capacity building, coordination, advocacy and representation when dealing with the government, and the international community<sup>161</sup>. Within its priority areas LCN has a democracy and human rights and elections management program<sup>162</sup>. It has been noted that its major contribution has been visible during elections, and its primary focus has been largely on voter education, election-related conflict management, electoral reforms and election monitoring. For instance, according to Matlosa (2006) LCN played these tasks fairly well during 1993, 1998 and 2002 general elections. However this role was relatively minimal during the first local government elections in 2005; perhaps this was influenced by the view that LCN held about the introduction of the gender quota that reserved 30% electoral wards for women, it was noted that LCN was opposed to the manner in which the intervention was instituted and claimed it to be unconstitutional.

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<sup>161</sup> Interview with LCN Director May 2007

<sup>162</sup> [www.lecongo.org.ls/programs/cssp.php](http://www.lecongo.org.ls/programs/cssp.php)

Within its structure LCN has a Women and Children's Commission that was established in the late 1990s following two major transnational feminist events, namely the fourth world conference on women in Beijing, and the 1997 Declaration on Gender and Development by the SADC heads of states. The main purpose of establishing this structure within the LCN was to address gender inequality and children's rights. Membership of the Commission is supposed to be made of all organizations and groups that work around women and children's issues. One of the mandates of the Commission is to coordinate activities of its members. However evidence from the interviews revealed that the Commission had not been functional for a long time and unavailability of financial resources were cited as inhibiting the work of the Commission as for over a long period it did not have an officer to run its daily activities.<sup>163</sup> Another problem cited by the commissioner of the unit is a lack of commitment from members as they often send junior officers to meetings meant to deliberate on women's issues. Yet on the other hand some members of women's groups argued that the Commission seemed interested mainly on children's issues and women's economic empowerment through small-income generating activities sponsored by some donors. They continued to point out that the Commission has done little if any, to influence policy dialogue on promoting women's leadership within the policy space. There was also a clear confusion on the actual role the Commission was supposed to play, for instance, the president of LCN had indicated in an interview that women's issues are the prerogative of women's groups such as WLSA and FIDA, yet it was also noted that the LCN itself engaged in advocacy and commissioned studies on gender equality without necessarily commissioning such initiatives to these women's groups.

Although LCN is mandated to coordinate activities of the NGO community in general there is noted competition and a lack of coordination on a number of national issues including gender equality. Some informants especially from women's groups that are also affiliates to the LCN argued that LCN was actually competing with them over donor funds and there has been a lot of duplication of efforts across the NGO

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<sup>163</sup> In 2009 the Commission was functional as there was a full time officer though children's issues dominated the activities of the Commission

community. It is this competition that has resulted in fragmentation of the community while on the other hand certain policies were given more prominence while some have been marginalized; for example issues of political empowerment have been ostensibly marginalized<sup>164</sup> within national policy discourses and in particular gender political equality has been ignored and the women's voice and agency have been missing in major political processes of their country.

As earlier mentioned at the regional level LCN is a founding member of SADC-Council of NGOs (NGO Web, 2009, 7) which aims at bringing together national umbrella organizations into the mainstream regional development agenda. This Council also intends to contribute towards the creation and sustenance of enabling environment for NGOs at national and regional levels. Members are expected to represent the interests of civil society in key institutions of SADC thereby creating a forum aimed at sharing best practices and skills on development issues that affect the region and encourage its members to promote and adopt practices that ensure NGOs accountability and transparency. And as we know gender equality forms the core business of SADC. The extent to which LCN makes use of this space to push representative politics is very critical.

The Transformation Resource Centre (TRC) is an ecumenical, non-governmental resource centre for justice, peace and participatory development that was established in 1979 during the undemocratic rule of the BNP<sup>165</sup>. TRC was initiated by an expatriate family and its earlier publications concentrated largely on the political events happening in South Africa. Though the centre espoused participation of citizens since its inception, the democracy and human rights program became visible in the late 1980s, and focused on civic education for citizen empowerment which entailed strengthening citizens' participation in democratic processes. According to the current director, the democracy program has changed focus depending on the

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<sup>164</sup> Interview with WLSA National Coordinator 27/04/07

<sup>165</sup> TRC was founded by two South African couple who brought some activism into Lesotho's social issues

strategic direction that the organization intends to take<sup>166</sup>. The Center's ideological stance on democratic principles can be read through the quarterly newsletter (*Work for Justice*) which covers variety of development issues. For example, before 1990 the paper published mainly issues of women's reproductive health, while reproductive rights became an issue only in the early 1990s. Similarly, legal constraints that prevented women from ownership and inheritance of resources such as land dominated the publication in the mid 1980s. A lack of access to credit, as well as women's rights to get passports for themselves and their children without the permission of their husbands were highlighted as issues of legal minority status. All these issues and barriers to women's reproductive rights despite their productive roles as heads of households in the absence of men (due to the migrant labor system) were never located within politics of inclusiveness and representation.

Notably the paper began talking about women's absence in the public space in the 1990s and questioned the role of female literacy which fails to open the political space for women. The paper called women to drive the political agenda and one author (Nketu), who wrote on 'Women and Democracy', argued strongly that political parties were not going to 'bring democracy to women on a plate'. She maintained that it was the responsibility of women themselves to bring about democracy and make it work and fulfill their needs. She raised concern that women lacked a common vision, and were not supportive of each other; and as a result of this division in their thinking, democracy for women was going to be very difficult to achieve. Though the author seem to put more responsibility on women despite the hostile political environment within which this mandate was to be achieved, she acknowledged the role that politicians could play, yet she failed to do the same with organizations such as the TRC. She lamented that appointment of women into decision making had been minimal and as such there was no impact that such women could make, and emphasized that 'as long as those few women in decision-making positions are in minority and are still used as tokens, democracy will remain a myth' (Nketu 1991, 7).

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<sup>166</sup> Interview with TRC Director 17<sup>th</sup>, July 2009

In the same Issue an expatriate activist (Jenesse, 1991, 15) argued that the main problems faced by advocates of gender equality in Lesotho emanate from negative attitudes that both women and men hold about the ability of women to be national leaders. Women's indecisiveness and a total lack of initiative and support for each other also compound the problem. She further insisted that "this apparent lack of resolution on the part of women makes men, even those who support the struggle for women to get their rights protected, simply state that 'women are their own enemies'". The situation has not changed 20 years after the assertion was made.

Like the NGOs in the rest of the Africa both the LCN and TRC share a number of characteristics that impact profoundly on driving transnational agendas. For instance their location which is in Maseru means that the needs of the rural poor will not be a priority for these organizations. Because these are urban-based their leadership is dominated by elite men who have been vocal on a number of political issues. Furthermore, the civil society in Lesotho has been described by many as generally weak (Selinyane 1997, Kabemba 2004, African Development Bank; 2006). This weakness has been attributed to a number of factors including fragmentation and unhealthy competition over financial resources. This view was also corroborated by almost all activists and some politicians interviewed, who argued that the civil society does not share a common vision but seem to compete against each other over resources. As McEwan, (2005) has observed in other contexts the NGO community is 'divided, with vested interests and exclusions'. But more significantly the society in Lesotho is relatively at an infancy stage despite having emerged at the same time the concept dominated the global political discourses. According to some donors, civil society in Lesotho is still fledging and largely uncoordinated without a united focus<sup>167</sup>. Furthermore, according to Care international agency, Lesotho's civil society is characterized by very few formally organized groups that are mainly urban based and this limits its voice in driving development issues<sup>168</sup>.

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<sup>167</sup> [www.care.org/careswork/projects/lso039.asp](http://www.care.org/careswork/projects/lso039.asp)

<sup>168</sup> [www.caresa-lesotho.org.za/gov.htm](http://www.caresa-lesotho.org.za/gov.htm)

The relevance of the civil society organizations within the national development discourses has also been questionable as one Commonwealth's study found out that 'ordinary citizens hardly mention the church, private sector and the *NGO community*' as important development actors; the paper argues that this suggests that these institutions do not play a significant role among the communities that were studied<sup>169</sup>. This assertion confirms the notion that the presence of the civil society sphere does not necessarily mean that citizens will be empowered, and it has been the case as the spaces created by the democratic rule as well as the creation of the civil society has not opened the political space for women as they remain invisible within the political debates. In situations where it is difficult for women to access formal political institutions that are characteristically male-dominated, one would assume that non-governmental organizations would provide a convenient channel through which women's political and participatory aspirations can be pursued. But as Rai (1994, 214) has argued, "the existence of civil society is no guarantee that women will find a safe space for participation in democratic processes or for improving their lives through participation in democratic institutions".

One other common feature that Lesotho NGOs share with NGOs in the rest of Africa is their relationship with government which can be described as either ambivalent or skeptical. This view was highlighted by both women's organizations as well as the mainstream NGOs officers. It was indicated that the relationship between government and civil society is not clear as the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that provided the parameters on which the two parties can engage had not been signed over two years of its proposal. The director of TRC also highlighted the reluctance of government to commit itself on working with the NGOs as signal to mistrust between the two parties. Similarly the director of LCN cited government's lack of transparency as the major factor influencing the type of engagement with NGOs, he pointed out that there is evidenced mistrust that emanates from the patronage politics and a weak state. This lack of a clear working relationship has created a situation that is characterized by poor engagement strategies and lack of dialogue on a number of

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<sup>169</sup> [www.commonwealthfoundation.com](http://www.commonwealthfoundation.com)

national issues including gender equality. On the side of government NGOs were looked with suspicion as one politician complained that:

*NGOs in this country see themselves as opposition and drive the agenda of opposition parties. They are not necessarily representing the interests of the poor but they are used by opposition parties against government.*<sup>170</sup>

However, some members of the donor community see this relative small local NGO community contributing to the democratic transition of the country, for example, one gender officer at the Irish aid commented the role played by these organizations, and maintained that the marginalization of the gender equality agenda emanates largely from the fragmented women's movement and a lack of feminist consciousness.

Finally, one other aspect relevant for the present discussion is the issue of NGOs autonomy and independence which is central to understanding their choice and prioritization of issues and strategies. These features embody freedom and participation as well as voice and agency. On the ideological level it is envisaged that instead of conforming to manipulation the civil society is expected to show 'spontaneity'<sup>171</sup>, yet both national political and economic contexts have increasingly influenced these very principles of social action. The next section talks to issues of financial dependence and policy choices on one hand and the institutionalization of a global feminist agenda that is unpopular within the patriarchal institutions on the other.

#### *NGOs, external financial dependence and the transnational gender equality discourse*

The emergence of 'NGO-isation' of the civil society has been followed by a sudden interest from the donor community, and as Schild (2002) posits, gender equality has become a required component of development grants as donors demand NGOs to mainstream gender into all programs and workings of the organizations. Within the

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<sup>170</sup> Interview with MP of the ruling party (LCD) June 2007

<sup>171</sup> [www.istr.org/conferences/barcelona/cd/pdf/abstracts/mwambuli.sekelaga.pdf](http://www.istr.org/conferences/barcelona/cd/pdf/abstracts/mwambuli.sekelaga.pdf)



new development discourse the rights- based advocacy was promoted and local NGOs had to do likewise in order to access financial support. This situation has led not only to overdependence on external assistance but it has also influenced choice of priority issues. The political and economic context from which Lesotho's NGOs emerged has rendered them to be highly dependent on external financial assistance. As chapter six illustrates, both Lesotho government and NGO community compete over donor funding and this perpetuates dependency and limited autonomy. Of course it is an undisputed fact that international NGOs and development agencies have played a critical role in supporting the efforts of local NGOs in making governments to be more responsive to women's needs. The problem though is that most of this support has been directed to few well-organized urban organizations that are elitist in both their outlook and approach. This location follows the international pattern as almost all big international NGOs are also based in cities of host countries.

Closely related to the issue of location is the issue of selection or choice of policy agendas. Because local NGOs depend wholly on external funding they tend to react to agendas set by international development agencies. Of course these agencies are in most cases implementing a transnational agenda which may not necessarily be the immediate need of women who are supposed to benefit from such interventions at that particular moment. But because donors may be interested in funding such activities some NGOs find themselves advocating for an agenda that they may not even understand or embrace. As Gyimah-Boadi (2004, 108) has indicated, 'in many cases donor funding is the sole means of survival for the new trusteeship NGOs'. This dependence influences the NGOs choice of priority areas and in the process the transnational gender equality agenda has been used to attract funding without serious engagement and commitment. For example, White (1992, 15) has also noted that in Bangladesh it is not only the state that has used women's issues as a potential financial resource, but this has been the case also with the local NGOs. She further argues that "the availability of funds for groups working with women clearly affects those groups' activities and philosophies"; she acknowledges the impact of the views of development practitioners who implement donor funded programs, but argues that such views and commitments are likely to change once donor funding becomes available. Similarly in the case of South Africa Hassim (2005, 8), argues that in

addition to being elite-driven, NGOs are under-resourced and as a result they “dependent to a high degree on donor funding”. This trend has been noted also in Eastern Europe as Howard (2002, 167) argues that since most of the NGOs were created by western organizations they are highly dependent upon western financial assistance. He further highlights that this economic dependence has had negative impact as it limits the autonomy of such groups as “leaders and activists are often more beholden to their funders than to the people they are trying to engage and inspire”.

In the case of Lesotho where there is no funding at all from government the situation is more serious. NGOs depend almost entirely on donor assistance to survive and with recent global and institutional changes within donor assistance, “a gapping hole is appearing in the democratic actors in Lesotho, that of NGOs” (*NGO Web* 2005). In fact in the same Issue the leader of LCN was quoted as lamenting that NGO funding had reached the level of ‘a crisis’ due to the exodus of donors to Pretoria. He noted that the donor flight has led to a collapse of a number of affiliate members (these include women groups). He further argued that donors also showed a lack of trust in their dealings with NGOs and were portraying paternalistic approach, yet he complained about their leaving the country. Perhaps he was aware that the new aid ‘architecture’ was shifting towards working more with government as he argued that increasingly this situation leaves government, donors and international NGOs as the major ‘bastions of change’ while national NGOs are being marginalized and forgotten. Though the NGOs leadership blames their financial crisis on donors, there is also a view from donors that NGOs are not doing enough to convince government and donors to continue supporting them. For example the DCI program director argued that due to their poor educational background NGOs fail to produce sustainable initiatives and that their successes are scattered pockets that fail to make an impression. Due to this, it is argued; government does not see them ‘as part of an intellectual exchange’<sup>172</sup>.

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<sup>172</sup> DCI funds umbrella organizations such as LCN that engage in poverty reduction initiatives.

The mushrooming of local NGOs, what some call the ‘NGO-ising of the civil society’ has entrenched dependence and has limited their capacity to initiate parameters of national debates as they are “influenced by the dominant donors’ priorities and issues that are most popular within the donor community” (Selinyane 1997, 45). And because gender equality and women’s political leadership in particular has not been a priority for donors it has suffered marginalization at all fronts. Evidence from the interviews suggests that in many cases due to a lack of a strong social movement including a women’s movement, donors in Lesotho have been very ‘casual’ about women’s issues while gender equality agenda has been a very contentious area for local NGOs. An officer in one of the donor agencies pointed out that despite gender equality being prominent in most donor program documents; in practice donors are as well indifferent about it, and the problem is local NGOs lack the capacity to demand their accountability. It is therefore not surprising that the local male-dominated NGOs may capitalize on this to marginalize a feminist agenda.

This lack of autonomy on policy choices has not only affected both activities and approaches of local NGOs but the financial support has rendered NGOs suspect in the eyes of some pessimists as they seem to reinforce the notion that they are in essence ‘agents of foreign interests’, in fact for patriarchal institutions gender equality issues are so foreign that they are seen as ‘contaminating valuable Sesotho culture and custom’. As Hyden (1983, 119) posits, because of their overdependence on foreign aid, most NGOs in African countries are viewed as “local branches or affiliates of foreign-based organizations”. Furthermore, this dependence has in most cases fuelled destructive competition among local NGOs, and in the process the real focus has been missed and critical issues such as political equality have been marginalized, as in reality this is also an area that donors are not interested in. According to some interviewees, this competition has not only created unhealthy relations within the civil society, but it has also led to unwarranted fragmentation that has in turn led to a lack of a shared vision<sup>173</sup>. But more importantly all these have resulted in a lack of accountability from both NGOs and governments. On the broader level the approaches adopted by these NGOs have not responded directly to domestic

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<sup>173</sup> Interview with WLSA national coordinator

conditions or society's needs. And as one commonwealth study revealed NGOs in Lesotho, like the private sector are not viewed as an important actor in the lives of ordinary Basotho<sup>174</sup>.

The client-patron relationship between local NGOs and donors also has negative impact on the relationship between the former and the state bureaucracies. Despite the fact that external assistance has helped to address the financial constraints faced by civil society organizations, governments fail to recognize the relevance of supporting NGOs. In its Fourth Five- Year Development Plan (1986/87- 1990/91), for the first time the Lesotho government articulated its intent to “create and maintain ‘non-governmental organizations that are committed to the cause of women’”. However the relationship between government and these organizations has been continuously antagonistic, as the latter are seen as mainly agents of opposition rather than development partners. But more interesting is the fact that there has never been a moment when any of the regimes have committed to providing financial support to such organizations. Because of this type of relation the NGOs in this country, just like in most African countries, have “received very little political recognition and its member organizations have been forced to struggle to make ends meet” (Hyden 1983, 119). In addition, while governments are ambiguous about the role of civil society on national policy issues, the opposition parties have seen them as their partners to oppose ruling parties and this has complicated the situation more, but most importantly this battle has made the NGOs to lose focus and as it has been shown, Lesotho political parties are less interested in inclusive democracy that prioritizes women's issues, so this means that in the meantime when everybody is fighting to court NGOs the marginalized groups such as women are bypassed by policy interventions that are critical to addressing their absence within political space.

*NGOs, the Democracy project and the institutionalization of the transnational feminist agenda*

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<sup>174</sup> [www.thecommonwealthfoundation.com/](http://www.thecommonwealthfoundation.com/)

Although civil society organizations are generally a product of the global democracy and good governance discourses they have encountered difficulties in consolidating democracy in countries they are operating in, and Lesotho is not an exception. It is a general conception that civil society organizations are key elements for democratic governance yet their definition of representative democracy has been conceptually narrow. Being important development actors NGOs have potential to represent the marginalized sectors of the population and can hold governments accountable to international standards and agreements made to address issues such as gender inequalities (Hassim 2006). However the extent to which local NGOs are able to make use of the political space opened by the current democratic era to push core principles of democracy such as political representation has varied. As Masterson (2007) has asserted, civil society organizations and groups need to engage the state strategically and take advantage of the newly created democratic space. A vibrant civil society is a key element in a democratic society and NGOs are expected to play a leading role especially in the consolidation of democracy. As members of the global development partnership they have the advantage of spreading global liberal ideas such as gender equality within their societies. Through networking and lobbying campaigns feminist ideas can be easily disseminated. Their comparative advantage with the donor community presents an avenue through which knowledge can be generated and shared informed by research on lived experiences of women. Armed with these skills and knowledge they can forge strategic links and build their base through mobilization of constituencies from different sectors of the population such as women groups inside and outside political institutions.

The above assertion suggests a link between effective democracy and strong, vibrant civil society in driving a global agenda. This view is supported by Woolberry and Shah (2004, 52) who argue that in order for democracy to be effective there is need for a 'robust' civil society. NGOs within the civil society are crucial for the promotion of human rights and the general process of democratization and good governance. It has been noted that in different contexts the civil society has played a crucial role in the promotion of human rights and the general processes of democracy. However the degree to which the NGOs in a particular country are able to influence the state policy is dependent on a number of factors. Most important of these is the character and

nature of the state which is influential in determining the place of a global agenda within the policy space. For instance, Byamukama (2002) noted that in Kenya, NGOs remain underdeveloped because of the history and character of the state. While financial resources have been identified to have a profound impact on the choice of issues the NGOs would want to pursue, there is also evidence to the fact that the domestic political context will shape the implementation of global gender politics, yet it is also a fact that the extent to which the needs of the marginalized form part of the NGOs core mandate will determine the place of gender equality issues within the broader social agenda. As Howard (2002, 165) indicates, the historical institutional thesis on the role of civil society calls for representative organizations to prioritize interests and opinions of their members, and to “protect citizens from potentially unjust laws and policies and promote legislation that their members favor”. From this assertion it could be argued that in the event where women’s groups are succeeding in fighting for legal equality for instance, democracy NGOs should be seen complementing such projects pushing political issues that are part of their democratic agenda. But what we have seen in Lesotho is that these NGOs may at times limit the institutionalization of feminist issues, as one member of WLSA affirmed:

*It is always easy to implement a feminist agenda if these organizations support it, but because of their strength if they don't 'buy' into an idea it is normally difficult for us to push it. They are vocal and people listen to them, so if they were interested in seeing women in leadership positions they have the strength to push the idea.*

This idea is supported by the fact that these NGOs supported laws that addressed sexual offences and they were easily instituted as opposed to the act that was meant to increase women’s political representation.

Though a concern for gender equality is in essence a democratic issue it has been established that there is a wide gap between democratic and good governance discourses on the one hand and politics of gender representation on the other. Driving a global gender equality agenda should be the responsibility of all groups that claim to drive the democratic processes; but in practice it has been neglected by mainstream NGOs except when it offers financial gains. The tendency has been to delegate

women's groups to equality issues that seem less attractive while fierce competition emerges for issues that are favoured by the donor community. For example, when asked about the role LCN has played in advancing women's political representation the then director of LCN argued that it is the responsibility of women's groups to mobilize women to contest the political space, yet there have been feminist issues that the Council picked up without delegating these groups. It is a known fact that active women's groups that are expected to drive this mandate concentrate mainly on legal activism; this means that there is a political lacuna for feminist advocacy for political representation which needs to be filled by these NGOs. Being strategically positioned LCN and TRC have the responsibility to engage the state on behalf of the marginalized women within the political leadership not necessarily to see this as solely the responsibility of women groups<sup>175</sup>, which in most cases operate largely within patriarchal environment.

Equal access to political participation received global attention within discourses of liberal democracy which inform NGOs' approaches within local contexts; however the main focus for LCN and TRC has been largely on enhancing credible elections without locating these processes within a feminist perspective. Since 1993, democratic regimes have been put into power through technical assistance of these NGOs, yet attainment of democratically elected governments has not resulted into equal representation of both men and women. Of course a number of factors have interacted to define the political space. For instance, 'political participation and access to decision making are strongly influenced by local perceptions of gender, race, and religion'<sup>176</sup>. And as one political leader argued on the question of the role played by NGOs in advancing women's issues:

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<sup>175</sup> [www.gender.no/policies\\_tools/1088](http://www.gender.no/policies_tools/1088)

<sup>176</sup> [http://devnet.anu.edu.au/genderpacific/pdfs/02\\_gen\\_civil-intro.pdg](http://devnet.anu.edu.au/genderpacific/pdfs/02_gen_civil-intro.pdg)

*The leadership of these NGOs is in the hands of males who hold particular views about women's leadership. And it would be difficult to champion an issue that women groups themselves seem to be divided upon.*<sup>177</sup>

This sentiment was reiterated by some gender activists who argued that, the LCN and TRC have been dominated by men of a particular party and ideology, who may not even be *'opposed to the gender equality agenda, but who may be interested in different political issues.'* In fact there was a strong belief that the organizations are dominated by the Popular Front for Democracy (PFD) party, which draws its membership largely from an elite urban-based group.

While membership of both TRC and LCN is open to all civil society organizations evidence shows that it is mainly women elite groups that interact within the space provided by these NGOs, as a result large numbers of grassroots groups of women are not exposed to political activism and the absence of a critical mass of women to domesticate gender issues affects the institutionalization of these ideas. The spread of these global issues among ordinary women would in turn influence perceptions that are held by both women and men about women's political leadership. These NGOs have not only marginalized grassroots groups within policy discourses, but they have ignored women within political parties. In this way, they have failed to establish strategic networks with groups that have the power to influence political agendas. In their campaigns on voter education they have failed to use these institutions to integrate gender equality as key to democracy. Their success in mobilizing people to vote has been limited by neglecting pervasive gender stereotypes within political parties, and this has resulted in the invisibility of women within political leadership debates. Their campaigns have been confined to election participation and have lacked the room to push the boundaries of political debates to accommodate transnational feminist issues within the domestic political space.

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<sup>177</sup> Interview with BNP leader June 2007



The foregoing analysis has highlighted how the democracy and good governance project has narrowly focused on electoral politics without engaging the feminist agenda of representation. The communication relation officer of the IEC affirmed that these two NGOs have been instrumental in monitoring national elections while gender issues have been a sensitive field for them. Matlosa, (2006, 46) reiterated this view that these organizations have played a critical role as key stakeholders in both election management and administration; he argues that since 1993 when Lesotho returned to multiparty democracy they have increasingly complemented the role of the IEC. Evidence from voter education material from both the NGOs and IEC shows that the content is mainly on procedures and general conduct of voting. Issues of gender representation are not covered at all; what seems to be a paradox is that these organizations are funded to undertake voter education by international development agencies which claim to embrace gender equality as a priority issue, yet there is no demand for the integration of representation of women within electoral discourses. The absence of gender equality agenda within the electoral processes suggests the continued exclusion of women from political leadership.

TRC and LCN have not only ignored political representation of women but they have failed to hold democratic regimes accountable for the international commitments they have signed. From the BCP to the LCD government these organizations have made notable interventions during political instabilities and could be expected to do the same with women's empowerment as part of consolidating democracy. Being the champions of democratic governance their failure to promote inclusive democracy has been detrimental to the whole debate of political leadership. According to Kimane and Ntimo-Makara (2006, 249), Basotho women's lack of involvement in democratic processes remains the greatest challenge that is 'inhibiting true, sustainable and substantive democracy'. As a result the type of democracy that prevails fails to address the social, economic and developmental concerns of marginalized citizens as it lacks the voice of women who constitute a high percentage of the population. The authors further argue that both the 'covert and overt exclusion of women from mainstream democratic processes prevents the representation of the diverse voices of the people', and fail to utilize attributes needed for a democratic society.

*Engaging the transnational gender equality agenda of political representation*

The emergence of the democracy and good governance agenda that was couched within the human rights discourse took place during the transition from the military rule and the return to democracy. While Goetz and Hassim (2002, 325) suggest that the manner in which civil society engages the political agenda including gender politics is largely influenced by the nature of the transition away from authoritarianism, however, in Lesotho the move from military rule did not involve significant social protest, but it came more as a response to the pressure from development partners and as such it can be argued that the approaches used to advance women's advancement within the policy space have been significantly influenced by the dominant international development thinking and less by the transition itself (Of course the military regime was in place for only five years). For example, it was noted that even though the establishment of LCN could be regarded as an indigenous initiative, its survival has been based on the support of the donor community.

While the promotion of global women's issues entered the development discourse in the 1970s, women's political participation was adopted by international donor agencies as part of the good governance agendas only in the early 1990s (Heerah 2006, 17). The thesis behind promoting women political participation was driven by the realization that their absence from decision making contributed to the marginalization of their needs and interests. The agenda was meant to open the space within the state to allow women to place gender equality issues on the policy agenda. However, the agenda has been competing with other agendas that have received aggressive lobbying and as a result gender equality and women's political presence in particular has been "increasingly reduced to a vague set of good intentions, which are rarely translated into meaningful policy and ideological demands" (Hassim 2005, 19). And according to Razavi (1998, 21), the 1990s saw the dominance of poverty alleviation and social development within the development discourse and a lot of funding was directed to these issues. Despite this huge amount of support women still

constitute the majority of the poorest while they still suffer tremendous social injustices.

While citizen participation has been prominent within the Lesotho's NGOs mandate, women political participation appears as an addendum to other issues. As Rai (1997) affirms, the impetus for women's political presence has come largely from state-led economic and political reforms rather than from the civil society. Britton and Fish (2009, 3) have also advanced that while civil society is regarded as an important avenue for women's activism, it has been demonstrated that "this sphere may be more hostile to women than the state has been". Despite this evidence, mainstream NGOs have been trusted with driving equality issues and they have actually claimed to represent the voice of the marginalized. As Howell (2005) has argued, the limited focus on feminist advocacy emanates from the parochial nature of scholarly debates on civil society that hardly recognize gender theory as a distinct strand within the social movement discourses. What is of critical relevance here is that the LCN and TRC have overshadowed women's organizations within policy corridors, while active women's groups have largely made inroads within the legal capacity space. In other words, the fact that these organizations have claimed their space within the gender equality struggles, they have managed to selectively pursue certain issues leaving out others that have the potential to challenge dominant patriarchal values within the political space.

Few studies on civil society in Lesotho have tended to focus primarily on examination of organizational activity of these NGOs in the public realm with less emphasis on how these institutions restructure gender relations and in particular their choice of priority issues, as well as how such choices affect women's political presence within decision making positions. And for Howell (2005, 18), this "silence on gender and civil society suggests a more pervasive hegemonic framing that acquiesces rather than challenges the gendered relations of civil society". The failure of both feminist and social movement research to analyze the marginalization of the women's political agenda by mainstream civil society actors suggests the need to revisit the cooptation of women's groups as affiliates of these organizations. Much of feminist research has

concentrated largely on women's groups and organizations as agents of women's empowerment, yet the broader civil society has been dominated by male-driven agendas within mixed-sex organizations, which have in turn influenced the terms of engagement and choice of priority areas for women's organizations.

The central role that these male dominated organizations have played in determining the boundaries of policy debates within undemocratic political contexts and donor dependency has been acknowledged. On the ideological level they are regarded as major allies of gender activism as they have the potential to influence the place of feminist issues within policy debates. On the practical level however, the fact that women's political empowerment competes with other agendas means that gender equality advocates are faced with both ideological and policy competition which needs transformative strategies for those who claim a concern for gender equality. For instance, Ackerly (1997, 156) maintains that organizations that have been successful in advancing women empowerment have done so by developing creative ways that are attentive to gender relations within the family; which are intrinsically linked to women's presence in the public realm, but most importantly they have been more successful when the equality agenda "does not compete with other goals for priority". Furthermore, if a concern for gender equality is seen as part of a broad social agenda, not just the responsibility of women's organizations<sup>178</sup>, it could be argued that these NGOs would find it important to place women's political presence on the development agenda.

Women and gender issues within studied NGOs programs are characteristically located within the democracy and governance themes. Yet there are no specific programs targeting women as a constituency especially to address their participation in policy processes. This trend is similar to those of the donor agencies such as UNDP, USAID, Irish Aid and UNFPA. The rationale for this is that gender equality is an aspect of democracy as it addresses issues of marginalization. However on the practical level the devotion of resources and the political commitment have reflected a

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<sup>178</sup> [www.acdi-cida.gc.ca](http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca) (12/05/08)

different story as the agenda surfaces only as an appendix of other issues such as elections. As evidence has shown both the TRC and LCN, have been actively involved in voter education during election campaigns and have monitored voting during elections (Matlosa, 2006). Yet as Ballington (2002) has noted these organizations do not target women in their civic education as candidates but only as voters. There is no support at all that is directed to women to stand for elections, and even for those who venture into politics do not get any support from these influential organizations prior to and during elections. Further still, the interest on women voters fades away immediately after elections<sup>179</sup>. The exception though has been the continuing support that the TRC provides to women councilors after 2005 local government elections. Despite this support the current TRC director expressed his concern that there is obvious failure of local government in delivering expected results, and asked:

*I wonder if this ministry (LG) is failing because it is led by women; the minister is a woman, her PS is a woman, and 58 percent of councilors are women! Would I be wrong to argue that the ministry's dominance of women has contributed to its failure to deliver?*<sup>180</sup>

This view has been expressed even by some politicians while some gender activists blamed councilors' low levels of education for this failure. The fact that local government in Lesotho is still centralized as financial decisions are still made by the central government has not been brought into the debate. Nonetheless, the TRC has conducted empowerment workshops for local government councilors and have commissioned a study on women and political empowerment. Despite his reservations about women's leadership and service delivery the director of TRC highlighted the contribution of quotas in encouraging women's visibility, he commented thus:

*these quotas have created an avenue for women to take their rightful place to influence decisions on issues that affect their communities. If well capacitated these women are a potential pool from which political leaders can be groomed.*

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<sup>179</sup> Interview Forere (FIDA), 2007

<sup>180</sup> Interview with Mr Nyane, July 2009

However, he argued that there is no corresponding political will from politicians to see more women in leadership positions, this has been reflected in the meetings the Centre has initiated on gender issues, the tendency has been to delegate women who did not occupy strategic positions in their political parties and could not influence their parties' policies or views about women's issues. TRC, like all other organizations, does not offer any support for women candidates before elections, and does not have established mechanisms to engage political parties or government on its commitments. The active role that TRC and other NGOs take during election fail to go beyond basic voter education, and have therefore failed to influence government policy as regards women's political representation. The Director also emphasized that TRC believes strongly in substantive participation than descriptive representation yet it cannot disregard the role quotas play to break the patriarchal ideologies that limit women's political participation. He further argued that even though quotas may strengthen some stereotypes they also have the potential to change the same views held about women once those women are in power. TRC never opposed the quota campaigns in themselves but feels there is a lot of capacity building to be done. He argued also that quotas have been implemented more as a political move and therefore see them as window-dressing especially when there is no follow up to equip these women with leadership skills from government side. Despite this apprehension most NGOs have ceaselessly asked for financial assistance to 'empower' women councilors. It is a known fact that there is a lot of money put on women in local government from agencies such as GTZ and EU, this interest emanates from the transnational feminist advocacy driven by development agencies meant to increase women in decision making. And in Lesotho these were first local government elections since independence that took place within discourses of good governance and decentralization<sup>181</sup>.

Both the TRC and LCN have been actively involved in human rights campaigns including law reforms initiatives that have led to the revision of laws that discriminated against women (*NGO Web* 2006). These initiatives have however

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<sup>181</sup> Agencies such as GTZ and EU are supporting the Ministry of Local Government with technical and financial assistance.

suffered political marginalization as they have not been extended to the political leadership. Women's political rights have been narrowly defined outside the mainstream rights discourse hence fails to see political rights as aspect of human rights. Of course given the nature of the NGO dependency on donor funding it is not surprising that they have tended to 'pick' those issues that have dominated the agenda of the donor community while national initiatives have been lacking. As indicated earlier both the LCN and TRC have been involved in major policy processes such as the drawing of policy drafts as key stakeholders. But what is clear is that their involvement has been inspired by the availability of donor support on particular policy issues, while on the other hand government has worked with these organizations only when such partnership proved to the donors that government is inclusive.

It would be remiss to ignore how NGOs' articulation of gender issues as well as the meaning they attach to them may be affected by the domestic political culture. It could be argued that the intersection of a global agenda and domestic political dynamics within the context of a patrimonial democracy and a fragmented civil society has led to the situation where gender issues seem to feature on the national policy agenda only if they offer financial and political incentives for most development actors including the civil society. But because political representation has never been of interest to neither donors nor political leadership, the NGOs have also neglected it, while picking it up when it served other purposes. The fact that NGOs have failed to hold government accountable to commitments such as the CEDAW<sup>182</sup>, is a true reflection that gender accountability is an illusion.

The leadership of these NGOs also presents an interesting dynamic; though at different historical moments the organizations have had women in top senior positions, in particular the TRC has had a woman president but from the point of view of activists these organizations are both associated with a particular group of individual men who have dominated the political debates (Kimane and Ntimo-Makara

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<sup>182</sup> CEDAW is still not domesticated and still has a reservation clause

2006, 243). These authors argue that even in their political mediations during political conflicts the voices that are heard are of these men, and the political solutions that have unfortunately failed lack the women's voice. In fact according to some gender activists interviewed, these men make it very difficult to open the leadership space of these organizations to accommodate women activists. Elections into administrative positions are bitterly contested using very crude strategies. One informant argued:

*'I was once approached by some men to stand for presidency elections of LCN, only to find out later that a number of allegations were made about me by the same men who already had their own male candidate. I was embarrassingly defeated. One of the allegations was that I had 'sold out' the NGO community by supporting the 30% gender quota introduced by government in 2005 and that I was not really patriotic as I had property in South Africa.'*<sup>183</sup>

The above assertions highlight the fact that even NGOs that claim to represent the civil society community can make it difficult for women to be leaders and in the process 'women's shared interests are less likely to be on the political agenda'<sup>184</sup>.

Both the history of how organizations were formed and leadership of such collectives are very important in understanding the workings of social movements within particular contexts. Lesotho civil society community suffers quality leadership as most employees are not necessarily activists and most of them lack capacity to drive a national issue. As the 2005 survey by LCN found out, many employees of NGOs in Lesotho have poor educational background and as a result NGOs lack the capacity to engage the government on national issues. This sentiment was shared by WLSA officers who argued that most organizations have experienced an exodus of experienced activists and they have been replaced by young graduates who in most cases join the community because of lack of job opportunities. Once they get

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<sup>183</sup> Interview with former WLSA National Coordinator, May 2007

<sup>184</sup> [www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/learning/gender/downloads/prog\\_insights\\_gender\\_overview.pdf](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/learning/gender/downloads/prog_insights_gender_overview.pdf)



exposure they leave and the cycle continues. It was argued that this trend does not only affect continuity but it has implications on the choice of policy priorities, as young women are not interested in issues that they believe are not relevant to them, and politics is one of them. This exodus was experienced across the wider NGO community as more experienced activists get employed in international NGOs or by government. What has also emerged is that once these activists leave the NGO work, their interest in gender issues wanes as they get absorbed in their new found careers.

Competition over donor funding was cited by all NGO personnel interviewed, and some of them agree that this has had a profound influence on the content and choice of policy issues. However the exodus of the donor agencies to Pretoria and the general transformation of the aid architecture have influenced the choice of priorities by these agencies, and unfortunately gender equality has always suffered most when both costs were cut and priorities aligned. In one of the NGO Web issue LCN president was quoted as blaming the donors for giving the NGOs ‘human capital’ instead of giving financial assistance. He maintained that local NGOs had enough expertise and did not need foreign human resources; this clearly highlights the frustration which the community is experiencing due to this financial dependency. This is so because in the same publication the same leader had indicated that one of the challenges facing the NGOs was lack of proper education and skills.

The study has established that it is a general fact that NGOs in Lesotho lack the capacity to set national agendas that would fulfill their mandate on democratic practices due to their dependence on donor funding. Because they are highly influenced by the donors’ own ideologies and priorities it has been difficult for them to mobilize the society to own national initiatives. Just as the donor community is failing to enhance development ‘ownership’ the NGOs are unable to instill this principle within the country. While women, especially poor rural women, are supposed to be empowered to demand accountability to their needs, they have been left out of major national debates that affect their lives. This failure has thus influenced their approaches towards engaging appropriate allies; for example, there is

a general tendency to isolate women in political parties for fear of losing neutrality<sup>185</sup>. In this way, these women who are strategically positioned are not capacitated to drive the gender agenda. In the same manner because of lack of skills in fund-raising the civil society compromises its autonomy as at times it finds itself ignoring governments' failures to account. But more importantly, there is clearly a general lack of activism, especially feminist consciousness within the civil society which seem to be dictated by these organizations on priority issues.

Though both organizations interviewed for this study are aware of the African Union Protocol on gender equality and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development and its targets, none of them are actively engaging the state to account for its lack of commitment to implement these regional demands. In fact their different positioning on this issue became clear in 2005 when they were divided over the constitutionality of the 30% quota of women's representation for Local Government elections. The LCN opposed the move on the basis of its 'unconstitutionality'. However, Ambrose (2005) has argued that the formula that the LCN was proposing for women's inclusion was going to produce the same results it was opposing, perhaps their dissatisfaction emanated primarily from their failure to acknowledge the role that quotas play in addressing gender inequalities, or alternatively they do not seriously appreciate the concept of equal political representation. The constitutionality of the intervention may have been used as a smoke screen to assuage women's fears and convince them that the organization was actually waging a fight for their political empowerment. Further still, one could argue that the LCN might have realized that this time government had done the right thing and it could not find the space to acknowledge this solitary right effort. It is not surprising therefore that the NGO community has not embarked on serious lobbying for quotas at the national level.

In light of the prominence of women's issues within the current TRC debates it could be justifiably expected that a transformative approach would be employed to address women's issues. However as it has been noted, like its counterpart TRC voter

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<sup>185</sup> Interviews with FIDA and WLSA senior officials, May 2007

education does not address the feminist agenda of political representation. This is so despite the fact that ‘all its programs are gender mainstreamed’<sup>186</sup>. TRC’s continued support beyond elections on capacity building may suggest the success of transnational feminist movement in changing perceptions of the NGO leadership. According to the *Work for Justice* Issue (72:11), the Centre maintains that election of women into councils would enable women to bring new issues and approaches to the political discourses because of their ‘aptitudes, skills and literacy levels that are different from men’. Furthermore, the TRC anticipates that women’s representation in decision making would bring some difference on ‘the content and methods of post-election sensitization, capacity building program for councilors and on the general local governing’. The success of this intervention rests with organizations like the TRC to keep the momentum alive but to also extend it to the national level. The fact that in 94% of the councils women councilors exceeded the 30% reservation target’ while nationally more than 53% of local councilors are women, a figure far above the indicative target set by African Union and SADC signals the readiness of women to participate at the highest levels of the political space of their country.

### **Conclusion**

The chapter attempted to trace the role of two mainstream mixed-sex NGOs in shaping the gender equality discourse within the national policy debates; it identified the gender discourses that became recognized as embodying women’s issues from the point of view of these organizations, and highlights how these choices have framed parameters of gender debates that have marginalized discourses of inclusiveness. The chapter engaged a feminist critique of mainstream organizations working on democracy and good governance. The main finding of the analysis reveals the privileging of some issues at the expense of women’s visibility within the political space. The chapter has corroborated feminist scholarly debates that show that democratic governance projects do not necessarily enhance accountability to women’s needs and interests (Fierlbeck 1997), and that ‘mainstream’ NGOs have ignored women’s absence from political power and have failed to engage government to

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<sup>186</sup> Interview with TRC Director 19<sup>th</sup>/06/09

honor its commitments on gender equality. The chapter has highlighted the NGOs' failure to utilize the space created by the democratic transformation to push for political inclusiveness that accommodates women's presence within political processes.

Though the two organizations studied have attempted to show commitment to some gender equality issues through their democracy and good governance programs, their main weakness has been their marginalization of gender representative politics within the leadership space. Rather than mobilizing women's constituencies for the advancement of women to contest the political space, these mainstream NGOs have in fact constrained women's political interests and needs. Democratic political discourses have been engaged without challenging the gendered political space and women's issues have been defined mainly within a legal terrain. Promoting women's political leadership debates has been characterized by complexities and tensions as these dominant organizations did not share a common vision, let alone a feminist ideology. For example, while the TRC has been supportive of gender quotas, its counterpart, the LCN has been very indifferent; this poses a feminist paradox as these are dominant actors which are highly recognized by the donor community that ensures survival of NGOs in Lesotho. But with the TRC as well their interest in promoting women at local government level without applying the same focus for national level indicates political/ideological conflict of interest as the local decision-making space does not threaten dominant patriarchal ideology on male political leadership.

A look at these NGOs reveals disturbing existence of institutional and ideological complexities and tendencies. For example, there is a tendency to isolate gender issues from the broader democratic and human rights discourses, as well as the general lack of capacity to engage the state to be responsive and accountable to women's political empowerment. The financial incentives provided by the donor agencies exacerbate the problem as the NGOs' tendency of driving the donors' agenda affects their own views and commitments to gender issues. The lack of domestic financial base to support self-initiated agendas and interests influences forms of engagement that NGOs eventually adopt. The pecuniary motivation that have dominated the NGOs

programs have distorted genuine dedication to basic principles of democracy and at times have generated intense competition within the NGO community and this has undoubtedly fragmented the democracy and good governance cause.

The chapter has highlighted that the studied NGOs have failed to use their 'comparative advantage' (Goetz 1996) of being popular with donors to advance women's presence in determining the policy agendas of their country. The organizations' autonomy in choosing priority areas as well as the content of their policy debates has been determined mainly by access to financial assistance rather than domestic social demands. It is a clear fact that donors in Lesotho have ignored women political empowerment in their interventions, and instead of filling that gap, local NGOs have been duplicating efforts by the donor community and in the end have marginalized political gender equality as an aspect of democracy. Their methods of engagement with government have been mainly influenced by their choice of policy priorities. While Ballard et al (2006, 404) maintain that social movement organizations' engagement is influenced by their "ideology, character and evolution of campaign, access to resources, including leadership, and opportunities and constraints generated by the political environment", in the case of Lesotho it is certainly clear that civil society organizations cannot claim any particular ideology due to their over-dependence on donor-set priorities. In the same manner the very reasons that influenced their emergence has limited their scope on priority policy choices. Furthermore, the issue of access to financial resources plays an important role as NGOs cannot set priorities different from those of their funders.

But it would be remiss to ignore the role that the political climate plays in shaping the content and the place of a global agenda within national policy choices. The very fact that political leaders do not prioritize women's presence in political leadership tends to set boundaries on political discourses across the development triad. The absence of women within political debates coupled with male-dominated leadership of the NGOs is unlikely to open political dialogue that addresses gender inequalities within decision making processes.

As Goetz in her introduction to *Making Institutions Right for Women* ((1997, 9), based on a number of arguments, reiterated, ‘NGOs can be as deeply structured by male privilege and preference as other organizations, and indeed, can be as bureaucratic and hierarchical as public-sector institutions’. This is the case with NGOs in Lesotho as they seem to have failed to transform political institutions that reproduce gender inequalities. The democracy project has been divorced from transformation of political institutions and processes. The chapter has made the case that strategies to promote gender equality are affected by the context within which they are pursued but that these are also connected to the institutional workings of social movement organizations. The type of claims that dominant NGOs make about women’s issues determine the terms of engagement and the type of issues that can be regarded as relevant, what Hobson (2006) calls ‘Privileging of discourses’.

Challenging gender inequality depends on a clear focused strategy to question gender subordination at all levels, however the study has revealed a lack of a shared vision and as such the organizations have failed to provide ‘an enabling environment within which women have the space and power to articulate and negotiate their interest’(Mayoux 1998,184). As a result their accountability to gender equality has been minimal as the agenda has been outcompeted by other priority issues. They have also failed to act as intermediaries as government has failed to honor a number of regional and international commitments on gender equality; for instance the failure of government to achieve 30% representation at national level has not been challenged and the 50/50 campaign has just evaporated within the political discourses.

In both studied organizations, gender accountability seemed to be a complex issue and dependent on the way women’s issues are defined by patriarchal tendencies, which in turn affects the prioritization of such issues. Because of a lack of explicit commitment to women’s political empowerment evidence from this study shows that gender equality within political leadership has been increasingly marginalized and has fallen into what Mayoux (1998) terms a ‘black hole’ between competing agendas.

Although the chapter has argued that the studied mainstream NGOs choice of policy is determined largely by their access to resources, the study has not been able to convincingly establish the extent to which women's organizations affiliation to a male-managed institution impacts on the content of the policy discourses as they relate to gender equality. Despite this affiliation they have not been able to promote women's political representation agenda within the debates dominating the civil society space, and as such women's absence from the political space has not been challenged. This aspect needs to be addressed further so that it can be determined whether women's organizations benefit by working within this community or they would be better working with the state.

While chapter four examined how women's organizations have influenced and were influenced by global women's movements in institutionalizing the feminist agenda, as well as how the national political context affected their initiatives and choice of strategies in institutionalizing women's issues, the current chapter looked at how two mixed-sex mainstream NGOs within the civil society have dictated terms of engagement in relation to the institutionalization of the transnational feminist agenda in Lesotho. The chapter has elucidated a number of complexities that function to limit the NGOs' role of holding government accountable to international norms on gender equality. While they may claim their place within the gender equality struggles they operate within the context of dependency that limits their autonomy, while on the other hand there is a lack of corresponding political will from political leadership to increase women's visibility within the policy space. The manner in which feminist issues have been implemented and the choice of policy issues in the institutionalization of transnational feminist agenda has been presented as a feminist paradox. However, it has become clear that the donor community has been central in this process; hence the next chapter unpacks the workings of four donor agencies in determining their role in shaping the content and place of the global feminist agenda within the Lesotho context.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **The Donor Community and the Transnational Gender Equality Agenda**

*It was development institutions that quickly adopted “the idea that women are good to have around if you are involved in project development”. (Simmons 1992, cited by Escobar 1995, 180)*

The chapter explores the efforts of the donor community in advancing global feminist issues in Lesotho. The analysis is intended to elucidate how the donors’ approaches to institutionalise women’s issues have functioned to define and shape the place of the women’s agenda on the national development agenda. It highlights feminist issues that have been prioritised by donor agencies at different historical moments and thus examines the interface between institutionalising an international agenda within the background of aid dependency and political vulnerability of the country to its neighbouring apartheid South Africa. The chapter introduces broad debates around gender equality and the aid politics. It then takes a historical journey to unpack the intersection of the development assistance and the commitment to women’s advancement under different political moments. In order to highlight the feminist puzzle of institutionalising global feminist ideas within domestic policy context characterised by aid dependency and weak democracy, this chapter uses the experiences of four development agencies- UNFPA<sup>187</sup> and UNDP which are multilateral organisations<sup>188</sup> that have strong influence in Lesotho, while the American Embassy and Irish Development Aid are regarded as major bilateral development partners of the Lesotho government, but more importantly, they have remained in Lesotho while most have relocated to Pretoria since the dismantling of

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<sup>187</sup> UNFPA was not in the initial proposed sample but replaced the World Bank whose local office referred me to Washington DC while the latter referred me back to the Lesotho, and I later learned that the Bank did not have special gender programmes. The UNFPA regional office is based in South Africa and operates from the country office

<sup>188</sup> According to Staudt K. (1998, 16) “multilateral agencies transfer funds and technical services from multiple sources to multiple countries, filtered through the professional staff, while bilateral agencies transfer these services and funds from one government to another country”.



apartheid in 1994<sup>189</sup>. The data for this chapter draws heavily from published and unpublished documents on the work of these agencies including consultancy work and programme reports. Interviews with officials responsible for gender issues or governance in these agencies complement the document analysis.

### **Introduction: Foreign aid and national policy debates**

The effectiveness of aid in dealing with development issues of recipient countries has recently dominated development discourses. In some cases, foreign aid has been blamed for dictating the course of national development debates while in some cases, weak states have been criticised for misusing aid funds (for example, Calderisi, 2006). Whatever position one takes, the fact is that aid has had enormous influence on the content of the development agenda including gender equality. What we have seen though is that despite decades of financial support, aid has been unable to solve development problems of host countries. A number of reasons have been advanced that have contributed to this failure. These include the tendency for donors to treat development assistance as ‘apolitical’ (Ferguson, 1990). In some cases, the failure has been attributed to the tendency of development agencies to dominate policy debates hence undermining local conditions or expertise.

For those who take the middle ground, aid has been effective in countries that have ‘indigenized’ the global agendas, they argue. For example, Calderisi (2006:7) argues that “successful countries are those that have chosen the right policies for their own reasons and seen foreign aid as a complement for their own efforts rather than as a bribe for undertaking difficult reforms”. Further, *Kardam* (1994, 151) posits that at the end it is the responsibility of women and men in Third World countries to ‘redefine gender relations and of development’ not that of foreign actors. For her, these agencies should be seen more primarily as “brokers” of development rather than being seen as replacing national development efforts. She posits that they are

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<sup>189</sup> The European Union was initially in the sample and some interviews were conducted as well as accessing some program documents, however it was clear that the focus on gender was fairly new and that there was not much to be discussed about the role of the EU gender policy.

accountable to governments that may constrain their autonomy and as such, they tend to have limited space for manoeuvre in changing prescribed practices. It is argued further that because of this lack of independence, they may end up reinforcing existing unequal traditional gender relations in host countries. Because of the mandate bestowed by their sponsors, donor agencies exercise their financial muscles in dictating the content of the development agenda of recipient countries. Both the mandates, as well as the background of these agencies, form the basis for the way they conduct their business. For instance, Staudt (1998:17) explains that multilateral agencies are not necessarily “embedded in contexts of political or democratic accountability. Bilateral agencies, in contrast, might be so embedded that democratic majorities exercise voice in those nation-states”. Kabeer (1994:12) further maintains that social problems are viewed through theoretical lenses and as such, it would be wrong to expect powerful development agencies to act outside of theoretical underpinnings. She argues “...no advocacy, scholarship or policy is entirely free from theory or innocent of ideology”. Because of this, development agencies “are likely to have a profound influence on the kinds of research and advocacy they are likely to fund, listen to and act upon” (citing Maguire, 1984).

Though the foregoing debates have concentrated on the shortcomings of the donor initiatives it would be defeating to dismiss entirely the positive role that international institutions have played in advancing the gender equality agenda in the Third World. As Miller (1998:171) advises, despite reservations that feminists have about working with multilateral development institutions, it is important not to ignore their contributions in supporting local actors who fight for ‘gender-equitable development’. She highlights the role played by such institutions in advancing change in policy processes. She justifies the presence of foreign technical support in that external gender advocates have an advantage over local activists because they can be free from patronizing local political constraints. These transnational advocates do not only bring with them new research that provides knowledge that can affect the ways and ‘thinking about doing development’ but they can also link with local activists to spread feminist ideas. Further, it would not be fair to exonerate nation-states from the ineffectiveness of aid in addressing development issues as national contexts have the potential to shape a global agenda. What this tells us is that aid on its own cannot

solve development problems of recipient countries; a number of dynamics play themselves out in influencing development initiatives for the good or worse. It is, therefore, important to explore the political context within which the global gender agenda has been pursued by aid development agencies, and as such, establish the extent to which these actors have been able or failed to shape the nature and place of the women's issues within the broader development agenda.

### **The Aid Industry and the Gender Equality Agenda**

Any development debates about women in the Third World need to be understood within the background of the aid dependency discourse. Just like all development agendas, the gender equality agenda has been predominantly driven by donors who initially worked primarily with national governments while women's groups were considered later as a result of the global shift on the rolling back of the state. At different historical moments, donors have chosen their local partners as national governments while women have been treated as passive 'beneficiaries' of development projects. However the donor community has been used by transnational feminist movements as a channel through which shifting discourses and paradigms in both the mainstream development discourse and gender debates in particular have been articulated. Several issues of the global women's agenda have been identified as critical at different historical moments while some have remained at the margins of policy debates. For instance, women's issues that have gained prominence within the development agenda include the integration of women in development (post- Mexico women's conference, 1970-1980s), women's rights and development (post-Nairobi 1990s), empowerment, and gender mainstreaming (mainly post-Beijing) (see Jahan, 1995). Throughout the globalisation processes donor agencies have not only influenced the content of the global development agenda, but have managed to also dictate the place of women's issues on that agenda by supporting some initiatives on the establishment of specific WID/GAD policies and strategies. For example, the setting of special women's policy units at national level such as bureaux, departments and ministries was a response to donor pressure meant to devise policies and strategies that would address women's issues.

These development agencies have not only provided technical and financial support to feminist interventions, but they have also been able to influence the introduction of key feminist concepts and strategies within the aid discourse some of which have been used as conditionalities for both governments and NGOs to qualify for assistance. Feminist advocacy within these agencies has benefitted from the employment of gender officers to coordinate initiatives meant to promote women's advancement, while on the other hand local gender activists have also used this assistance as an opportunity to advance feminist issues that national governments fail to address. For instance, Baden and Goetz (1997) argue that gender mainstreaming has been able to spread within international development institutions due to the existence of gender policy advocates in some bilateral agencies; and this in turn has been used as a condition on programs funded by these agencies.

In spite of this support we need to emphasize that donors' prioritisation of initiatives that addressed women's issues has been usually influenced by the ways in which donors themselves defined women's issues more than what the local contexts dictated (for example see White 1992 on Bangladesh). In most cases, their understandings have been a product of the mainstream global development thinking of the time void of local experiences and perspectives, yet on the other hand local activists have made use of this international arena provided by the donor industry due to the limited political space provided by the local political context. From their side, donors have dismissed the significance of local politics in implementing these initiatives. As Harrison (1995) has argued, one of the tendencies of donors has been to treat gender issues as a 'technical project' void of political implications; Similarly Baden and Goetz (1997, 39 citing Khan) have argued that the aid industry has influenced the gender equality agenda to become a technocratic discourse despite its theoretical grounding within the socialist feminist perspective; this they argue, has been due to the dominance of the agenda by "researchers, policy makers, and consultants, which no longer addressed issues of power central to women's subordination". The depoliticisation of the development industry has been extensively highlighted by Ferguson who illustrated that the development industry in Lesotho has failed due to its 'depoliticisation' by development agencies. Needless to underscore that context matters; aid is not implemented in a vacuum as there are a number of contextual

aspects that will always militate against any global development endeavours. These may range from cultural issues to political struggles within recipient countries.

There is no gainsaying in acknowledging the contribution made by donor agencies in pushing the gender equality agenda on the global development agenda at both national governments and development institutions. Goetz (1998:43) has highlighted the crucial role that the international community has played in supporting national WID/GAD efforts. They have done this through the “UN Decade for Women and through the aid programmes of local constituencies mobilised in support of the WID/GAD issues”. There is clear evidence that in many countries, women’s issues entered the national development debates only after 1975 and that women’s policy units were created mainly as a response to donor pressure. For example, Bryden and Chant (1989) posit that the UN conferences have been the catalysts in the founding of women and development as well as the international mobilisation of women. In some contexts, these forums have also been able to “legitimize a broad platform for feminist activism at the national and international levels” (Saunders 2000:5). In the case of Lesotho, for example, the women’s bureau was established in 1979 in response to the international women’s decade that emanated from the 1975 conference on women, while debates to review laws that discriminate against women emerged during the military regime after the Nairobi women’s conference. Further, the process of drafting the first gender policy (1994) began as a response to the Beijing world women’s conference<sup>190</sup>; all these gained financial and technical support from the donor community. This can be illustrated by the fact that when the BCP got into power in 1994 it had declared that it was not going to have a separate unit for women as it perceived that as unnecessary, but incidentally a fully fledged ministry was later established in 1998 without pressure from any local actors. As earlier shown in chapter two, the director of the Department of Gender and the national coordinator of WLSA pointed out that the creation of this ministry was a response more to the

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<sup>190</sup> A number of respondents have indicated that government initiated this process in order to appear ‘progressive’ as the country was preparing to attend the conference. However, as indicated in various sections of the thesis, this process was frustrated by petty politics.

Beijing platform for action and ensuing donor support for implementation at within local contexts<sup>191</sup>.

On the other hand, this external pressure has benefitted certain issues of the agenda while in some cases some issues have remained marginalised. For a long time in its history, the aid discourse has concentrated on women's reproductive roles while their political agency has been marginalised. As indicated by a number of program reports of donors investigated in this study, the issue of political empowerment gradually entered the discourse only after 1995, and it only got visible prominence after 2000. Nonetheless, a number of women's organisations, including those that embrace the rights-based approach, have depended fully on donor support, for example, WLSA and FIDA. As Goetz (1997) confirms, the international development community has played an important role in supporting and resourcing nation-level gender initiatives. The influence of external pressure, she argues, has served a useful purpose in the absence of a strong national women's movement as well as national resources for gender and development activities. In addition, Mayoux (1998) also indicates that funding from both multilateral and bilateral organisations and INGOs has also played a significant role, not only in supporting the efforts of states, but also efforts by local NGOs. In some cases, these organisations have been able to influence governments' responsiveness and accountability while at other moments they have ignored established gender discriminations. As shown in chapter five in the case of Lesotho this influence has created dependency and fierce competition over these resources by local NGOs including those that have no serious commitment or basic principles of gender equality. This has been also witnessed in Croatia where Irvin (2007) reports that this competition also leads to the discrediting of women's groups as well as the fracturing of the civil society.

A number of issues have been raised about the effectiveness of foreign aid in addressing gender inequalities (for instance, Himmelstrand, 1997). These include the ownership of the women's agenda, the donors' economical muscles in dictating the

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<sup>191</sup> Interviews with gender activists who are also most senior officials in their institutions, 2007

nature of the debate and the whole purpose of the aid industry. The dominance of donor agencies in development debates and deployment of foreign ‘experts’ in implementing aid initiatives undermines the local ownership of the agenda. On the one hand, this has impacted on the way the agenda has been viewed and pursued, while it has, on the other hand, led to the marginalisation of the women’s agency. Goetz (1998) points out that though the donors’ overwhelming pressure has functioned to create interest for adopting WID/GAD approaches; on the other hand, it has led to some sense of ‘ambivalence’ in processes of addressing gender inequalities because some local gatekeepers have viewed the initiatives as foreign; hence, they strongly resist the changes. She cautions thus; “As a foreign import, the legitimacy of the WID/GAD issue can be undermined and genuine local ‘internalisation’ or ‘ownership’ of the issue postponed” (1998:43). In the context of Lesotho, this was witnessed during the introduction of law reforms which were labelled as ‘the Beijing thing’. In fact, Beijing was used so negatively by most men to refer to women who were out of control and ‘bitter’. The debates about rights were said to be anti-cultural and ‘decent’ women were discouraged to associate themselves with. This sentiment has not totally disappeared as some respondents emphasised that organisations such as FIDA are “misleading women into feminism which is totally against Sesotho culture”<sup>192</sup>. Goetz further emphasized that actors such as donors and states have profoundly influenced the meaning of women’s issues as well as strategies to solve them.

The donors’ pressure has also manifested itself in the shifts of discourses that have dominated the gender agenda. For example, Baden and Goetz (1998:20) posit that gender mainstreaming as a new approach in addressing gender inequalities, has been predominantly promoted within international development institutions by gender policy advocates and national governments were expected to employ this strategy albeit with little or no understanding of basic principles of the approach. This has therefore led “to accusations of a donor driven agenda”. A clear example of this in the case of Lesotho is the creation of gender focal points in different ministries. According to some of these officers and some gender activists, their contribution is

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<sup>192</sup> Interviews with political party leaders, (BNP) 2007

very minimal as they occupy junior positions. Some have argued that this problem is exacerbated by the fact that the Department of Gender lacks direction on what should be the role of these desks in addition to the fact the various ministries are not interested in gender issues as they are seen as the prerogative of the Ministry of Gender. One interesting finding from interviews was that some UN agencies had embarked on internal scrutiny on how the agencies themselves were mainstreaming gender in their work. Though the findings were not as yet ready for public consumption, the preliminary findings suggested that there was a big gap between the agencies' pronouncements on gender mainstreaming and what they practice. The findings were telling a critical story in understanding the extent to which these agencies could be trusted to actually drive the women's agenda.

Another aspect is that of the agenda being an alibi for the state and civil society groups, who see it as a bargaining chip to access donor funds. There is evidence that a number of states have responded to GAD calls, not because they were committed to the cause, but to 'demonstrate a progressive' national stance as a channel to access funds (Goetz, 1998; Naciri, 1998). White (1992:12) further points out:

*Despite being couched in the language of human need, aid is a highly political resource for both donors and recipients. Donors allocate aid in accordance with their political and commercial interests, amongst groups as diverse as government ministries, foreign consultants, local contractors and village factions, there is fierce competition for access to aid resources.*

On the other hand, recipient countries have pursued gender equality initiatives also to push other agendas and as such, the gender agenda has been a means to achieve certain ends. Women's issues have been prioritised at different historical moments in order to pursue certain development agendas. For example, globally, family planning was instrumental in controlling population growth that has been regarded as an impediment to economic development. Similarly, women's 'integration' into economic development was emphasised as an instrument to attain economic efficiency. Local and national groups have been used to carry out these mandates,



sometimes unconscious of the motives. White (1992:15) points out that, not only for the state that ‘women’s issue’ have been a potential source of funds, but this has also been the case with the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that sometimes may change their ideologies and practices to align them with those of donors in order to access funds. There are many examples of donor funded women’s programmes that have failed to challenge established patterns of male dominance over access to resources. They have rather continued to reproduce marginalisation of the women’s voice, even in programs that are meant to ‘target’ them. This has been the case in Lesotho’s agricultural and rural development projects that ignored the marginalisation of women’s property rights. In the case of Bangladesh, White (1992:15) mentions that in most cases, the women’s programmes have been allocated lower budgets while their focus has been “modest, comprising ‘soft’ components, such as very basic instruction in health, culinary and sanitary practices, rather than ‘harder’ programmes to bring significant economic or structural benefits”. Apart from ‘motherhood’ initiatives, income-generating programs for women have been generally of small scale and have failed to improve women’s economic status. One of the respondents in this present study argued that these programs were not necessarily a misguided strategy, but that the problem was the way they were conceived. She expresses her disappointment that despite Basotho women’s involvement in the domestic science-related activities such as sowing and weaving, it is ironical that when Lesotho got involved in AGOA, the deal benefitted the Chinese investors instead of local women who could have been encouraged to form joint ventures with foreign investors<sup>193</sup>. This is a clear indication that such programmes were never meant to transform women’s economic activities beyond household or domestic level. This tendency has been noted by Escobar (1995:184) in Colombia where he argues that:

*‘income-generating’ projects introduced in the wake of the UN Decade for Women devoted resources to projects such as home improvement, manufacturing of handicrafts, and sewing. The projects sought to make women more productive in those activities considered natural for them. The fact that international organisations made clear their interest in formulating*

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<sup>193</sup> Interview with Mokokoane, 2007

*women's policies at the official level pushed governments in the Third World in this direction.*

Escobar's assertion brings into discussion the issue of the donor's economic advantage in dictating the nature and content of the debate. For example, the 1990s have witnessed the democratization project being championed by donors, and women's participation in politics has been advanced on the basis that it would enhance democracy (Irvin, 2007). Gender mainstreaming has been advocated as both a strategy and conditionality for governments to access further funding. As earlier indicated both the Lesotho major policy statements, namely; the Poverty Reduction Strategy (2004) and the Vision 2020 address gender issues in a very casual manner that reflects a clear ambivalence of government in dealing with women's issues. But because government had to appear progressive to the donors, a section was inserted without comprehensive analysis of the root causes of continued gender inequalities. The Lesotho PRS has been hailed by donors as the most representative. Yet, the implementation of this strategy seems to pay little focus on the relationship between poverty and gender relations. The ways in which of the gender equality discourse has been introduced within policy debates within recipient countries' development agendas has not only undermined self- initiated national efforts, but it has led to perpetual dependence of these countries on foreign influence. Unfortunately, this has also impacted on local women's organizations that have always functioned by responding to foreign pressure rather than initiating debates around women's issues. As argued by one official of the women's organization, in the absence of governments' support and the private sector, these organizations have to take orders from donors. She highlighted that even if Lesotho as a country was not ready to shift from "WID to GAD", there was little space to maneuver as donors were championing the gender mainstreaming strategy and they were looking for partners. She argued that no group was ready to be left behind, so they had to advocate for a concept that she believes was not well understood<sup>194</sup>. According to the Reality of Aid Report of 2002, the concept of gender has been imposed on the development agenda of Third World countries as the result of their need for financial assistance. However, the same report

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<sup>194</sup> Interview with WLSA Coordinator, 2007

argues that in some instances, aid has contributed effectively to gender equity and law reforms meant to advance women's "empowerment and emancipation". Women empowerment as a conditionality has, to some extent, benefited women in those projects that are considered natural for them, but as experience has shown, donors have been reluctant to show interest in local politics and as such, this conditionality may bypass the political arena.

The emphasis laid on the lack of commitment of donors in advancing the gender agenda has tended to play down the role of the local context in shaping the content of the global agenda. Much focus has been said about how donors' approaches have been characterized by a 'miniscule amount of resources invested in women' (Ferguson in Staudt, 1990). Others have indicated that, despite good intentions of donors to gender equality, there is a tendency for such intentions to 'evaporate' at the implementation level.<sup>195</sup> This report (Reality of Aid Report) continues to argue that this evaporation is the result of the complexity of the policy making process. On the other hand, Goetz (2001) has emphasised the need to understand the role played by implementers or fieldworkers of development projects in influencing the success of these initiatives. However, it can also be argued that the absence of the women's voice as well as the political commitment of government contributes enormously on the institutionalisation of a global agenda. The lack of a strong civil society and women's movement, particularly in Lesotho, has allowed the situation where the gender agenda has been predominantly driven by the donor agencies. It is therefore imperative to understand the significance of bringing on board different voices to drive the agenda. As Miller and Razavi (1998:13) illustrate, it is critical to understand the significance of the intersection of international and domestic pressure and networking in advancing the feminist agenda within different institutional contexts. The donors' support, as earlier indicated, needs to be seen more as complementing local initiatives rather than as substitution for local visions. Their support can only go as far as strengthening capacity of national development actors.

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<sup>195</sup> [www.realityofaid.org/roareport](http://www.realityofaid.org/roareport)

### **The Apartheid Influence, Foreign Aid and the Place of Women's Issues**

The contemporary gender landscape in Lesotho that is characterised by unequal gender inequalities at the household and decision-making levels cannot be adequately addressed if the role of geo-political position of a country is not taken into account. The context within which development agendas, including gender equality have been pursued in Lesotho is that which has been characterised by both extreme aid dependence and economic dependence on the neighbouring South Africa. In fact the nature of the flow of aid into this country has been inherently linked to the political developments in South Africa. This context has had profound influence on the place of the gender discourse within the mainstream development agenda. Issues as well as strategies identified as key to the women's agenda could not constitute core business of regimes that did not have control over their own course of development. Most importantly, the intersection between the aid dependence and the articulation of a global gender equality agenda needs to be located within the framework of a closed political space emanating from undemocratic and repressive apartheid regimes in South Africa before 1994. There are three interrelated dimensions that are always cited as critical to understanding Lesotho's development issues; namely, its geo-political position within a strong, historically hostile neighbour, its over-dependence on that country's economy and hence its dependence on foreign assistance (Matlosa, 1999; Ferguson, 1990; Ntho, 2003). As argued by Bardill and Cobbe (1985), it is difficult to talk about any development aspect in Lesotho that is not influenced by South Africa; these would include gender equality issues. From the point of view of most donors, their presence in Lesotho was an attempt to assist a small interlocked state which suffered because of its stand against apartheid South Africa (O'Donnell, 1997; Minister of State for Overseas Development and Human Rights). It is this position which Lesotho regimes have also used as an alibi to easily get foreign attention. Needless to note that the end of apartheid has actually decreased donors' support to the country which in any case remains landlocked and dependent on South African economy.

Lesotho's position within the 'belly' of South Africa and the apartheid rule of the latter has rendered it very vulnerable, even on the choice of policy priorities. Lesotho's domestic and foreign policies have, in one way or the other, been

determined by how they seemed suitable and safe by the apartheid regime. For example, Lesotho's policy on giving asylum to African National Congress (ANC) and Pan-African Congress (PAC) refugees predisposed her to Pretoria's military attack. The consequences was a military coup that led to a change of government in 1986 due to the border blockage to Lesotho.<sup>196</sup> One of the surprising responses to this change of regimes by donor community was the huge funds they devoted to the Lesotho Highlands Water Project signed by the undemocratic apartheid and military regimes.

At different historical moments Lesotho rulers have used the country's vulnerable position to amass foreign funds. Further, the donors seemed ready to devote huge funds on Lesotho as the country's problems were believed to have direct link with its position. This international sympathy led to overwhelming over-dependence on donor assistance hence vulnerability to shifting donor focus. As Ferguson (1990) points out, this sympathy also led to a huge presence of expatriates 'experts' who dominated most development projects. Khalapa Development Agency report (2004:17) has added that getting money from donors was very easy during the apartheid era. The report claims that "if you needed money from a donor during apartheid era, all you did was to prepare a back of the envelope proposal and within a very short time; the money would be in the bank". It would seem therefore that the national commitment on development agendas was not given serious attention as the objective of foreign assistance was primarily to monitor the apartheid regime, not necessarily to help Lesotho to move out of its dependency position.

Donor countries continued assisting undemocratic regimes in Lesotho on the basis that such regimes were against the apartheid rule in South Africa. For example, after the 1970 election in which the BNP had lost, the British government briefly stopped its aid but resumed it "dramatically when government began voicing harsh criticism of apartheid of its neighbour and allowed a large number of ANC exiles to stay in the

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<sup>196</sup> This was not the first blockade in the history of these countries. Time and again, the blockades were made but this one was longer and precipitated political uncertainty that was caused by internal factors

country” (Lesotho 1996 Official Yearbook)<sup>197</sup>. Matlosa reports that the 1976 Soweto uprising was a catalyst to a significant outflow of South African refugees into Lesotho. It was this refugee factor that the BNP government used as a bargaining chip to access huge development assistance (Matlosa, 1999; Makoa, 1996). Ferguson (1990:3) further notes that, in the period between 1975 and 1984, Lesotho was receiving development assistance from about 27 bilateral sources and more than 50 ‘international agencies and quasi-governmental organisations’. Because of this support, the BNP government postponed endeavours to bring about a democratically-elected government including a lack of commitment in addressing representative politics.

The importance of an extensive analysis of the relationship between the apartheid regime and the aid industry in Lesotho is meant to highlight the vulnerability of policy development processes in Lesotho as a result of the donors’ intentions of their presence in that country. In fact, some scholars predicted even before 1994 that the future of aid in Lesotho depended on the political events in South Africa. For example, Gill (1992) argued that this future depended on the place of Lesotho in a new South Africa that might see a possible interest of donors in the changed South Africa with corresponding decrease in aid to Lesotho.

In his analysis of aid and democracy in Lesotho, Matlosa (1999) looks at three phases through which to understand the evolution of the aid discourse. He explores this evolution under different political moments namely; the post-independence, the South African blockages of Lesotho/ SA borders and the resultant military coup and the last phase that was characterised by political instability and donor fatigue. Though Matlosa does not address the impact of these phases on gender issues, his analysis becomes relevant in as far as gender equality is seen as an aspect of development and democracy. Though the post-independence era was marked by few aid debates, the country’s relations with South Africa played themselves in that the BNP government had to choose between pleasing the apartheid regime or the British who were the sole

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<sup>197</sup> [www.lesotho.gov.ls](http://www.lesotho.gov.ls)

donors (1999, 5). Jonathan (Lesotho's Prime minister) had received food aid from Verwoerd (RSA's president) during the by-elections which helped him to win a constituency in 1966 and eventually becoming the prime minister. But because Jonathan chose the latter, the country suffered the wrath of the apartheid regime through a number of frustrations including border-crossing restrictions. When the Soweto uprising of 1976 pushed many South Africans into exile, again Jonathan defied the RSA National Party government as he accommodated these exiles to the anger of the apartheid regime. The third phase that Matlosa describes is that which came after the end of apartheid, which led to what he terms donor 'fatigue'.

These phases have a direct link to the content of the gender discourse and its place on the development agenda. Despite many development agencies having established relationships with Lesotho between 1975 (UNDP, Irish Aid, USAID e.t.c.) and 1985 (UNFPA), coinciding with the UN Decade for Women, they focused more on assisting Lesotho regimes in what was referred to as 'lessening' (for example see Ferguson 1990) Lesotho's dependence on South Africa and less focus on democratic principles such as gender equality. This was evidenced by the fact that, even though Jonathan's post-1970 regime was undemocratic, development agencies continued funding its programmes. This happened amidst various human rights abuses against opposition parties. Most development initiatives pursued by this regime were funded by donors. Yet, there was no focus on inequalities that marginalised women's advancement except when women appeared as passive beneficiaries. As Gill (1992) points out, it was only after 1990 that donor agencies established programmes that focused mainly on women. She argues that in cases where women were targeted, it was under 'motherhood' domains. The initial focus was on rural development and agricultural projects which were designed in a gender-blind manner as they failed to alter gender inequalities within these sectors as women's minority status remained unchallenged.

Key to Matlosa's analysis is the prioritisation of certain issues and marginalisation of some such as democratic governance. Because the focus was to dismantle apartheid in the neighbouring South Africa, most development issues became secondary to the

donors' agenda. The same case can be made about the gender agenda in that, despite huge development assistance which was supposedly meant to address Lesotho's development problems, the gender equality agenda was not adequately pushed by these development agencies. The difference came only after 1990, except that this as well was accompanied by the donors' flight to South Africa. Matlosa concludes that instead of aid decreasing Lesotho's dependence on South Africa, what has happened is that it has 'deepened the country's dependence on South Africa, it has bolstered the power/survival of the state and has had minimal impact on poverty reduction" (1999:29) and we can add, women's political equality.

On the other hand, Pule (2004) argues that the reaction of the donor community towards the end of apartheid became a 'rude shock' to many Basotho as within one year, more than 30 agencies had relocated to Pretoria<sup>198</sup>. The sudden shift of sympathy was not anticipated and has surprised even outsiders, as argued by editor of the Afrol news letter that "... despite good governance, relative democracy and heavy needs due to the AIDS pandemic and droughts induced by global warming, only Ireland sees Lesotho as a major development partner."<sup>199</sup> The analysis continues to argue that Lesotho has well-functioning democratic institutions that have been hailed by IMF. In fact, according to this view, Lesotho government is committed to women empowerment, yet by 2005, it was receiving less aid than even dictatorship regimes such as Eritrea. This assertion confirms the view that donor agencies were never concerned with development issues of Basotho but the country served as 'watch tower' from which political events in RSA were monitored.

The end of apartheid saw both the shift of donor 'sympathy' and new faces in the aid industry such as the Chinese. This was accompanied by huge investments in manufacturing industry that absorbed large numbers of young women and at the same

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<sup>198</sup> The only missions that remained in Maseru were the British (British Council later relocated in 2005 the Germans also phased their assistance), the Irish, the European Union and the Chinese" (Pule, 2004). Most UN agencies have their regional offices in SA.

<sup>199</sup> ([www.afrol.com/articles/28114](http://www.afrol.com/articles/28114))



time has brought inhuman labor practices that unfortunately have not been part of the mainstream feminist agenda. As predicted by Bayles and Wright (1993:590), a new democratic government in South Africa was expected to demand higher wages which would scare investors away and force them to operate in Lesotho where there was a pool of cheap labor. Incidentally, this was to be predominantly young uneducated females who are unable to secure better paying jobs. This analysis has helped us understand how a global agenda can be marginalized by both domestic and international actors, but also how regional politics are important in shaping development discourses while on the other hand the commitment of international development institutions need to be scrutinized so that we have a better understanding of their motives for operating in poor countries that do not offer any political gains.

### **Institutionalising transnational feminist agenda within the shifting aid discourses: a historical trajectory**

The following section traces systematically how the global shifting development discourses have influenced the intersection between the articulation of global feminist issues within the donor community and domestic efforts to address gender inequality specifically in the case of Lesotho.

Over the course of history donors' assistance in Lesotho has not only been tenuous in quantity but its focus and language has as well taken a number of mutations. For instance, from the 1960s the aid industry was dominated by the language of economic growth and as such, aid in countries like Lesotho was channelled to large-scale rural development projects. In the same manner, the 1970s and 1980s emphasised 'growth with distribution' that inspired among others the 'integrated rural development approach' and infrastructure development. Up to this stage, democracy had not yet entered the mainstream global development discourses. In Lesotho this was evidenced by its absence in both national policies and donor project documents. This absence might explain the continued flow of aid even under repressive regimes. Of course the role played by the political conditions in the neighbouring RSA cannot be overemphasised. When the global gender equality language entered the public domain

in the 1990s it was still attached to other agendas such as sustainable development and democratic governance.

As earlier noted a number of global forums have contributed to this new way of looking at development, but more importantly, women's initial entry into the debate was associated with the global acknowledgement of their role in development. These international forums have been used by donor agencies to advance transnational feminist issues, for instance, the Cairo Agenda of 1994 which emphasised for the first time a holistic approach to population and development received significant recognition as UNFPA actively influenced the drafting of a gender policy that was grounded within the human development framework. Similarly the Beijing women's conference of 1995 that endorsed gender mainstreaming as the key strategy to be adopted by member states in promoting gender equality and 'empowering' women influenced in particular the creation of a fully fledged ministry for women which received technical support from both UNDP and UNFPA. Further, in 2000 the third goal of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that emphasised the need to 'promote gender equality and empower women'<sup>200</sup> has been addresses through a number of interventions and as well received donor support from the US sponsored Millennium Challenge Compact (MCA), the Irish Aid and other multilateral and bilateral institutions. Some of these interventions include legal capacity that paved way for women to access economic opportunities provided by Compact.

As part of the global community Lesotho had to respond to the demands of these international norms except that the history of this response reflects numerous contradictions and conundrums. For example, Mashinini (2002) argues that through foreign assistance, the rural development framework was implemented through area-based projects yet these were "characterised by unequal access, marginalisation and exclusion of the poor in rural communities accentuated by differences in gender, economic class, location and political bias" (2002: 36). Despite women's majority in the rural sector, there was no attempt to address structural inequalities and power

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<sup>200</sup> [www.unifem.org/attachements/events/Brusselsconference\\_JanesanguMpagi.pdf](http://www.unifem.org/attachements/events/Brusselsconference_JanesanguMpagi.pdf).

imbalances and ignored their strategic needs. Comments on this intervention varied; for instance political leaders believe that the rural development framework benefitted rural women while some gender activists argued that the strategy marginalized urban poor women and divided the women's voice as professional urban women were excluded from the debates. Of course rural women participated in these projects as 'beneficiaries' and their lack of participation in international women's forums was not addressed either by governments or donor agencies, hence the agenda failed to challenge patriarchal tendencies within the rural sector.

The 1990s transnational human rights discourse was highly influential compared to previous global agendas; this was so because local feminist groups picked up the rights issues to influence domestic policy debates. The response of Lesotho state and non state actors to the women's human rights also received significant donor assistance as reflected by the number of donor agencies that funded research and advocacy on women's legal issues. For example, a gender activist who was a member of the Law Reform Commission which was set to investigate laws that discriminate against women commented that:

*The establishment of the Law Reform Commission took a long time to be realized because political leaders themselves did not believe in the agenda, but because donors were ready to sponsor this project they worked through the civil society women's groups to drive this transnational agenda and indeed a number of laws have been revised.<sup>201</sup>*

Similarly the gender officers within donor agencies expressed their frustration with the way the policy institutions engage gender equality issues, as one of them argued:

*Donors can do so much, the casual attitude of political leadership on gender issues puts a lot of strain on gender equality advocates and in turn this affects ownership of the gender agenda by Basotho themselves.<sup>202</sup>*

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<sup>201</sup> Interview with Kimane May 2007

<sup>202</sup> Interview with Kimane, June 2007

Shifting global development discourses have affected the architecture of foreign aid which has since changed over the years with varying targets and quantities. Matlosa (1999:29) argues that in the case of Lesotho, the change in aid has “been influenced more by the changing perceptions of the donor and less by domestic policy projections and visions by state and non-state actors”. The same thing can be said about the changes in the gender equality discourses. For example, the language of ‘gender’ and gender mainstreaming in particular that replaced ‘women’ has been prominent in donor interventions and has been advocated by donors while the concept is still not well understood by locals<sup>203</sup>. There has been a clear indication of some confusion on what the concept means even from some women within the civil society and political institutions. As noted earlier the adoption of ‘gender’ within the policy debates came largely as a result of pressure from transnational feminist movements which used feminist advocates within states and civil society organizations; of course all gender officers interviewed for this study showed that their agencies funded workshops on gender mainstreaming for government officers in collaboration with local feminist groups.

One other feminist puzzle within the policy space in this country has been the drafting of the gender policy which received significant donor support yet it took more than five years to be tabled before cabinet. Though it was claimed by some respondents that during the drafting of the gender policy, the national committee rejected the involvement of ‘a foreign expert’ so as to ensure ‘ownership’ of the process (Makatjane<sup>204</sup>), there have been clear indications of donor involvement from the initial stages of the process and a number of commissioned studies had recommended the need to have a policy to guide gender equality interventions. The assistance was distributed through both financial and ‘capacity building’ of government officials. Further, despite the Government’s Secretary’s assertion that the policy process was

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<sup>203</sup> According to Goetz, the term ‘gender’ is derived from an Anglo-American understanding of the social construction of gender differences and fails to translate easily into other languages.

<sup>204</sup> Interview May 2007, Makatjane is one of the few men who were involved in the development of the gender policy, it was reported that this expatriate ‘expert’ had won the tender to offer consultancy work to draft the policy- and she came into the country with a complete document without any local input.

consultative and as such ideas were drawn from a wide stakeholder representation, it was reported that the draft policy was tabled before Permanent Secretaries before it could go to stakeholders such as women's organisations. When it was finally opened for national debate, it was done through '*lipitso*'<sup>205</sup>. Participation in these traditional forums was not necessarily drawn from particular constituencies such as, for instance, political leadership. As it has been noted, these types of gatherings are dominated by men while women rarely participate in the debates (Makoa, 1997). Despite dissatisfaction expressed by organisations such as WLSA about the irregularities in the drafting of this policy, the government went ahead to table the draft to the executive and was approved. On the other hand, the willingness of donors to fund the process encouraged government to have an upper hand over gender issues to be prioritised. It is, therefore, not surprising that a number of women politicians and other stakeholders seemed ignorant of the key priorities of the document. One interesting observation was the assertion of two male policy experts who argued that if the policy was to be presented to parliament its passage would have been very difficult because MPs would have 'rejected' it. If this is something to go by, it makes sense why the policy remains the property of the Department of Gender with limited commitment from other ministries.

Similarly, a number of respondents reported that the passage of the long-awaited bill on equality of married persons came as a response to pressure from Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC)<sup>206</sup>. According to FIDA officials, the organisation is also using this international pressure to force government to enact the Child Protection and Welfare Bill, which has dragged in parliament<sup>207</sup>. Further, there are a number of utterances by government officials confirming that government's efforts to address gender inequalities have come as a response to its signing of international agreements, not necessarily driven as a national vision. In fact, some politicians argued that some of these agreements are not well understood and they impinge on the

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<sup>205</sup> These are community/village gatherings where issues are brought for discussion.

<sup>206</sup> Lesotho received US\$ 362.6 Million from the Compact to reduce poverty and increase economic growth.

<sup>207</sup> Interview with FIDA senior program officer, June 2007

credibility of traditional and cultural identity<sup>208</sup>. There is no reference to national-initiated process as reflected in most official pronouncement. This was more evident during the discussion on the use of gender quotas for the first local government elections in 2005; as noted in chapter three these election received enormous financial and technical foreign assistance and it is continuing to do so within the good governance and democracy project that dominates the donor community mandate. The following utterances were made by MPs who used the transnational space to support the introduction of quotas without referring to this as part of the domestic democratic agenda:

*The House must remember that we have signed the SADC declaration on Gender equality and we are bound to take action. (BNP MP)*

*Lesotho is signatory to both SADC and AU agreements on gender equality and as such we are bound by these agreements. (LCD MP)*

A number of these utterances highlight the absence of indigenous and national initiatives and ownership of the processes of addressing women's needs. The intention here is not to blame the international community in its efforts to address gender inequalities, but to highlight the context within which this agenda has been pursued; namely, a clear lack of national commitment to the agenda as well as ownership of the process. In the absence of these aspects, the aid agencies had to lead the gender discourses initiatives and in turn placed issues of their interests within the mainstream development debates. As Kimane<sup>209</sup> correctly argued, some gender issues have been pushed by international development agencies on the basis of their attitudes towards Basotho women, and these attitudes influenced their choice of activities they funded; even research into women's status followed this pattern and most of it has been undertaken by foreign 'experts'. Because of dependency by both state and non state actors on financial assistance and knowledge, issues that have dominated the gender

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<sup>208</sup> Going through the daily Hansard reports one noted puzzling statements by MPs on women's issues.

<sup>209</sup> Interview with gender activists, July 2007

landscape reflect substantial donor influence while domestic initiative remains relatively limited.

### **The UNDP and women's issues**

The UNDP and other development agencies adopted policies that prioritised women's issues as a response to pressures and recommendations that emerged from international conferences on women. For example, UNDP responded to this pressure in 1976 by firstly focusing mainly on internal arrangements, for instance, setting up of gender advisory structures (Miller 1998:148). Miller further notes that when it reviewed its progress in 1985, UNDP found that only 4 per cent of its resources were allocated to projects related to women. Even these were targeted at projects on maternal health and child care (1998:150). Later in 1995, the agency changed its outlook and redefined development to mean not only economic growth but introduced a human face to development through the Sustainable Human Development (SHD) approach which emphasised the importance of enhancing women's participation and empowerment (Staudt 1998:15). The 1995 UNDP report was predominantly devoted to the issue of gender equality and emphasised the role of participation in development so as to achieve sustainability. It recognised the importance of participation of women's organisations in the design and implementation of new projects and programmes as means of improving sustainability (Miller 1998:167).

In the case of Lesotho, this was evident during the preparations for the 1995 Beijing Conference when UNDP defied government and insisted in funding women's groups to attend the conference despite the BCP government's resistance to the participation of women's groups and NGOs<sup>210</sup>. Though a number of UNDP's support since this time was influenced by the SHD approach, there is no evidence suggesting that there has been corresponding national commitment to this approach, other than its mention in the three year rolling Sixth National Development Plan. The obvious conundrum has been the continuing dependence of feminist groups on foreign funding while women's participation at decision-making continued to be peripheral to mainstream gender debates.

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<sup>210</sup> Interviews; Mapetla, Molapo, Mabathoana

Though the UNDP was established in 1966, it began operating in Lesotho only in 1975. Like most other multilateral institutions, it partnered with government through the Ministry of Planning as its local partner. There is evidence to the effect that this is one of the technocratic units of government that has frustrated a lot of gender initiatives through budgeting processes. In justifying this partnership, the gender officer at UNDP argued that the agency must not be seen as a ‘donor’ but more as ‘a broker’ or a development partner. Hence, its main partner has been government. Its role is to source funds for government’s proposed programs and the Ministry of Planning is central and relevant for distributing such funds. It can be noted, however, that with the shifting focus on the role of state, this perspective does not hold any more. Most ‘development partners’ have channelled funds through NGOs that are seen more as close to the people. Agencies that continue to sponsor programmes through government departments fail to have a significant impact on vulnerable groups that seriously need assistance. As is the case with most agencies, the UNDP distribution of aid has been characterised by urban bias as its staff are based in Maseru which is in the lowlands (Van Dusen, 1985). Moreover, until very recently, most of their executive staff have always been male expatriates.

In its first review on the status of women in Lesotho, the UNDP report of 1978 played down the role of the transnational feminist movement by arguing that Basotho women were not enticed by any international movements’ calling for women to be integrated in the developments of their countries, instead they were forced by circumstances beyond their control to be involved to the peak of their ability in the development of their country. The migration of Basotho males to the South African mines was cited as the major contributing factor. It would then follow that UNDP’s approach to women’s advancement was influenced by this thinking, probably this may explain why UNDP was not keen to pressure government to honor international commitments. A similar view by foreign experts has been advanced by Gill (1994) who argued that contrary to popular view that women’s participation in development is a product of international pressure; Basotho women’s role in development must be understood as a product of “sheer necessity”. From this perspective, it would be



expected therefore that these women would have initiated their 'indigenous' route of gender and development. What has resulted though has been a hybrid of strategies driven by other actors while women have played their role from the margins of development debates. In particular, they have been ostensibly absent from the political leadership that decides on development debates and priorities of their country.

In spite of UNDP's thesis of Basotho women and the transnational feminist advocacy, the agency recommendation to address gender inequalities were framed by the development thinking of the 1970s and 80s, thus the first UNDP report recommended the following as of critical significance in addressing Lesotho women's marginalization; increasing credit availability, appropriate technology, expansion of daycare centers, rural and cottage industry, mohair and textile industry as well as rural access. A brief look into these proposals is relevant. Credit institutions have been inaccessible to women as they were legal minors who could not enter into any contract without men's consent until November 2006. Ironically, on the issue of appropriate technology and labour intensive job creation, women were employed in road construction doing menial tasks and paid with food parcels, not money. Payment with money was introduced when the Department of Rural Roads was tasked to address the absorption of mineworkers' returnees in the late 1980s. Even with this intervention, women continued to perform feminized tasks. Day-care centers, on the other hand, were widely run by women without state's support. These day-care centers mainly benefitted women in formal employment as poor women could not afford their costs. They were also concentrated in urban areas/towns. Rural cottage strategy had been spearheaded by vocational training by women's groups, yet these remained at small-scale with limited growth. The marketing of products from this sector was very limited and most of these were sold at low costs while some foreign investors exported them at high costs. All these suggest that the Lesotho government understanding of women's issues did not differ from those of donors. For instance, government's efforts to address women's issues have been channeled through different ministries and included poultry farming, communal gardens, agricultural products, small scale enterprises and day care centers (Wilkins *et al.*, 1988). Ministries charged with these issues included Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural

Development with no explicit policy for women. The Ministry of Health was responsible for all maternal and child health including family planning and breastfeeding (Lesotho Country Paper, 1985). On the other hand, the creation of the Ministry of Gender has resulted in the neglect of women's issues by other line ministries.

The UNDP has continued its support and has been prominent in providing technical support. For instance, according to the UNDP gender officer, the agency has recently partnered with the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Sports (MGYS) and offers technical support. It looks at the work-plan of the ministry and gives technical or financial support of selected activities or programs. She however confirmed that a number of women's issues to advance women have been flown around but with no serious debates or action. She blames this on women politicians and MPs whom she maintains that they are not committed to the women's agenda as their loyalty is with their political parties that have failed to show their commitment to equal gender representation. A clear example was during the discussion on Sexual Offences Bill (2003), the Local Government Bill (2005) on the introduction of quotas and the Married Persons' Equality Bill (2006). She argued:

*these women politicians made least contributions, primarily because they were not sure of their male counterparts and parties stance on the issues or that they knew little of the implications of such legal interventions<sup>211</sup>.*

She also highlighted the absence of a strong women's movement to be contributing to the apathy on women's issues. She cited an example of politics of representation which have been left in the hands of male politicians; in her view gender sensitisation programs have actually marginalized the agenda of representation. Nonetheless, it was also confirmed that successful UNDP interventions came mainly as a result of the gender mainstreaming strategy adopted by the agency after the Beijing conference. Through this strategy focus was on the internal capacity and the centrality of gender

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<sup>211</sup> Interview with Ms Moorosi, gender officer UNDP. May/2007

in all projects, workshops for the gender think-group on gender mainstreaming, consultancies on evaluating the agency, as well as mainstreaming gender in HIV/AIDS programmes. In general, the introspection has been directed to the internal workings of the agency while less focus has been on the impact of the agency on lived experiences of women.

The experiences of UNDP on the women's agenda in Lesotho need to be read within the larger international approaches to issues of equality. Until the mid 1980s, multilateral donors tended to tackle development issues including GAD issues with initiatives targeted mainly at the project level. Miller (1998:159) posits that "a range of small, unconnected projects for women were often pursued while programme assistance carried on in a 'gender-blind' fashion, promoting macro and sectoral policies that often undid any of the positive gains that could be expected from project-level assistance". In support of the above, Goetz (2003) argues that the UN Decade for Women influenced women's issues in development to be based on the 'project' of access or 'integration' into development policy making and project-implementing institutions and the most dominant being the state. Because transnational feminist ideas have been spread through development agencies, the way donors defined women's issues had a direct impact on the way the agenda was articulated. For instance, it would seem that the intention was not to bring women as agents of development to access the policy space so as to drive the agenda of integration, but to add them passive 'beneficiaries' in the development process.

Similarly, Matlosa (1999:24) has shown that during the 1970s, aid flows in Lesotho concentrated on agricultural projects as major development partners funded area-based projects. However, Wellings (1982) has shown that the 1980s saw the decline in agricultural funding in Lesotho as more donors began sponsoring infrastructural initiatives in works and transport. For instance, between 1970 and 1977, UNDP sponsored two large agricultural projects; namely, Leribe Pilot Agricultural Scheme and Senqu River Agricultural Extension Project; while another huge project; Thaba-Bosiu Rural Development Project was funded by the USAID between 1973 and 1979. Before this period, the US had functioned as the main donor of food aid through the

Catholic Relief Services. This huge funding failed to consider the gender biasness of land ownership in Lesotho which precludes women who incidentally constitute the majority of the rural and agricultural labour force. Agricultural production has remained very low and instead of addressing the land distribution laws, the BNP government in its First Five Year Development Plan blamed women for the poor harvest.

As was the case with all Third World countries, when the global aid discourse shifted from the project approach, donors in Lesotho as well shifted to the programme approach but continued to sponsor huge agricultural and rural development initiatives such as BASP without altering gender inequalities within the sector<sup>212</sup>. Even with this shift in approach, the programs did not address women as a constituency to drive their agenda. According to Gill (1992:18), up to 1992, most donors did not have programs aimed at women, or if they were aimed at women, they were in the realm of health and maternal care. It has been noted that before 1985, the UNDP resources in Lesotho were concerned with maternal and child health while gender mainstreaming appeared as a priority only in the mid-1990s. This observation supports Miller's (1998:51) assertion that women and development became one of the four critical areas after 1985 along with environment, NGOs, and the role of private sector in development. In the case of Lesotho, Matlosa (1999) notes that the top five priority aid areas did not include 'gender' until the late 1990s. Because women have always been better educated than men and that they are in the majority, many projects attracted a high rate of female involvement. However, this involvement failed to influence the place of the women's agenda of political equality on the development discourse. Their involvement in these projects has been misinterpreted as an indication that their concerns were considered while their lack of political power has been played down as their own making.

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<sup>212</sup> The first initiative to address inequalities in the distribution of land came only in 1979, even then married rural women were not granted the same rights that urban women received in acquiring land.

Since 1995 UNDP has made few inroads on the political plane. It supported the compilation of the Lesotho National Report for the world conference on women, and according to one gender activist and Board member of WLSA<sup>213</sup>, as preparations to attend by NGOs were frustrated by government; the UNDP was caught in the middle of this power struggle as it was not sure who to work with. However, it continued to support women groups beyond the conference. This initiative was in line with the agency's agenda of enhancing civil society participation as an aspect of democracy and good governance. As mentioned in chapter a lot of funding has been channelled to this project yet women's political empowerment has remained marginal. But as earlier indicated, the UNDP sees its main partner as government through different departments than with women's groups.

In response to the regional feminist agenda of political representation, UNDP also supported the creation of Lesotho Women Parliamentarians Caucus that was officially launched on 28 November 2003 following the SADC recommendation on advancing women political empowerment. However, according to the UNDP gender officer, this structure has failed to operate as it was expected to. It has been silent on a number of issues that were raised in parliament. As a result, the UNDP is targeting political capacity-building of this unit in its current program. There was an admission that since its formation, the caucus has not been as visible in driving the women's agenda as should have been the case. This view was supported by a number of female MPs and the reluctance of the chairperson of the caucus to be interviewed about the activities of the caucus. Women MPs from the opposition blamed the failure of the caucus on the ruling party. They claimed that the caucus is dominated by LCD which seems to marginalize the participation of other women MPs. It was clear from the interviews that promotion of women's participation in politics has been debated without any programmes and implementation strategies. This has rendered the unit to be only a token to get funds from agencies such as the UNDP and the SADC-PF. This issue also highlighted the limitations of the capacity of development partners to put pressure on national governments in the implementation of international and regional development agendas.

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<sup>213</sup> Interview with Mapetla 2008

While the post-1995 was followed by a shift to gender mainstreaming<sup>214</sup>, there was also mounting pressure to address the HIV/AIDS issues which also affected women disproportionately. UNDP and all other agencies started to shift their focus and provided support in the fight against this pandemic in addition to supporting some activities related to income generating and curriculum development for primary schools and non-formal vocational training. This approach has stretched resources and the focus has tended to fragment the feminist agenda, and as one gender activist mentioned, there is no one common agenda for women; and “the donor community is not helping the situation either, as their funding is not consistent with one common agenda”. Of course Lesotho ranks high among countries affected by the HIV pandemic and women constitute the most vulnerable group due to a number of social and economic factors. UNDP support is therefore targeted at the most disadvantaged; albeit political invisibility which remains a big challenge for feminist advocacy.

### **The United Nations Population Fund: UNFPA**

UNFPA Support to Lesotho began in 1985 and it focused on four country programmes namely; reproductive health, population and development and gender. According to the first UNFPA Report, the reproductive health status in Lesotho was found to be poor. There was noted improvement in fertility rates over a number of years. for example, “the total fertility rate declined from 5.3 children per woman in 1986 to 3.5 children per woman in 2004... the contraceptive prevalence rate has declined from 41 per cent in 2001 to 37 per cent in 2004”<sup>215</sup>. Though the report does not explain the reasons for this decline in the phase of high HIV and AIDS prevalence among women and girls, it could be concluded that family planning messages and programs are inadequate in dealing with females’ sexual positions within the society.

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<sup>214</sup> Valdeavilla E. (1995) defines gender mainstreaming as the processes and strategies of making women’s needs and perspectives an integral part of the overall development work of the government, as opposed to a separate concern. Mainstreaming involves questioning the present order of things in government – how are resources allocated and utilized? Where are the women in this order of things? What impact will the work of agencies have on women?

<sup>215</sup> [www.unfpa.org/exbrd/2008/firstsession/dpfpa\\_cpd\\_ls\\_5/doc](http://www.unfpa.org/exbrd/2008/firstsession/dpfpa_cpd_ls_5/doc).

Before 1994 UNFPA's involvement with women's advancement was mainly influenced by the global framework which saw population control through family planning. As shown by Jackson (1998), UNFPA used women as the means to achieve low population statistics despite their lower legal status in the marriage institution in the Third World. This instrumental approach has been blamed for its gender-blindness in ignoring lived women's experiences in marriage. According to this critique, UNFPA justified gender equality in population control in order to advance environmental management and conservation that were believed to be under threat. Within this view, women's roles to meet their practical needs such as collecting firewood were regarded as dangerous to nature hence they needed to be controlled. Jackson further argues that "even women's 'empowerment' is instrumental – UNFPA expects empowered women to have smaller families. Thus, women are now the means of controlling population; of achieving sustainable development, of poverty alleviation" (1998:40). This approach has been noted in Lesotho as well. For instance, it has been noted that the agency sponsored conferences that were meant to campaign for smaller families; for instance, Wainaina (1979) notes that one major conference on 'the role of women in family planning development' was hosted as part of population management. The theme of the conference highlighted the centrality of family planning as a factor in development. In this conference and similar ones, the agency partnered with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. Also, as shown earlier in chapter four, family planning initiatives that were threatened by the church and chieftaincy were successfully carried out by the support of UNFPA staff, though clandestinely<sup>216</sup>. According to Mosala, the UNFPA worked together with women's groups to distribute contraceptives among women, especially rural women.

Post 1994, especially after the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICDP), ushered in new thinking on women's role in development; according to the gender officer of UNFPA,<sup>217</sup> in addition to support on maternal health

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<sup>216</sup> Interview Mrs Mosala, June 2007

<sup>217</sup> Interview Violet Maraisane, 27/04/07

and population, the role of women in development was redefined as population was placed within the context of sustainable development. Influenced by this global norm UNPFA in Lesotho emphasised education and empowerment of women. Practical steps taken included the training of staff in the Ministry of Gender. Through technical support the Department of Gender submits applications for national needs and the agency then selects areas of support guided by the agency's priorities. According to this officer, success has been mainly on population control and demographic surveys that have been gendered.

Because the sustainable development approach to population control has been grounded within the global human rights framework, UNFPA in Lesotho has been instrumental in funding policy and legal interventions such as Legal Capacity White Paper, Gender and Development Policy and enactment of Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act (2006). On advocacy, it has supported the development of adolescent health policy, the gender policy implementation plan, and the development of a gender action plan as well as strengthening the capacity of district gender officers. Another milestone achieved by UNFPA has been the support of Lesotho Safe Motherhood Initiative in 1996. This was meant to enhance the quality of life especially for women and children through adoption of a combination of health and non-health strategies. In 1996, UNFPA funded a national debriefing meeting under the auspices of LCN; one of the resolutions from the meeting was to elect a national committee to evaluate and monitor progress on critical areas that included; poverty, women's rights, violence, economic advancement. (FIDA Newsletter, June 1996)

The above analysis highlights the extent to which multilateral development institutions have been used to implement some feminist issues; as corroborated by almost all gender activists and officers in the department of gender, UNFPA has been leading the process of pushing gender equality issues within the policy space. It can therefore be concluded that in this case UNPFA has managed to open a transnational space through which international commitments to women's advancement have been implemented as it created the space for women activists to take part in establishing a policy and legal framework through which gender equality can be pursued.



UNFPA has been very sensitive to review its impact in Lesotho. For instance, it embarked on an exercise to evaluate government's policy on women and the infrastructure for its implementation (Shoeshoe, 1996). From this evaluation, a number of recommendations which included the creation of a fully fledged ministry of youth and women's affairs were advanced. This unit would focus on policy formulation, planning, coordination, advocacy as well as collaboration among government ministries, NGOs and donors. It would evaluate all policies across ministries to determine their impacts on women, and also undertake research necessary for the advancement of women with a view of improving their legal status which was seen as the major obstacle to women's empowerment. It also recommended that the government must set a specialised commission to review existing laws affecting women and make recommendations for reform.

The government response to these has been selective. For example, the creation of the ministry has been characterised by unclear mandate of the unit<sup>218</sup>. It has been observed that the ministry is acting more as an advocacy unit than policy making machinery, and as one gender activist argued:

*the ministry is struggling to define its role, it cannot tell if it is a unit for coordination, implementation, policy making or advocacy.*<sup>219</sup>

Nonetheless the UNFPA has continued working closely with government and there have been issues that have received prominence such as review of laws while reproductive rights such as termination of pregnancy have been neglected within the rights discourse. This is so despite high rates of illegal abortions performed by both girls and married women. A number of women have been detained while some have died due to these risky practices. Of course issues of abortion have not received global feminist consensus so it is not surprising that in countries such as Lesotho this is one agenda that might take long to surface within the policy debates. While UNFPA has

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<sup>218</sup> A number of interviewees including officers in the ministry of gender have corroborated this view.

<sup>219</sup> Interview Kimane, July 2007.

recently proposed a programme that uses a ‘rights-based, gender-sensitive and culturally sensitive approach’<sup>220</sup>, the danger is that both Basotho men and women do not agree on what is culturally acceptable. It is likely that the traditional fundamentalists within the church and traditional institutions might use this as way of blocking social change and close the existing political opportunities through which feminist issues have been advanced.

In sum, while UNFPA’s interventions may be seen as interfering by some, it is clear that it has played a significant role in introducing shifting global frameworks on women within the Lesotho domestic policy space. It has used international instruments to the benefit of women who were unable to penetrate the patriarchal policy institutions. And as WLSA officers as well as the director of Gender pointed out, UNFPA has been able to bring government officers and civil society feminist groups to one table; as a result it has been easy to persuade government to honour these international norms. Nevertheless, it became obvious that the UNFPA has neglected representative politics as there has been no focus on women’s political empowerment, though the gender officer in the agency argued that they have encouraged women to take decisions in relation to their health, it became crystal clear that political equality has been a treaded area, yet women need to be in decision making positions in order to drive health rights issues.

### **The United States Agency for International Development/US Embassy**

The relationship between the Lesotho government and the Americans can be traced from the 1960s after independence. According to records, this relationship was mainly on provision of food aid. The food packages were used mainly in rural road and dam construction. The significance of this point in this analysis is the political implications of the donations. As earlier mentioned, the post-independence government of BNP was said to owe its allegiance to women who constituted the majority of voters as most males were away. Women also constitute the majority of rural labour force

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<sup>220</sup> Interview UNFPA gender officer, April 2007.

hence their dominance in these constructions. But more interestingly is the notion of ‘food’ in paying women that perpetuated the patriarchal ideology that confines women to the domestic realm. As mentioned, money was only introduced in the 1980s when males entered the labour intensive construction projects.

In the 1970s and 1980s, USAID support was more with organisations dealing with family planning information, education and communication programs.<sup>221</sup> As a response to the global concern on population explosion, the Americans also saw women as the channel through which population control could be attained. Just like the rest of all development agencies, the social and economic status of women was not factored in these intervention programs. The agency was also active in sponsoring area-based agricultural projects which unfortunately were gender-blind as they failed to consider marginalisation of women to access land.

Influenced by the global shift on the role of the state in the late 1980s, the agency introduced the Ambassador’s self-help grant that funded small income-generating activities by women groups that were meant to improve basic standard of living. The grants initially focused on what was commonly referred to as community development which included water, footbridges, clinics and day care centres, but it also accommodated micro business ventures by women groups, and the maximum amount of the grant is R50, 000.00. This grant is made available to women groups that are able to submit proposals that meet the requirements of the agency. One observation made during fieldwork is that in most cases, these groups do not possess necessary proposal writing skills and as such, the grant has not been extensively used. However, the Embassy has recently translated the proposal into Sesotho for ease of reading though some concepts are not necessarily easy to understand as they are technical.

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<sup>221</sup> UNFPA Programme Review and Strategy Development Report No.28 1993, New York.

The 1990s saw the global shift from small scale income generation to good governance as a strategy to attain sustainable development and democracy. Likewise, the USAID began funding programs on good governance as an aspect of democracy. Voter education was therefore given the highest priority. As Lesotho was preparing for national elections after a military rule, most agencies strengthened their support on encouraging people to vote. However, as indicated in chapter five these campaigns did not necessarily address women as a constituency and their political representation did not feature within the election agenda. According to the program officer at the embassy, the content of the voter education was determined by the civil society organisations working on democracy, of course there was admission that women's visibility in political leadership was a sensitive issue as Basotho society is 'highly patriarchal'<sup>222</sup>.

Though the office of the USAID closed its offices in Lesotho after 1994, the American embassy has continued to operate in Lesotho and is continuing to fund a number of programs on human rights and good governance. Influenced by the global human rights discourses the Embassy has worked with feminist NGOs involved in women's rights issues. These include the Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) and Maseru Women Senior citizens. FIDA has been able to translate a number of laws that address women's issues from English to Sesotho with funding from the USAID. These include laws on inheritance and maintenance<sup>223</sup>. In the same manner, a number of studies commissioned by the agency have been undertaken by FIDA and funds have been made available to produce booklets that are distributed to grassroots women's groups. According to the US embassy program officer<sup>224</sup>, the office also funds costs of workshops on women issues and their facilitation. One conditionality to access these funds is that these issues must be related to aspects of human rights and good governance. They have included women's legal status and empowerment, domestic violence and HIV and AIDS rights which have been promoted through theatre /drama messages. The plays have been meant to address mainly issues of

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<sup>222</sup> Interview program officer, May 2007

<sup>223</sup> Interview, FIDA officer (Lindiwe), May 2007

<sup>224</sup> Interview April (Mrs Lipholo) 2007

stigma. Since 2000, the HIV and AIDS intervention initiatives have dominated the policy debates and focus on political empowerment has again been marginalised. While it is a fact that women are at the highest risk of getting the virus, hence the need to put full support to HIV and AIDS mitigation; however, such efforts become useless if they are not accompanied by programs that give women political empowerment so that they lead these processes.

While political empowerment has not featured within the Embassy's priority areas it should be noted though that it has put in place a special program to empower girl children through the Ambassador's Girls Scholarship Programme that targets top examination scorers. After completing their secondary education, they get into a mentoring program offered by UNICEF with the help of focal teachers that are chosen to mentor these girls. The program affords these girls entry into best performing schools. While this is a commendable feminist intervention in that it looks at top scorers regardless of their family economic background; it can also be argued that educational performance in some cases may be linked to a family's economic and social status; hence the intervention may benefit girls who come from advantaged background leaving out those who come poor families. Needless to say the impact that this program has had on these girls has not received public attention, and as the program officer indicated, there is a problem of lack of data about the activities of the embassy and their impact. According to her, the main problem is that the data base is very thin and not many people including other donors, know what is done and by who. This was corroborated by other donor agencies' officers who complained about a lack of consolidation of efforts and the lack of government political will to drive its own processes of development. For instance, it was not clear whether there are follow-up strategies to determine the quality of the content of the education these girls receive; in particular, the extent to which it equips them with leadership skills so as to create a pool of young women political leaders who will later lead the political processes of their country.

Despite the issue of a lack of database, there is evidence that the Americans are relatively committed to women's human rights as an aspect of the global human rights

agenda. For example, according to the US Embassy Newsletter (2007), the key presidential initiatives in Lesotho have scaled up attempts to address the spread of HIV and AIDS through the 'Emergency Plan for Aids Relief'. This will go a long way to benefit women and girls who bear the greater burden of the scourge. Furthermore, the signing of the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) forced the Lesotho government to enact the long awaited bill on Equality of Married Persons; and according to FIDA officer interviewed for this study, the government is expected to implement most international instruments on gender equality before the Compact could be executed. Theoretically, this conditionality has positive implications for women's economic emancipation while practically; men and some institutions continue to demand men's consent when women apply for financial assistance. Even a number of women still do not understand or even appreciate the essence of this Act. However, the agency continues to prioritise women's rights, democracy and human rights. What remains though is the national response that is driven by women groups and the civil society and use the political opportunity created by this space.

### **The Irish Aid**

The Irish Aid has remained one of the biggest external financial sources for Lesotho even after the sudden departure of many donor agencies in Lesotho since the end of apartheid in South Africa. The agency has supported a wide spectrum of development initiatives. These include education, health (in particular HIV and AIDS), rural transport infrastructure including access roads and footbridges, water and sanitation, and good governance. It has also funded a number of advocacy works on gender equality working with women's organisations such as Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA-Lesotho Chapter), and government departments on the adoption of the Gender and Development Policy. Up to 2004, the Department of Gender was the agency's main partner but according to the acting gender officer at the Irish Aid, this relationship was ended due to lack of serious commitment from the side of government<sup>225</sup>. As a result, the agency has therefore shifted its focus and has partnered with women's organisations such as WLSA on women's legal status and

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<sup>225</sup> Interview with Irish Aid acting gender officer (Mrs Hanson) July 2007

Lesotho Population and Parenthood Association (LPPA) on sexual and reproductive health. According to the gender officer, the agency supports pro-poor policies and studies on demographic survey which directly address women's vulnerability. It identifies partners with comparative advantage and collaborates with them on issues that are of similar interest to the agency's development priorities.

From 1992, the agency has focused on rural access, through footbridges, and later rural access roads beginning in 1994. It was within this infrastructural initiative that the agency pushed the 30 per cent representation of women in road construction. According to studies undertaken to evaluate the agency's efforts in empowering women, all constructors who won construction tenders were expected to comply with this demand before they could be awarded funding (Sechaba Consultants Report 2000, Ntho and Tsikoane 2004). The agency was able to achieve this even though the government had not pushed this agenda on its policy front. The Department of Rural Roads (DRR) was however obliged to implement this as conditionality to access funds. Even after this success, the transport construction industry is still dominated by men who own a number of construction and transport companies. With the end of infrastructure support from the Irish, it will be interesting to find out if the ministry will continue with this principle of 30% quota. Still, it is important to note that there are no programs from government's side to encourage women to enter into this type of business.

Similar to other development agencies the Irish aid support has been influenced by emerging global development discourses. While the agency supports proposals on issues of priority made by the government, these must fit with Irish Aid's own priorities. For example, in 1997, Lesotho chose poverty alleviation as the theme for the Donor Conference which fitted well with Ireland's aid priorities (O'Donnell, 1997); this agenda emanated from the global human development strategy which views poverty as a violation of human dignity. The agency has therefore funded a number of programmes that are meant to address poverty through labour intensive projects. Ntho and Tsikoane (2003) noted that whilst Irish Aid did not hold itself to a specific gender policy, it however advanced specific poverty reduction strategies in

which gender issues were to be given priority. These were pursued within the sustainable development framework that recognised the central role that women play in development. According to the project documents the focus on gender equality seemed to have surfaced prominently after 1995 following the Beijing Platform for Action as well as from Ireland Aid's own poverty focus on vulnerable groups that include women. The agency's commitment to poverty reduction was eminent in supporting Lesotho's Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) that were part of the United Nations Millennium Goals; it is however important to note that the PRS is a bit casual on the relationship between gender relations and poverty.

On the political front, the Irish Aid agenda of good governance has been realised through the support of democratic institutions such as the Independent Electoral Commission's (IEC) efforts of institutionalising the Mixed Member Parliament (MMP) electoral model for the 2002 national elections as well as the establishment of the Office of the Ombudsman. Irish Aid was instrumental in ensuring that the 2002 party manifestos prioritised women's inclusion. As indicated in chapter three it funded all parties on condition that their manifestoes reflected commitment to address gender inequality. All parties responded by inserting sections or paragraphs on 'women' or 'gender' in order to access these funds. Regrettably none of the manifestos proposed specific programs to address women's issue while there was also no mention of commitment to political representation at party leadership levels. On the other hand, when they submitted their party lists to the IEC, they ignored the women's representation<sup>226</sup>, yet, both the IEC and the Irish Aid failed to hold parties accountable for the gender disparities reflected in their lists. A lack of political will from political parties reflected in the representation lists indicates the absence of corresponding national political opportunities regarding the visibility of women within the political leadership<sup>227</sup> despite the creation of that space by the transnational arena.

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<sup>226</sup> Interviews with IEC communication officer and Commissioner as well as gender officer at the Irish Aid

<sup>227</sup> Interview with Makatjane May 2007



Finally, while the Irish Aid has shifted its focus and emphasises strengthening civil society as the means to achieve good governance, it is important to underscore the danger of excluding political institutions in the process of consolidating democracy, which seems to be the current dominating agenda. Women within and outside these institutions need support to make use of the political opportunity structures created by the transnational agenda of good governance which call for equal political representation. What seems to be also missing from this new focus is that the NGOs within the civil society are dominated by mixed-sex organisations whose agenda does not necessarily prioritise women's visibility within mainstream policy debates.

### **Conclusions**

Multilateral and bilateral agencies working in Lesotho have relied on feminist norms that emanated from U.N. conferences on women to institute mechanisms through which they collaborated with local feminists within and outside state bureaucracy to influence the domestication of the transnational feminist agenda. As Baden and Goetz (1998, 45) have argued, the gender equality agenda suffers insufficient domestic support from national governments and even among women, but the transnational space has enabled these feminist advocates to “‘leap frog’ past the boundaries of state sovereignty to propose visions of women's liberation”. Because international norms are binding to governments, Lesotho regimes have found themselves putting in place feminist interventions that they may not have understood or even appreciate, while on the other hand the donor community as well supported these interventions without necessarily understanding domestic patriarchal politics. Furthermore feminist NGOs that have benefitted from donor assistance to drive the feminist agenda have been unable to promote feminist consciousness with local women outside the formal women's movement as well as with women politicians. The fragmented women's voice has failed to benefit from high aid flows available during the apartheid era in RSA. On the other hand we underscored the fact that donor agencies limited their impact by ignoring local political dynamics and imbedded patriarchal ideologies within political institutions. Yet it is important to emphasise that the workings of the donor community in this landlocked state owed much of their origin to their interests

into what was taking place in South Africa; if women's issues were to offer opportunities for these agencies to monitor SA politics, they would have addressed them differently.

While issues on motherhood and reproductive roles of women were pushed by donors without locating them within the rights framework, there is clear evidence that Basotho women within feminist groups benefitted from donors' support as they were able to attend world conferences and undertook research and advocacy on women's lived experiences. Of course Wilkens *et al* (1988) argue that for long time equality as a right in itself was seldom pursued by both state actors and non-state actors including donors and women's associations in Lesotho. Despite Lesotho's overdependence on foreign aid coupled with the limited feminist consciousness, the donor community failed to use their financial comparative advantage to push global feminist issues such as political representation which would see more women influencing policy debates affecting women directly. Their support has been selective and has failed to penetrate the political and policy space that has remained male-dominated. This ambivalence on the side of donors has been reflected in continued funding of misguided initiatives by governments that have failed to domesticate international instruments on women's issues, CEDAW is the case in point.

In addition to the dominance of donor agencies in funding major development initiatives, one of the most telling aspects of the aid industry in Lesotho is the predominance of consultancy work on women's issues undertaken by foreign 'experts'. As White (1992) reported for the Bangladesh case, almost all 'texts' on aid and women has been funded by donors; in Lesotho, these include, Gill (1992) funded by USAID, Gay (1991), Yates (1978) funded by US Peace Corps, Van Dunsen (1985) funded by ILO, Wilkens *et al* (1988) funded by Swedish Aid and a number of others. The common theme across these studies has been the 'role and/or integration' of women in development and the similarly popular 'the situation of women and children'. Few Basotho scholars who have featured in internationally sponsored studies have been predominantly men, for example, Mhlanga, Matlosa, Sello and the male-dominated local firm Sechaba Consulting. This dominance has some

implications in understanding the role of the donor community in determining the content and shape of the gender discourse. Professional women gender analysts have focused on scholarly reviews of issues around marriage, legal minority status of women, women and employment, and women and the land policy. Women's political agenda surfaced in the 1990s, and similarly, male scholars have also dominated the debates.

The fact that development assistance is normally signed by governments and donor agencies suggests that these agencies may find it difficult to bypass government and work independently with interest groups such as women's groups on issues that are of little interests to government. However, in a country so vulnerable and dependent on aid, it is highly likely that it would be easy to drive the women's agenda if that was in the interest of the donor community as well. Needless to say, the situation is more complicated than it may be seen. For instance, the absence of a vibrant women's movement to partner with the donor community makes it difficult for the latter to really implement some interventions as there is no corresponding national commitment among the targeted groups themselves. Furthermore, there seems to be a consistent omission of engaging political parties in matters of political equality. Even with shifts in electoral models, the donor community went as far as funding these changes without pushing women's visibility within the political space. It is true though that some agencies tried to push political parties to indicate their commitment to women's representation (Irish Aid), but they didn't push hard enough, or we may argue that they needed women's support to hold political parties accountable.

In sum, donor agencies have been the channel through which international financial assistance has been distributed for the institutionalization of the transnational feminist agenda; they have provided both financial resources and technical expertise on mainstreaming gender as well as in the formulation of gender policies. While gender equality features prominently in their project and program documents their influence on Lesotho regimes to account for the commitments made on transnational feminist norms has been dictated by both their own interests that influenced their approaches as well as the domestic political context dominated by patriarchal institutions. These

agencies have supported gender equality initiatives that have failed to open the political space for women to occupy their rightful place in decision making.

The major feminist puzzle within this analysis, which has been common with other development actors, is that gender equality has been an alibi for donors as well; while using gender equality as a technical instrument and conditionality, the agenda has also been used by these agencies to legitimise their existence in Lesotho. The manner in which they picked up women's issues had therefore to comply with global women's issues but most importantly with the way their sponsors define Basotho women's concerns. On the other hand Lesotho's vicious indebtedness has affected the way women's issues have been addressed as local actors have been more interested in what donors approved. Yet it is no gainsaying to highlight that it is also challenging to institute liberal feminist ideas within undemocratic weak state especially when the women's movement is fragmented.

This chapter traced the articulation of the transnational feminist agenda within the context of the aid politics in Lesotho coupled with socio-economic dependence on SA and the type of debates emanating from such a context. It has highlighted the complexity of dynamics that work against the effective implementation of a global feminist agenda especially by external development actors. The analysis has highlighted that even though the gender equality agenda entered the mainstream development debate as a result of international pressure from transnational women's movements from the mid-1970s; the donor community only prioritized and institutionalized this agenda from the mid-1990s. This shift has been attributed to both international and regional political events; namely the 1994 democratic dispensation in RSA, the 1995 World Women's Conference in Beijing and the subsequent SADC Declaration on Gender and Development. The chapter has highlighted that before 1994 the donors' commitment to Lesotho's development issues was largely peripheral as their political motive was indeed to use the country as the gateway to be closer to RSA, this is evidenced by the fact that the end of apartheid has brought a new look at the country's development issues; while the presence of donors was supposed to end the country's dependence on its neighbor the current focus is actually promoting such

dependence as the new era has shifted the sympathy away from this landlocked poor dependent state while the new faces in the new aid architecture are grappling with new issues such as HIV/Aids as well as climate change.

Having unpacked the workings of different development actors in shaping the nature and place of transnational feminist issues within the political context of Lesotho, the next chapter draws the conclusions on the debates emanating from the feminist conundrum characterizing gender equality politics in Lesotho and proposes areas for further research.

## *Chapter Seven: The conclusion*

### *Sheer Necessity? Paradoxes of institutionalising transnational feminist agendas*

When I first embarked on writing this thesis, I had a problem of explaining why some gender equality issues were being successfully implemented in Lesotho by both democratic and undemocratic regimes while some never appeared on the national policy agenda while some received enormous negativity even from women. Having been teaching gender and development courses at university, I was aware that Lesotho regimes were signatory to all international instruments on women yet there was a gap between these policy rhetoric and practice. It occurred to me that in most cases these feminist interventions (being policy statements or legal reforms) were labelled 'foreign' yet state and non-state actors continued implementing them and some feminist concepts were gradually becoming part of the development discourse. What was more puzzling for me was the fact that there was this 'deafening' silence from women about existing gender inequalities especially within the political leadership, as well as failure of government to honour international standards to address these inequalities; I wondered if Basotho women were necessarily not interested in being liberated. The feminist agenda could be easily attributed to certain few women within the NGO community, yet on the other hand successful implementation of some liberal feminist reforms was not necessarily resisted. Having been active in one of these feminist organisations as an associate researcher I used to observe how these activists were at times frustrated by the way they had to stretch their resources to accommodate even agendas that were not part of their legal capacity mandate. But of more interest to me was their cautious approach to choice of issues which they believed would raise significant resistance and as such managed to garner support from some liberated men, especially those within the legal fraternity and government. On another level I realized that there were many actors involved within the gender politics space and wondered if the feminist agenda was treated so marginally because of this web of players who claimed their place in fighting discrimination; I wondered if there was one particular actor responsible to drive the agenda and came to the conclusion that all these actors are in fact rightly positioned to drive the agenda. The main question that kept on bothering me was the simultaneous popularity and unpopularity of the gender equality agenda and wondered how both the domestic and international factors contribute to this feminist conundrum within the gender equality politics in Lesotho,

hence I asked; what are the forces within the domestic and international spaces that push for the implementation of feminist agendas despite obvious resistance? The fact that the gender equality agenda is at times labelled as foreign yet both feminist and antifeminist actors within the domestic space interact to institutionalise the agenda pushed me to investigate how the intersection between the domestic space and the international global agenda to address women's issues impacts on the way women's issues are conceptualised and addressed.

This thesis attempted to examine how the interface between the domestic political context and the articulation of the transnational feminist agenda function to define and shape the place of gender equality issues within mainstream national policy debates and processes in Lesotho. The study identified a number of development actors interacting within this transnational space to claim their place in fighting gender inequalities, and explored how these development actors' efforts in their conceptualisation, articulation and prioritisation of the global gender equality agenda have contributed to the marginalisation of women's political advancement. These actors are; the state, political parties, women feminist organisations, mainstream mixed-sex NGOs, and international development agencies. While political parties may not be visible within most international space ruling parties play an important role especially as their manifestos influence government's policy, hence they have been included for analysis in this study. While this study is not a historical analysis an attempt has been made to periodize the gender equality trajectory so as to understand how the agenda entered the mainstream development debates as well as how different historical moments functioned to shape the institutionalisation of transnational gender equality discourses.

This study has highlighted a number of factors within the domestic context that have interacted with the global feminist agenda to restructure gender equality politics in Lesotho and have produced various puzzles. One of the major findings of the study is that the institutionalisation of liberal feminist issues in this small land-locked country has not been influenced by any significant pressure from either local women's movement or NGOs working on democracy, neither have the issues been necessarily

pursued due to political will from government nor political parties. Nonetheless, the study also argues that the internationalisation of feminist issues has not been imposed on Lesotho; this is so because local gender activists within and outside the state have participated in major international and regional forums where global feminist norms and standards are set, in the same manner Lesotho government has acceded to almost all international and regional instruments meant to address gender inequalities. While processes of globalisation have enhanced the spread of these feminist ideas their implementation has also been influentially determined by domestic socio-economic and political dynamics that have produced contradictions and paradoxes that currently characterise the Lesotho gender landscape.

Some of these factors emanate from formal institutions trusted to effect social change while some are embedded within patriarchal sites that have not been exposed to feminist scrutiny. For example the role of religious and traditional institutions in influencing ideologies and attitudes about women's leadership within the public space has escaped academic and feminist debates, yet in a country where more than 90 per cent of the population is Christian, and more than 50 per cent of that is catholic there is bound to be huge influence on the way power relations are structured. In the same manner the context is also complicated by the degree to which Basotho are attached to their cultural institutions and practices; their adherence to maintain some principles of core sites of patriarchy such as chieftainship that is based on male succession (as mentioned in chapter two this is enshrined in the constitution and some laws) suggests the critical dominance of patriarchal ideologies that permeate institutional arrangements and development practices meant to bring social change and in particular those that challenge power relations between men and women. One key aspect relevant for this study about these institutions is that they do not participate at the transnational arena and as such they are not bound by international feminist norms and cannot be held accountable yet at the domestic level they wield enormous power as almost all actors within and outside the state are governed by ideological norms set within these institutions. These institutions emerge as key forces if even they are not included as key actors, but their ideologies have influenced actions of activists within and outside the state as they wage silent resistance to transformation of gender relations.



Whereas the articulation of transnational feminist norms is inherently swathed in western hegemonic language, the domestic political arena on the other hand plays a significant role in drawing boundaries of gender discourse engagement; in addition to cultural and traditional tendencies within traditional institutions these norms suffer structural and policy challenges that include patriarchal attitudes within bureaucratic institutions outside and within the state, a lack of a common policy vision, paternalistic and patrimonial political relations, donor dependency, and most perturbing is a lack of a feminist political culture within the broader civil society organisations including women's groups. All these have reproduced feminist paradoxes and conundrums that characterise Lesotho gender politics today.

One of the contradictions within gender equality politics in Lesotho is that feminist interventions cannot be necessarily attributed to democratic levels; for instance, liberal feminist interventions of the post-independence era such as enfranchisement, creation of policy units for women's issues within ministries as well as reproductive health policies and facilities were instituted by very undemocratic regimes; moreover all regimes prioritised access to education and female literacy has been very high. Paradoxically, the democratisation period of post- 1993 has not been significantly different as the period has been characterised by manipulative and selective prioritisation of feminist issues. In this manner there has been no direct link between democracy and gender equality struggles, hence we cannot necessarily ascribe the slow and contradictory progress in addressing gender inequalities to democratic levels as progress has relatively been similar. In fact the democratic era has tended to reproduce some puzzling tendencies as illustrated by the court case against government on the use of quotas (chapter 2). Whereas the nascent democratic period has been marked by a number of liberal reforms and creation of relevant democratic institutions; for instance, the existence of civil society organisations working on democracy and good governance, feminist NGOs focusing on feminist legal reforms, as well as availability of technical support and financial assistance (though declining in quantity) from international development institutions, there seems to be a very sluggish process to vigorously break patriarchal barriers to women's political

advancement which is so core to democratic principles. Feminist interventions instituted within this era can therefore be attributed largely to factors within the transnational and regional space and less to the domestic national policy prioritisation.

Following the global and regional feminist discourse shifts the post-1990 period has been characterised by some radical feminist reforms instituted by government addressing inequalities within both the private and public space. For example, despite significant resistance to passage of sexual offences act in parliament in 2003 government went ahead to enact this law, this was the case also with the reform of the law to increase women's representation at local government authority structures. All these emanated from the transnational and regional advocacy pressure as articulated within policy statements. The contradictory implementation of these interventions poses a challenge for their sustenance. For instance the institutionalisation of gender quotas at local government while the same is not the case at national level suggests lack of serious commitment from government and in fact there is a high possibility of losing this gain as there is growing resistance to continuing use of these measures. As the study has shown the introduction of quotas entered the political debates as part of the feminist language emanating from representative democracy discourses. In order to show compliance to these regional feminist norms the state was forced to initiate this change yet it seems there was no genuine political will. Of course this intervention has restructured gender politics as more women are visible within the political space as community councillors, but what is also obvious is that central government is still in control of power and these women councillors are not gaining any leadership skills.

In addition to pressure from regional and international advocacy on women's advancement Lesotho government has been more responsive to external pressure that has been mediated through development agencies. Despite having signed many international and regional instruments on gender equality there are a few that have been ratified and domesticated, yet the regimes continued to receive financial assistance. Formulation of departments within ministries, gender focal points, ministries of women and gender affairs and selective legal reforms have been used to

convince donors that government is committed to eliminating inequalities. In addition, articulation of gender equality language within development plans; policy statements and legal reforms have been suggested as an indication for commitment while in practice there has been no serious engagement especially to increase women's presence in the policy space. The way each of the post-independent regimes addressed gender inequalities have always been influenced by this opportunistic approach. This has also been enabled by absence of a strong feminist consciousness among women within the civil society community as well as patriarchal tendencies within the political system.

The study has illustrated that state's usurpation of the feminist agenda has been based on contradictory purposes; while at one level the state wanted to control women's lives through welfare approaches such as family planning initiatives, it also found it necessary to liberate them so that they can be used to achieve other development goals. The prioritisation of female education despite the failure of that education to open leadership space for women to drive the development process is a clear telling story. Of course the study has shown that the high female literacy can also be attributed to factors beyond state's institutions such as the male migration to RSA and the resulting high female population available for Christian conversion. And to add to the conundrum the church and the state have strangely shared the paternalist vision over women as they have ganged to narrow the political space for women's advancement.

The study has established that since 1970 the state in Lesotho has been in the forefront in claiming leading role in the struggles for gender equalities. These articulations are seen in major policy documents such as national development plans and sector specific public statements, yet the focus has always been on issues that do not address women's presence in decision making. These policy claims have faithfully followed the international trend where women's issues have been around how women function in private space. Unfortunately, the shift to legal capacity and human rights discourses which emerged in the early 1990s has over-shadowed the need to go beyond equality before the law. This approach has taken precedence over

political representation and women's legal minority status has been defined in isolation of its implication on political empowerment. Instead of treating this status as a symptom of patriarchal ideologies imbedded in political institutions and practices, it has been viewed more as the cause for all problems that women face. As a result more resources have been directed to the revision of discriminatory laws, yet women have not improved their status as regards political leadership.

The role of the state in mediating gender issues have emanated from two major factors, namely, the state as a major determinant of policy issues and control of donor funding which is channelled through government departments. Using its ubiquitous power, government has therefore dictated the prioritisation of gender equality issues, using statements that are based on its own definition of women's rights and interests. This has occurred without accountability and compliance to international and regional commitments that the country has been a signatory to, to address gender inequalities. Failure to take practical measures to advance women's political presence espoused in a number of international instruments and conventions has not been challenged even by women's organisation as well as the larger civil society community.

The study has corroborated some feminist thesis on state's role that (for example, Goetz 1996) acknowledges the key position of the state for pursuing the gender equality agenda as it remains the only institution which is supposed to be accountable to the society. However the state in Lesotho has not necessarily been a neutral site for pursuing the feminist agenda. Instead, the state has manipulated the agenda and has directed the gender equality debates in ways that do not challenge power distribution within the policy space. The choice of issues that the state has picked up over time has overshadowed politics of representation while on the other hand the nomination of few women into critical positions of power (such as Speaker of the National Assembly and cabinet ministers) has not been done as a recognition of how they would contribute in the development of a feminist culture and advance women's rights within these institutions. Few women who have entered the leadership space have not done so as a consequence of belonging to a women's movement but have entered the legislature through the political party ticket. Instead of opening the space

for more women, this nomination has in actual fact masked political inequalities and has pushed away the debate on special measures such as quotas, and consequently these measures have been highly politicised and have even divided the voice of women. The presence of these women in senior public office has not been accompanied by discourses which are about the emancipation of women to any high degree in the nation. Needless to say the government's approaches to feminist issues need to be broadly understood within the political system within which they operate and the political culture from which they originate.

One fact about political parties is that they do not participate at international forums yet policies of the ruling party emanate from the party's manifesto, this suggests that they cannot be held accountable for commitments they have not acceded to. However, through regional activism there have been attempts to bring political leadership into development dialogue (for example SADC Parliamentary Forum), this however has been more on parliament's role of oversight while gender issues are still marginalised by patriarchal attitudes of male dominated legislatures. Nonetheless, through pressure from regional feminist advocacy parliament has instituted a women's caucus meant to bring women MPs together to address women's concerns by influencing laws and policies. Unfortunately, as this study has shown this unit has not been visibly active to push a feminist agenda. The divisive and patronising nature of the political system from which these women operate discourage them from working as a constituency as they are expected to operate within the discourse parameters drawn by the male dominated executive committees of their parties. The depressing aspect in Lesotho's case even though it has 'officially launched' the caucus is that the caucus is deeply divided along party affiliations and this has paralysed it. Furthermore these women MPs are not affiliated to any women's organisations hence their loyalty lies more with political parties that have put them into parliament. This situation is indicative of the power of domestic politics in restructuring terms of engagement and corroborates feminist thesis that political parties are the 'most substantial vehicles for advancing group claims to representation' (Hassim 2009, 176 citing Phillips); hence ignoring them amounts to a feminist political blunder.

The study has highlighted patrimonial relations characterising the political system in Lesotho which do not only limit expansion of the democratic mandate but also affect policy choices. The political leadership terrain has therefore been hostile and closed to accommodate debates on the distribution of political power. However pressure on governments from the transnational and regional feminist advocacy to commit themselves to international standards has permeated these domestic barriers as ruling parties have to be seen as progressive and therefore win women's support. This tendency has been illustrated by the fact that it is only the ruling LCD that has instituted gender quotas at party level to increase women's representation within the leadership of the party, while all opposition parties have ignored the call for increased women's representation. Nonetheless even with the LCD these quotas have not been extended to candidature for national elections.

While political parties have demanded electoral reforms in order to increase political representation within the multiparty politics, this has not been expanded to the women's constituency. The shift from FPTP model to the mixed electoral system has not benefitted feminist calls for increased women's representation and has posed a feminist paradox as women remain underrepresented. The small increase in numbers of women MPs that has been noted recently has actually come from the constituency ballot instead of the PR contradictory to what has been normally the case in other contexts. The interesting aspect in this analysis is that the pressure for the electoral shift did not originate from the international or regional arena, but it was purely driven by domestic discontent with election results, and the fact that this failed to include women's political concerns suggests that the domestic political space is still very closed for expansion of women's political rights and has therefore tended to restructure the nature of the institutionalisation of the feminist transnational agenda within representative politics. On the basis of this conundrum the study has concluded and corroborated feminist thesis that argue for a political will to complement political interventions, and in particular electoral reforms if women are to take part in shaping policy priorities of their country. While the political impact of the few women in political positions has not yet been analysed we cannot blame them for existing gender disparities until a critical mass is achieved.

Just as is the case with political parties in the third world women's gendered roles of motherhood have been extended to political leadership space through the creation of the women's league within the leadership structures. However since the women's league is represented on the executive of the party; especially of the ruling party, it can be argued that it has an opportunity of participating in policy debates and hence insert feminist issues within this space. Most women who are in the leadership of this space are normally elected or appointed to parliament, and the nature of their work allows them to engage with transnational and regional feminist issues. However because of the paternalistic politics and attitudes of the leadership of political parties the role of the league has been structured to promote motherhood and welfarist discourses that discourage women to challenge patriarchal barriers to their political agency.

A lack of networking between women in political parties and outside has been one major flaw for the institutionalisation of the feminist agenda; as argued in chapter four, due to various reasons the women's organisations have been operating at the margins of formal politics and as a result there is no common agenda between women politicians and feminist activists. The failure of gender activists to lobby women politicians to extend women's political rights beyond voting, but to participate at the highest levels of decision-making, as well as the failure of these women politicians to make use of knowledge generated by these activists to inform their political interventions have produced a feminist paradox . This has generated a feminist discourse lacuna in which women's political agency and representation have remained a challenge that feminist advocates have to overcome. The isolation of women politicians by gender activists and the political parties' hostility towards feminist groups within the NGOs' community impacts negatively on efforts meant to address women's political rights. There is therefore a need for strong political networks that can collaboratively drive the political gender equality agenda forward in order to enable women to take their rightful place within the national policy space.

This study concludes that political parties are very central to both democracy and feminist agendas as they influentially determine boundaries of political discourses. They are strategically positioned to articulate feminist consciousness within political discourses, ideologies, structures, activities and programmes. The fact that they are not exposed to transnational feminist influence suggests that they can frustrate feminist advocacy interventions if not strategically engaged. While autonomy is maintained by non-state actors it is imperative not to alienate these institutions from advancing women's issues. Politicians need to be encouraged to make use of the emerging democratic discourses to push for true inclusive politics; correct conceptualisation of gender equality within political discourses need to be strengthened through identification of appropriate narratives and approaches that can be employed in order to influence politicians and the electorate to appreciate the centrality of gender equality in the consolidation and deepening of democracy.

While the domestic political space may have restricted feminist consciousness for the women's movement for example, participation in international and regional forums on women and the signing of transnational feminist norms provided an opening of a political opportunity to expand women's claims. Nevertheless, the extent to which local gender activists used this opportunity to demand legitimisation of gender equality struggles has been structured by a web of dynamics within domestic politics. For instance, the study has highlighted a lack of a united women's voice within and outside state to hold governments accountable to women's concerns, and this has created a situation where political leaders opportunistically pick and choose feminist policy issues while on the other hand they manipulate the agenda for financial and political gains. Further women activists are moved out of the movement to occupy new positions in government where their contribution to feminist activism declines.

The study has clearly shown that the women's movement is small in size and also fragmented. One major contributing factor to this fragmentation is the inherent dependency of women's organisations on foreign aid. They have found themselves reacting mostly to external pressure which in turn discourages them from addressing feminist issues that are not supported by donors and unfortunately women's political



rights is one such an issue. While these groups are part of regional feminist advocacy, they rely heavily on international donor funding and this has not only affected engagement with patriarchal challenges but their autonomy has well been limited within a narrowing political space.

At another level the fragmentation is noted between women in progressive groups and those in political parties. Women politicians seem not to see their role within the feminist struggles while on the other hand gender activists choose not to engage these women for a number of reasons, for instance, because of the nature of the political culture there is mistrust between these groups and in order to maintain their autonomy feminist groups have tended to isolate women politicians. While this strategy might have worked it is obvious that it has fragmented the women's voice and in process it has frustrated a lot of feminist initiatives as women politicians fail to support them within political institutions. The available space created by the regional networks through the women's caucus has not been effectively used to penetrate the political space within which critical decisions are made. This situation has produced a conundrum in which feminist issues seem to be an agenda of women outside the state while on the other hand male-dominated government is seen to be implementing international feminist norms without pressure from women in state institutions; this has apparently made it difficult to locate feminist interventions by government within the framework of state feminism.

Another contradiction the study has also highlighted about gender politics within the fragmented women's voice in Lesotho is that at one level the high female literacy has failed to open the political space for women to push feminist issues on the policy agenda. At another level few educated women participate in political processes while those appointed to leadership positions do not represent any women's constituency. The high number of uneducated women who participate in political campaigns has failed to challenge the political terrain as these women lack needed skills to break the patriarchal tendencies within these institutions. Ironically, the high number of educated women and occupation of high office by some has been used against feminist calls for representative measures such as quotas. On the other hand the

creation of feminist policy units such as ministries for women has as well limited feminist activism as these are cited by antifeminists as an indication of women's liberation and hence they question calls for feminist affirmative action interventions.

Further, women's organisations studied here have suffered a narrow defined common feminist purpose which has affected engagement of core sites of patriarchal power. Whereas in some countries women's activism has been frustrated by racial and class tensions, feminist activism in Lesotho does not have to deal with these issues as the country is not divided along racial lines and female literacy rates are relatively high. Needless to say a lack of feminist consciousness emanating from domestic political culture characterised by patrimonial and patriarchal relations continue to restructure gender equality politics amidst transnational feminist opportunities. These organisations have had comparative advantage over grassroots groups as they participate at international and regional feminist forums as well as at the national policy space; taking advantage of the dominant global rights discourse they exclusively focused on women's legal status which had emerged from different studies as the main problem facing women in Lesotho. Among these legal issues violence against women and their minority marital power have been given prominence while access to land, economic resources and political rights remained peripheral. On the other hand issues of unpaid labour have not featured at all, and these for me are issues central to rural women in particular whose livelihoods revolve around unpaid work. Moreover, these organisations have failed to address rural women's basic land rights not addressed by the 1979 Act; of course rural women grassroots groups have not been part of this study and it would be interesting to explore their political concerns and the extent to which they have benefitted from existing feminist reforms, such a study needs to be undertaken so as to inform feminist interventions that would benefit all Basotho women. Nevertheless the argument here is that focus on legal equality, though feminist in nature, has been limited as it has been narrowly conceptualised.

As the study has shown feminist activism has been shaped by both internal policy priorities and external pressures. On the one hand the external pressure has helped

these groups to be exposed to international issues while on the other hand the domestic space has narrowed the political space. The intersection of these two sites has therefore reproduced contradictory tendencies. Needless to highlight that gender equality activism is sometimes influenced by being realistic; that is, there are some issues that cannot be pushed because of the negativity they can attract; hence it is critical to assess what is achievable at particular historical moments as well as taking cognisance of the prevailing dominant discourses. Progressive women's groups have been able to do this effectively and as such they have been able to win allies within and outside state, for example one notable strategy employed by these groups has been to avoid public feminist identity and concepts, this in turn has enabled the institutionalisation of some very liberal legal reforms changed women's minority legal status.

While women's groups analysed for this study are part of the broad civil society community in Lesotho it is important to understand the influential role played by mixed-sex NGOs in shaping the place of the transnational feminist agenda within the domestic policy space. Their relative autonomy positions them strategically to represent the voice of the marginalised groups. In the case of Lesotho a number of factors that distinguish them from other organisations within the society include their dominance over a number of development issues, in particular the democracy and good governance project. Further, as shown in chapter five they have been able to attract significant financial support from donor agencies, while unlike women's organisations their relationship with government has been described as oppositional. These organisations also have the advantage of interacting at both the regional and transnational arena and as such have access to emerging global priorities. The global shift away from the dominance of the state has pushed these actors to the front of the development terrain, and as such they occupy a strategic position to drive a transnational agenda.

Nonetheless, analogous with workings of other local actors these NGOs' engagement with the global gender equality agenda has been characterised by intermittent tendencies and patriarchal contradictions. Furthermore, while the gender equality

agenda appears within the democracy programs it has been pursued primarily as a response to transnational feminist advocacy at one level while at another level it has been used as an alibi to access donor funding. This is evidenced by continued failure to hold government accountable to the international feminist commitments within policy prioritisation. But most importantly their usurpation of some feminist issues has been influenced by the incentives imbedded within the position of such issues within emerging development agendas. It can be argued further that while women's groups within the civil society have concentrated on legal capacity it would have made sense for these groups to insert women's political rights on the legal policy agenda as part of the human rights agenda, but because these rights have not been popular within the aid industry these organisations have ignored to prioritise them.

The relationship between these organisations and women's groups has not been necessarily complementary but the former have dominated democracy discourses which have been narrowly defined. Due to competition over foreign assistance and a lack of a common vision there have been noted incidences of unnecessary duplication of feminist interventions which resulted in further fragmentation of the civil society's mandate. This financial dependence has also framed borders of engagement with women's concerns as these NGOs have been unable to initiate feminist debates that are not within the priorities of funding organizations, and this has resulted in a stifled gender equality agenda within the developmental dialogue.

The study has shown that the studied NGOs were created at different historical moments but that they both showed significant appearance on the policy space during the global democratisation wave of the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, their main ideological flaw has been their narrow definition of democracy that has been confined to equal political representation for political parties within the legislature while ignoring women's political visibility within that space. On the basis of this I would argue that prioritisation of women's issues has been largely influenced by discourses of a narrow definition of both inclusive democracy and procedural election politics. The involvement of these NGOs in democracy and civic education has tended to omit women from the mainstream democratisation discourses as the content

of their voter education has ignored women's political invisibility within the leadership arena. Despite women's dominance of political parties' membership, their absence from leadership positions has not been addressed through voting campaigns as focus has been purely on electoral procedures. These campaigns have ignored even women who have braved the patriarchal barriers by standing for elections; there have been no special programs to support them either in their campaigns or after being elected. At both ideological and practical levels this has significantly impacted on the way democracy has been conceived and gender inequalities addressed. This approach has excluded women from democratisation processes and the good governance agenda has remained rhetoric as the political debates have not been informed by women's political concerns.

While the role of civil society organisations includes demanding government responsiveness and accountability to international standards, the Lesotho mainstream NGOs have not only failed to push the agenda of women's political rights on the policy agenda, but they have also failed to engage the state to honour its international commitments on gender equality. Over a period of time these organisations have failed to force government to domesticate international instruments such as the CEDAW. Rather than making use of the space created by the international democratic agenda as well as the emerging democracy within the domestic space, these NGOs have relied more on responding to external pressure amidst shifting discourse focus and with no serious commitment. This dependency has increasingly distorted and fragmented their democracy and good governance mandate.

Through their comparative advantage within development policy engagements these NGOs have not only dominated development policy debates but they have also strategically co-opted existing progressive women's organisations whose mandates have the potential to open the space for women's political advancement. This cooptation has significantly influenced the content of the gender equality discourses as well as their place within policy debates. Rather than mobilizing women's constituencies for the advancement of women's negotiation and contestation of the

political space, these mainstream NGOs have in fact constrained women's political agency.

One way that the political space has been narrowed has been the manner in which political parties have been engaged by civil society organisations in general. There has been a clear animosity between NGOs and ruling parties; issues that have been driven by NGOs have been suspect to political leaders and NGOs on the other hand have criticised almost any government effort, and in turn the feminist political agenda has suffered marginalisation within this tug-of-war. Yet on the other hand the common thing they have shared has been the marginalisation of women's political advancement. A clear case has been the attitudes of the LCN on quotas instituted by the ruling LCD, while the political parties on the other hand conveniently failed to publicly pledge its support for this intervention. In addition, even the few programs on women that have been implemented by these organisations have maintained a non feminist consciousness and have been largely restructured by terrains of control and manipulation.

At the institutional level employees within these organizations are not necessarily activists but these are used as avenues for lucrative employment opportunities. In the same manner their leadership reflects an elitist and chauvinistic dominance as women within these groups are few in number. Consequently both the research capacity and political activism required for feminist consciousness have been seriously compromised. The role of women within these organisations did not form the brief of this study, but it can be argued that the few women occupying leadership positions within these male-dominated NGOs is unlikely to open a political space for dialogue that addresses gender inequalities within decision making processes. This observation opens an area for future research that looks at the positions of women in mainstream mixed-sex NGOs and the extent to which they identify themselves with the gender equality struggles. Further, the continued patriarchal dominance by particular group of men of a similar political affiliation influences policy prioritisation based on the background of their own feminist political definition. And as Goetz in her introduction to *Making Institutions Right for Women* ((1997, 9) has argued, these

organisations 'can be as deeply structured by male privilege and preference as other organizations in the public sector'. The study has argued that this is the case with NGOs in Lesotho as they have ignored the transformation of political institutions that reproduce gender inequalities, while on the other hand they have not themselves transformed to embrace a feminist consciousness perspective. While they may have embraced the democratic principles of freedom and equality, as individuals they are still members of patriarchal institutions such as the church and other traditional entities that continue to influence their attitudes towards women. This ideological impasse has structured the terms of engagement with the state and other political actors and has determined the content of policy debates as regards the place of women's political concerns within such debates.

Of course these organisations operate within specific political moments and contexts that have been characterised not only by undemocratic tendencies but also by patriarchal political ideologies that have influentially determined the content of national policy choices. The fact that historically political institutions have persistently marginalised women's political rights; it has been a challenge to other development actors to push a political feminist agenda within such barriers. While NGOs are to play a watchdog role by monitoring ruling parties and hold them accountable to commitments made by their governments the political complexities within political parties' structures are out of reach of these organisations, yet this is where critical decisions emanate. The privileging of some feminist issues above inclusive politics can therefore be understood within the broader domestic political culture. The absence of women at the highest decision making positions cannot be addressed without challenging their absence from the political leadership structures and this, the NGOs cannot achieve without a serious political engagement and a clearly defined feminist agenda. As has been argued a lack of a clear commitment to gender equality within the civil society, especially within the mainstream NGOs has reproduced gender inequalities and their efforts have fallen into what Mayoux (1998) terms a 'black hole' of competing agendas.

While the study has highlighted that the domestic space has narrowed for women's political freedom, the international development agencies have provided a channel through which transnational feminist issues have been spread. At one level they have promoted these issues as part of their democracy mandate while at another level the agenda was pushed as an instrument to achieve other development goals. Through their financial muscles and ideological dominance they have provided women the political opportunity to legitimise their struggle against patriarchal tendencies. Development agencies have been instrumental in pushing some feminist issues on the domestic policy space through the use of conditionalities. This has exerted pressure on both state and non state actors to take practical actions to address gender inequalities. While this could be understood as a way of enhancing compliance to international commitments it has paradoxically produced the manipulation of the feminist agenda by local development actors while the same resources have fractured the civil society community as they compete over meagre available funds to maintain their survival. As the study has shown this competition has negatively influenced the already weak feminist consciousness and has as well created the mushrooming of entities that claim their space within gender struggles while they are not committed to the agenda.

In a country which is so dependent on foreign aid, donor agencies have been at the centre of gender politics as they provided both technical expertise and financial resources which are very scarce for local actors. One other paradox of this assistance has been the tendency of these agencies to continue supporting initiatives that fail to address issues of power distribution within the policy space. For instance their support of some policy reforms and social development has failed to open the political space for women to be involved in the leadership of political processes. But more interesting has been their support of these initiatives even within undemocratic regimes that were not accountable to women. While this could be attributed to aid politics that are beyond the domestic space it has reproduced contradictions within gender debates as reforms that have happened have left the political space unchallenged and male dominated.



While the study has argued that feminist issues have significantly benefitted some political agendas it is also true that the tenacious nature of gender inequalities within the political space has also been determined in part by the development discourse shifts driven by development agencies that have forced governments to shift their focuses without necessarily being committed to such interventions. For example, as Staudt (1997 citing Jahan) has argued gender mainstreaming is one feminist issue that has been driven by donor agencies without any pledge for a feminist agenda, and government institutions have embarked on mainstreaming without any clear conceptualisation of the feminist demands of the strategy. In turn the introduction of these new issues has taken precedence over women's political concerns as they bring with them new sources of funding. Notwithstanding, these global shifts have restructured domestic gender equality politics within the national policy space, while the same context has also dictated parameters of feminist discourse engagement as emerging global development challenges such as poverty, HIV and Aids as well as economic crisis demand attention.

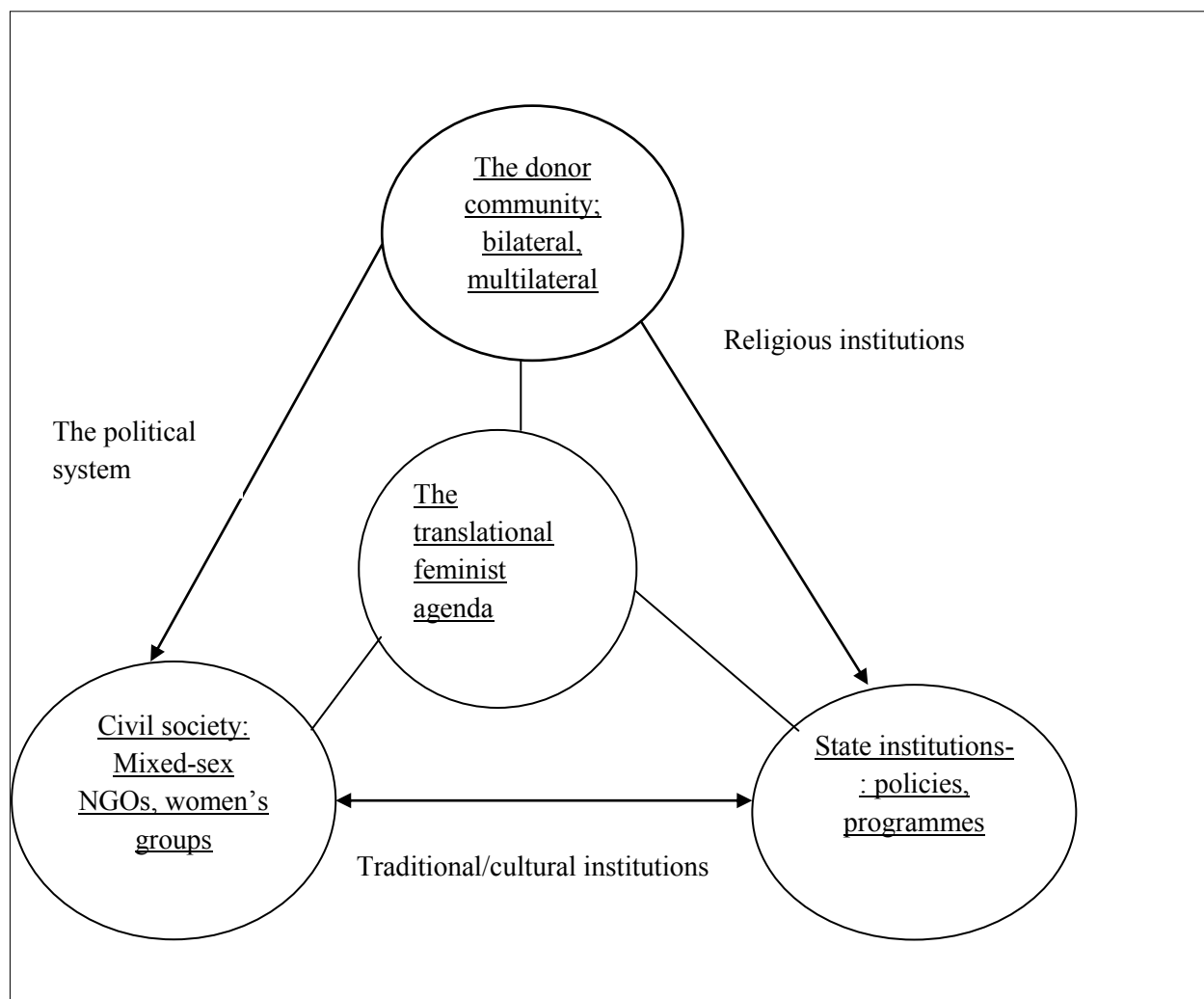
Related to the foregoing argument is the issue of Lesotho's vulnerable geo-political situation within which it is located. Historically, availability of foreign financial assistance has been based largely on political developments in the neighbouring RSA and less on the development challenges facing the country, nonetheless the existence of such resources before 1994 could have been tapped to address policy priority issues that concern women, but what has emerged is the failure of local feminist activists to make use of such opportunity to expand women's advancement. On the other hand while the end of apartheid has shifted donor sympathy away from Lesotho; the transnational space has provided the opportunity for more accountability and responsiveness to gender equality demands through conventions and instruments that are binding to states, and as gender equality has become a global policy priority that has influenced a number of international and national development priorities, those committed to the feminist course can use this space to institute liberal feminist reforms amidst declining foreign aid.

At the end donor agencies also have their own structural limits to institute agendas that are so political more so when their efforts are not complemented by a united national vision. On the other hand, their approach to work with state institutions has failed to challenge patriarchal ideologies and attitudes within these spaces. In the same manner by ignoring some non-state actors such as political parties and religious institutions they have failed to engage these key patriarchal sites hence cultural tendencies that restructure women's visibility in leadership space remain a big challenge to the institutionalisation of the global feminist norms.

Donor agencies have not only benefitted gender equality politics by placing some feminist issues on the national policy agenda; but they have also contributed significantly in creating knowledge base by supporting studies and conferences on local women's status. This exposure has created an opportunity from which local activists can draw tools to fight gender discriminations. The study has shown that without the donor community's support some Basotho gender activists would not have participated in feminist forums at the international level. In this way these agencies have been able to bypass domestic patriarchal barriers and enabled these women to influence both the transnational and domestic spaces. Of course what has been lacking is viability of interventions emanating from these spaces. In most cases the implementation of these agendas has been left in the hands of patriarchal state bureaucracies. This is complicated by the fact that the state has remained the main development partner of these agencies; hence there is a need to further investigate the extent to which feminist groups in Lesotho can engage the state to be truly responsive to women's demands.

In sum, the implementation of the gender equality agenda within the political space in Lesotho is constrained mainly by domestic factors while on the other hand the manner in which global feminist issues enter this space is very critical. There are behind-the-scene factors which play a critical role in shaping this implementation hence they need to be factored in if serious commitment to women's rights is to be achieved. The diagram below summarises this argument.

**Figure 2. The domestic space and the restructuring of the transnational feminist agenda; a summary**



The diagram is meant to expound the argument that while the international feminist agenda is not necessarily imposed on the local context, there are a number of domestic factors that influentially determine the nature and place of gender equality issues within the domestic policy priorities. Efforts of different domestic actors interacting at the transnational space get influenced by patriarchal attitudes within religious, political and traditional institutions within the domestic context. These patriarchal sites are out of reach of the transnational and regional feminist influence

hence their ability to maintain discriminatory principles. Their influence does not only influence local actors but can influence the implementation of feminist interventions executed by international development actors. Hence the intersection of this context with the transnational feminist issues has reproduced contradictions as at one level development actors have to respond to the global agenda while at the same time the domestic space gets narrowed by these patriarchal tendencies. These domestic patriarchal institutions do not only affect prioritisation of issues but they also determine levels of both political activism and feminist consciousness.

The arrows between the domestic actors (State, civil society and donor community) also highlights that the institutionalisation of the feminist agenda is also shaped by the central position occupied by the donor community. Both the civil society and state institutions rely heavily on foreign assistance in responding to the international and regional feminist pressures. In the same manner the relationship between the state and civil society is thinner in the sense that the latter is regarded as oppositional to state efforts; yet at another level civil society groups rely on state's responsiveness to provide space within the policy and legal priorities for their advocacy issues.

Finally, the successful implementation of feminist interventions through law reforms has been the result of the pressure from the transnational activism, while political reforms have been frustrated by patriarchal barriers within domestic political institutions. This might be attributed to the fact that women within the human rights organisations are professionals within the legal fraternity while women within the political institutions do not have professional political skills and knowledge. In part due to their affiliation to the regional feminist movement and also due to the dominant global human rights discourses these progressive groups have been able to influence the institutionalisation of very liberal legal changes. While male politicians do not either possess professional political acumen, their cultural socialisation has enabled them to carve their space and dominance of this power terrain. Whereas the same socialisation has relegated women into subordinate serving positions the political space has remained critically resilient to global feminist advocacy. All these call for aggressive political empowerment of women and strategic engagement of patriarchal

gate-keepers. There is urgent need for strengthening the capacity of all development actors to institutionalise feminist issues. The complementary role that a vibrant women's movement can play to state efforts in addressing gender inequalities needs to be strengthened. Further, serious engagement of democratic principles and an expanded definition of inclusive democracy are critical for the development of progressive political culture that can open the domestic space for the institutionalisation of the global feminist demands and norms. A clear domestic feminist agenda has to be set by all who claim to fight gender discrimination while development assistance has to recognise basic patriarchal sites and support appropriate feminist priorities.

In the final analysis the argument the study expounds is that gender equality in decision making institutions and structures is key to the whole agenda of political equality. If women are to influence the nature and content of policy issues that affect them directly, they need to fully and equally participate in political spaces that govern their lives. In order for women to take their rightful place in policy interventions they need to be visible within senior policy structures. The study has shown that there is a need to challenge aggressively the stereotypes, prejudices and attitudes that continue to undermine women's full citizenship. The structural and institutional barriers to women's leadership remain the major challenge for achieving gender equality and the problem lies not with one single actor, hence there is no single answer to the problem. Scepticism about women's ability to be effective leaders can be addressed through challenging embedded harmful ideologies about women.

#### **Areas for further research**

A number of key issues that need further research emerged in relation to the understanding of the history of the gender equality agenda in Lesotho. The call for increased numbers of women in the political office requires the justification of women's impact on pertinent issues that affect women while in that office. However, for a long time the numbers of women were too small to make a social impact, hence the call for a critical mass. Since Lesotho is almost close to the 30% critical mass target (25% after 2007 elections), it would be fair to document the contribution that women in political positions have made in relation to the advancement of women's

issues . Such an analysis would help the women politicians to redefine their role and reposition themselves in relation to the implementation of feminist initiatives.

In a similar manner, though the study has documented the role of the women's organisations in influencing the place of the gender equality agenda within the policy space, it is important to go deeper and identify strategies that would unite the women's voice and audit available skills and competencies within the women's movement so that appropriate strategies can be employed in order to invigorate the movement and expand the support base so that an indigenous gender agenda is set. A shared stance between women in political parties, civil society and the donor community seems a small beginning for a bigger end.

While governments' policies emanate from political party manifestos it is clear that in most cases ruling parties commit themselves to agreements originating from the transnational space and these may at times receive negativity which can frustrate implementation of international norms. This dilemma calls for a systematic analysis of how political resistance to women's advancement manifest itself within the political space, as well as identification of strategies that can be employed to break the patriarchal barriers within these institutions.

The study has argued that the role of donors has been influenced by their ideological definitions of what constitute women's issues. But what the study has not been able to explore is gender dynamics within such agencies. There is therefore a need to understand internal women's advancement within donor agencies themselves and how these impact on the implementation of the transnational feminist agendas especially with the current new aid architecture with new faces as the old allies move out to South Africa.

Although a number of assertions have been made in relation to resistance to women's leadership there is a need to document both men's and women's ideologies of

leadership, this would enable appropriate entry points in addressing stereotypes, attitudes and prejudices and ideologies of leadership within a society that is patriarchal.

While Lesotho has been hailed for the introduction of the MMP electoral model within the political system less has been said on the ways this model can be used to increase women's visibility within the highest echelons of power. A study that can explore ways in which the model can open the political space for more women will contribute a gender dimension on discourses of electoral politics. The role of democratic institutions such as the IEC could be strengthened through findings of such as study.

Though the role of media in contributing to women's marginalisation within political debates has not been given academic scrutiny; the media shapes contents of political debates by publicising other issues and shadowing others. It would therefore be important in the future to explore how the media has contributed towards the articulation and visibility of women's political interests.

Rural women's political perceptions on their role in contesting the political space have been neglected even within the emerging feminist discourses of inclusive democracy. These constitute majority of political party membership who vote faithfully even though their lives have not improved, there is a need therefore to understand barriers to their political agency.

A lack of coordination of donor' sponsored interventions to address women's issues demands a critical analysis so as to strengthen their impact and eliminate unnecessary duplications in the institutionalisation of feminist norms.

Finally, the focus on conventional development actors in shaping gender discourses has ignored critical domestic forces that determine success of social change outside formal development institutions. For instance the study of the role of religion in restructuring women's issues has not included the effects of such restructuring on global issues, it is therefore important to undertake an analysis of the strategies employed by these patriarchal institutions in rewriting gender relations and these affect the implementation of transnational agendas to structure gender equality debates in Lesotho.



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## **Appendix 1**

### **Document Analysis**

#### **Policy documents:**

Five year Development Plans from 1970 to 1999

Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2004)

Vision 2020

Gender Policy 2003

#### **Official Documents:**

a) Country Reports prepared for International women's conferences: a) The Lesotho National Report for the 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference for Women Beijing 1995.

b) Country Paper "Lesotho End of women's UN Decade 1975-1985" paper presented at Nairobi, Kenya World conference (15<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> July 1985).

c) Country Paper "Lesotho: second ECA MULPOC sub- regional Committee on Integration of Women in Development". 1980

Donor programme and project documents as well as websites: UNFPA, UNDP, Irish aid, American Embassy

NGOs programme documents and publications: WLSA, FIDA, LCN, and LNCW

The Lesotho Constitution (Amendment 1993) and the Electoral Act (Amendment) of 2001

#### **Archival material**

Manifestos of political parties that have been in government; BNP, BCP and LCD

Feminist magazines; Shoeshoe (issues 2,3,4,5, vol.1, 1991, issue2 vol.3 1996)

Journals; Readings in BOLESWA Governments; selected documents on the government and politics of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. 1971 Work For Justice.

Daily Hansard report on quotas for Local Government elections; first Session of the Sixth parliament

#### **Other**

**Consultancy Reports;**

a) "The situation of Children and Women in Lesotho". 1994 (Sechaba Consultants sponsored by UNICEF)

b) "Lesotho: A Gender Analysis". 1992 funded by SIDA

c) "The Role of Women in Development in Lesotho". The UNDP Report,

d) "An Inventory of Current Efforts which Integrate Basotho Women in Development: Training for self-Reliance project". 1985. Funded by ILO

e) "Integration of Women in Development in Zambia, Botswana and Lesotho: Aid's Efforts". 1978. USAID

f) "Study on Swedish Support to NGOs and Women Activities in Lesotho" 1988

g) "Report of National Conference on Population Management as a Factor in Development including Family Planning". 1979. Ministry of Health

h) "Programme Review and Strategy Development Report" 1993. UNFPA

i) "Women's Status and their Contribution to National Development". 1984. Funded by UNESCO

j) "UN Integrated Reporting System on the Status of Women 1980-81 Biennial Round: Country Report" 1981. Directorate for Women and Youth Affairs.

k) "Women in Development Sector Overview" 1984. FAO.

## **Appendix 2. Interviewees and interview Guides**

### **Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) - Communication Officer, Chairperson (currently Commissioner), Legal advisor**

1. To what extent have the party lists for proportional representation and/or constituency seats maintained gender sensitivity?
2. What has been the average percentage of women voters for national election of 1998, 2002 and in the 2005 Local Government election?
3. What has been the average percentage of women candidates for 1998, 2002 and in the 2005 Local Government elections?
4. To what extent has the new electoral model affected women's political representation?
5. Which parties seem to submit more gender balanced lists? (1993-2002)
6. How does the IEC ensure that political parties submit lists that maintain equal representation?
7. What programs are run by the IEC to encourage women to participate in election as voters and candidates?
8. How are political parties involved in drawing the content of voter education?
9. From the point of view of IEC, why are women not equally represented in the political parties' structures?
10. What are the main challenges for instituting gender equality within the electoral processes?
11. What should be done to promote women's political representation?

### **Women's organizations (WLSA/ FIDA/ LNWC/ Lesotho Women Self-help group)**

1. When were WLSA/ FIDA/ LNWC/ Lesotho Women Self-help group established in Lesotho?

2. Why was the organisation created?
3. What has been the organisation's mandate?
4. What have been the major accomplishments of the organisation?
5. Who are the pioneers of the organisation? What contributions have they made in advancing gender equality?
6. What feminist approach has influenced the organisation in addressing women's development issues? (In both research and advocacy)?
7. Has the organisation deviated from the original mandate/approach in any way, and if so what are the reasons for this?
8. Is the organisation a member of any regional or international advocacy network? How does this affiliation benefit the organisation?
9. What has been the organisation's role in influencing policy change regarding the advancement of the women's agenda?
10. What type of change has been advocated by the organization?
11. How does the organisation work with other development actors (Government, donors, NGOs and other women's groups) in the pursuit of gender equality?
12. How does the organisation work with formal political institutions (political parties, women's wings/leagues, Parliamentary women's caucus) in advancing women's political representation?
13. Under which historical moments has the organisation worked effectively, and what are reasons for this?
14. What factors have contributed to the organisation's success and or failure in addressing women's political representation?
15. What type of support has the organization received from different regimes since its inception?
16. To what extent has the organisation maintained its autonomy from the state, donors or political parties?



17. What major challenges face feminist activism in Lesotho?

**WOMEN'S LEAGUE (LCD, BCP, BNP)**

1. What has been the role of the league within the party?
2. What programs does the League have that are meant to advance women's political empowerment?
3. What type of interventions has the League made in advancing women's issues?
4. How does the League operate to influence national policies that address women's issues?
5. How does the League work with the party/ executive in realising gender equality?
6. What is the League's stance on employing Affirmative Action to increase women's representation?
7. How does the League work with women's organisations in advancing women's issues?
8. Can you say your party is committed to advancing women's equal representation in parliament and at party level?
9. What type of support do women candidates get from the party/ League when they run for elections and after joining parliament?
10. What major challenges face the League and the party in realising women's political representation?
11. How does the party work with women's organisations outside the party to promote women's issues?
12. How does the League work with the Parliamentary Women's Caucus, the Ministry of Gender, IEC and NGOs on women's issues?
13. What should be done to achieve equal gender political representation?

14. What are the major challenges facing feminist activism in Lesotho?

**Mixed-sex NGOs (TRC and LCN)**

1. What has been the organizations' role in influencing policy change for the advancement of women's issues?
2. What influences the organization's choice of women's issues?
3. What is the organisation's relationship with other development actors such as women's groups, donors and government in addressing gender inequalities, in particular women's political representation?
4. What type of change is advocated by the organization for achieving gender equality, and what strategies have been employed to attain such change?
5. What is the organization's relationship with formal political institutions in pursuing gender equality?
6. Which historical moments have been more effective in driving the organisation's agenda?
7. What factors may have limited or enabled success of the organization's efforts in addressing women's equal representation?
8. To what extent has the organisation maintained its autonomy from the state and donor agencies in its pursuit for gender equality?
9. What is the position of the organisation on the adoption of gender quotas as a strategy to increase women's political representation?

**Women who have been in leadership of women's policy units -The Women's Commission, The Bureau of Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Gender and Youth Affairs (Director and Minister)**

1. What was the purpose of creating the women's affairs unit?

2. What was the mandate of the unit, and to what extent has it been achieved?
3. Where was the unit placed and what were the advantages and disadvantages of this location?
4. What criterion was used to appoint you to head the office?
5. What type of relationship did the unit have with political women's leagues?
6. What was the relationship between the unit and the women's organisations?
7. What could be cited as the main achievement of the unit?
8. What challenges faced the unit?
9. In which areas has the unit been unable to effect change, and what are the reasons?
10. To what extent did the unit influence women's political representation?
11. As an individual what are your experiences of heading this unit, and what type of change have you made?
12. What are main challenges facing women's activism in this country?

**Women and Men in Positions of Power in Government (1966-2005)- BNP, BCP, LCD leadership including those who broke away from BCP (LPC leader), Ex-Military leader.**

- What were the processes through which the policy to integrate women into development formed?
- What changes were brought by these policy interventions?
- Where did these women's policy ideas originate?

- How have different policies been implemented, monitored and evaluated to advance women's issues, especially their political rights?
- What practical measures have been taken to address women's political representation?
- What has been the role of external or/ and local agencies in the formulation of the gendered policy approaches?
- What are the major challenges facing the implementation of women's issues?
- How has the women's agenda benefited from regional and international bodies?
- How does government relate with organisations that work on women's issues, and what has been their contribution?

**The Donor Community** (UNFPA, American Embassy, Irish AID, UNDP gender/program officers)

- How the donor agency defines its mandate as regards women's political advancement in Lesotho?
- How the donor agency has contributed in influencing policy as regards women's political representation?
- Strategies/approaches that the agency employs to address gender inequality and women's political representation in particular.
- Areas in which the donor's interventions have been successful to achieve gender equality and areas that have not shown success. Reasons for the differing performance.
- How the donor explains causes for Basotho women's political under-representation.

- What strategies can be proposed to address the inequalities within the political space?
- What do the project documents say about advancing the women's agenda?
- What consultancy work has been done on women's issues and what change has this work effected?
- Major challenges facing the institutionalisation of the feminist agenda in Lesotho policy space

### **Gender Activists and academics/ consultants**

**(Leah Molapo, Keiso Matashane-Marite, Matseliso Mapetla, Ntimo-Makara, Itumeleng Kimane, Puleng Letuka, Prof. Makatjane, Prof. Ambrose, Stephen Gill)**

1. What has been your involvement in the advancement of women's issues in Lesotho?
2. With which organisation have you been involved? Are you still an active member of the women's movement?
3. What strategies have been employed by your organisation to advance the women's agenda?
4. How do you define the core tenets of the women's struggles in Lesotho?
5. What contributes to the continued under-representation of women in political decision-making positions?
6. What is your opinion on the role of the women's movement in advancing the women's agenda?
7. What is the relationship between the women's movement and government in the pursuit on advancing women's political representation?
8. What type of relationship exists between the women's movement and the political parties/ women's leagues?
9. What type of change has been brought by the creation of the department of gender?
10. What do you think should be done to enhance women's political representation in Lesotho?