



Ms Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi holds a BA (1984) and MA (1988) in History from the University of Ife, Nigeria. She also received an MA in Gender and Society (1992) from Middlesex University, UK.

Ms Fayemi co-founded the African Women's Development Fund, (AWDF), the first Africa-wide grant-making fund, which supports the work of organisations promoting women's rights in Africa. Since it began grant making in 2001, AWDF has

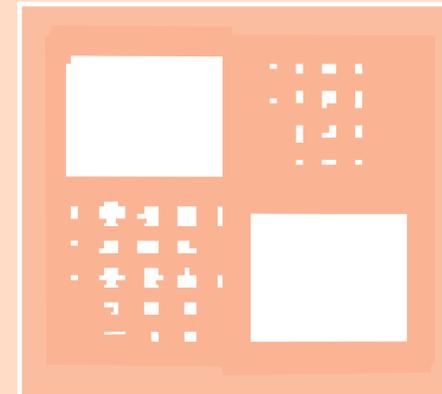
supported over 800 women's organisations in 42 African countries with over US\$16m in grants.

Ms Fayemi was the Director of Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA), an international development organisation for African women based in London, UK.

Ms Fayemi is a leading voice not only in the African women's movement and civil society, but in the global women's movement as well.

She has also become a key figure in the world of philanthropy, particularly in the global South. She is in very high demand across the world as a resource person, strategist, guest speaker, trainer, events host and process manager.

Democratization and Women in Africa – Progress, Stagnation or Retreat



Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi

The Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) is an independent, non-partisan and nonprofit research think tank based in Accra, Ghana. CDD-Ghana is dedicated to the promotion of democracy, good governance and the development of a liberal political and economic environment in Ghana in particular and Africa in general. In so doing, CDD-Ghana seeks to enhance the democratic content of public policy and to advance the cause of constitutionalism, individual liberty, the rule of law, and integrity in public life.

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Correspondence: The Publications Assistant

Ghana Center for Democratic Development,
CDD-Ghana
P. O. Box LG 404, Legon-Accra, Ghana

Tel: +233 302 776142/784293-4

Fax: +233 302 763028/9

*** Our Tamale Office**

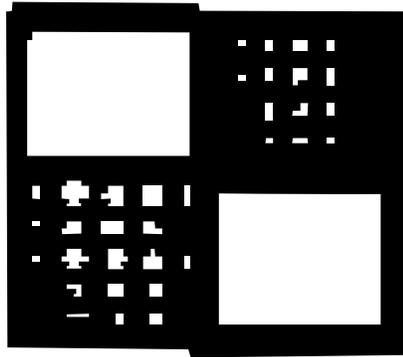
P. O. Box TL 864, Tamale, Ghana

Tel.: 0372 027 758

Fax: 0372 027 759

Email: info@cddghana.org

THE “KRONTI NE AKWAMU” SYMBOL



'Kronti ne Akwamu' is the adinkra symbol for democracy, duality of the essence of life, compositeness and complementarity. It encapsulates a system of governance with decentralized political authority and different branches of government that complement each other.

ABOUT THE CDD-GHANA ANNUAL *KRONTI NE AKWAMU*
(DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE) LECTURE

The *Kronti ne Akwamu* Lecture is the Center's flagship annual public lecture on democracy and governance. It is one of the Center's initiatives aimed towards bridging the gap between reflection, research and analysis on one hand, and pro-democracy and good governance advocacy on the other. Therefore, it is aimed at enriching the quality of public discourse on democratic and governance reforms.

The lectures feature prominent scholars and/or activists of local and international repute whose work focus on democracy building and fostering good governance. Speakers are invited to share knowledge and insights on these issues, in the hope of stimulating vibrant public debate.

The lectures have been dubbed *Kronti ne Akwamu* after the Akan *adinkra* symbol that best represents democracy, duality of the essence of life, and interdependence. The symbol encapsulates a system of decentralized political authority with different branches of government complementing and also checking each other.

The maiden lecture was delivered in March 2005. It featured an internationally renowned scholar and activist of democratic development - Prof Larry Diamond, a senior fellow of the Hoover Institution at Stanford University (USA). He spoke on the topic: "Democracy and Development - A Case for Mutual Dependency." The then Chief Justice of Ghana, His Lordship Justice George Kingsley Acquah was the chairman for that occasion.

The second *Kronti ne Akwamu* lecture was delivered by the distinguished Ghanaian lawyer, statesman and former Speaker of the Parliament of Ghana, the Rt. Hon Peter Ala Adjetey. He spoke on the topic "Reflections on the Effectiveness of the Parliament of the Fourth Republic of Ghana." The distinguished chairman of that

event was The Very Reverend Professor S. K. Adjepong, Chairman of the National African Peer Review Mechanism Governing Council.

The third *Kronti ne Akwamu* lecture, the Golden Jubilee edition, was delivered by Professor Richard Joseph, a distinguished political scientist, former head of the Program of African Studies at the Northwestern University (USA), and former head of Africa programs at the Carter Center on the topic: “Ghana and Democratic Development in Africa: Back to the Future”. That lecture event was chaired by the Hon. J. H. Mensah, then Chairman of the National Development Planning Commission.

The fourth *Kronti ne Akwamu* lecture was delivered by Dr. K.Y. Amoako, founder and president of the African Center for Economic Transformation on the topic “The Future of Civil Society in Democratic Governance and Development in Africa.” The chairperson was Mrs. Mary Chinery Hesse, chief advisor to the former President, John Agyekum Kufuor.

The fifth lecture was organised in partnership with KPMG-Ghana and was delivered by Dr. Kwadwo Afari-Gyan, Chairman of the Electoral Commission on the topic: “The Challenges to Conducting Free and Fair Elections in Emerging African Democracies: The Case of Ghana.”

The sixth lecture was delivered by Dr. Jendayi Frazer, a former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs and a distinguished service professor at Carnegie Mellon University, USA. She spoke on the topic “Enhancing the Conflict Prevention Role of Elections in Africa.”

This year’s lecture is on the topic: **Democratization and Women in Africa – Progress, Stagnation or Retreat** and it will be delivered by Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi, President and Co-Founder of the Africa Women Development Fund, AWDF.

Since inception, all the *Kronti ne Akwamu* lectures have been held at the British Council Auditorium. We are grateful to the management of the British Council for their cooperation. I am pleased to report that the texts of all the previous lectures have been published and widely disseminated.

I wish to place on record our profound gratitude to the following organizations for their generous sponsorship of this lecture: KPMG Ghana, The Canadian High Commission, Stanbic Bank, Metropolitan Insurance Company, Unique Expressions, Joy FM, Citi FM, the Daily Graphic and all individuals who supported this year's event.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Gyimah-Boadi', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

E. Gyimah-Boadi (Ph.D)
Executive Director

March, 2011
Accra

Introduction

I would like to thank the management and staff of CDD-Ghana for inviting me here today to deliver this important lecture. I feel very humbled and privileged to be following in the footsteps of great minds and thinkers who have delivered this lecture in previous years. I am particularly glad that this year, CDD has decided to give space to a discussion about African women and democracy and what this means to them. This is an indication that CDD-Ghana takes women's rights seriously at an intellectual, ideological and practical level.

In 1995, the 4th World Conference on Women took place in Beijing, China. The conference was unprecedented, both in terms of its sheer scale, and in its outcomes. Over 40,000 women and men attended the conference, and there was such a massive mobilisation of women at all levels from all over the world in the months leading up to the conference. The Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), the negotiated outcomes document, for all its limitations, was far reaching than any other previous commitments made at previous UN Women's Conferences. For those of us in the women's movement, this document represented a new dawn for us in the search for gender justice and equality, and it gave us a serious political, technical and analytical tool with which to demand accountability from governments and institutions responsible for advancing gender equality globally.

Almost sixteen years after, we now live in a world that is markedly different from 1995 when the Beijing Platform for Action was agreed on. We have moved into increasingly darker times of reckless militarization, unilateralism, unbridled corporate greed, a war against terrorism, an erosion of civil liberties, the thriving of various forms of fundamentalism and the use of adverse trade terms and agreements to undermine economies in many parts of the

Global South. If the 2005 review of the BPFA was not encouraging, the review of Beijing 15 years after was even bleaker. Progress on implementing the Beijing Platform for Action has been slow in most parts of the global South. A combination of factors such as the global economic crisis, political instability, conflict, lack of adequate communication systems, inadequate institutional mechanisms for mainstreaming gender, and the devastating impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic have marred the process.

Africa as a continent has been severely weakened by the adverse effects of globalisation. The implementation of misguided economic policies and massive debt has been a major problem in many African countries. This has manifested itself in the loss of livelihoods, unemployment, an increase in the number of commercial sex workers, trafficking in women, a rise in the number of street children, the feminisation of poverty, and a total rupturing of the social fabric which binds communities together. This has also made more women and girls vulnerable to sexual exploitation and at risk of contracting HIV & AIDS. If there is a crisis in any community, women are affected in different ways from men, and in most cases, they suffer most. This affects all spheres of development – economic, political, technological or social. Indeed, women in Africa have borne the brunt of the continent's misfortunes.

As true as this may be, macro and micro-economic policies, programmes, and development strategies have not been designed to take into account their impact on women and girl-children, especially those living in poverty. Women continue to lack access to resources such as land, capital, technology, water and adequate food. Majority of women – most of whom are rural based, and most urban women – continue to live in conditions of economic underdevelopment and social marginalisation. Over the past twenty years, millions of Africans have lost their lives in wars and genocide. Many more have become refugees. These conflicts have placed tremendous burdens on women who suffer displacement, loss of

families and livelihoods, various forms of intense, gender-based violence, and the responsibility of sustaining entire communities. Women and children from countries such as Liberia, Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Somalia have spent the last decade living under unbelievably difficult circumstances.

With the continued impoverishment of the African State, the fallout from many years of violent conflict, and the inability to prioritise human security needs, most of our countries have become violent playgrounds for ex and current warlords, bands of unemployed youth, local militia, gangs of armed robbers, ex-soldiers and kidnappers. All of them have access to thousands of small arms proliferating in many of our major cities, and they have now turned the once-unique African urban experience into a nightmare.

It is against this backdrop that African citizens are calling for a reframing of our democratic spaces and cultures. They are making demands on their leaders to address the huge gap between the powerful visions needed to drive the continent forward and the grim realities of unfulfilled expectations and dashed dreams that shape the day-to-day lives of millions of Africans. Part of this demand for new visions and new directions is a call for solutions to our leadership crisis. This requires new faces, voices, experiences and insights, and it is African women who are now placing these alternatives on the table.

African Women and Democracy: Progress

The BPFPA raised concerns about the continued under-representation of women in most levels of government in spite of the movement towards democracy everywhere. The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) set a target of 30% for the inclusion of women in positions of power and decision-making. Fifteen and a half years after Beijing, this target has not been met world-wide. African governments made specific commitments on this issue. Several countries and political parties have created quota systems and Affirmative Action programmes through which between 25-50% of elective seats at national and local levels (as well as other appointive positions) are reserved for women. As a result, some countries such as South Africa, Mozambique, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda, have significantly higher levels of women's representation in national assemblies and other positions of power and decision-making.

In many areas, there have been significant successes and achievements, in the face of overwhelming odds. The past sixteen years have witnessed an acceptance, on the part of several governments, of the need to address women's empowerment and gender equality. The African Union adopted the African Protocol on Women's Rights as well as the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in 2004. The founding instruments of the African Union also include a commitment to a 50/50 gender parity for all the organs of the AU. In 2006, Africa got its first democratically-elected female President, Mrs Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia. We have also seen impressive numbers of women in national parliaments, with Rwanda setting a world record of up to 56%, followed by countries such as South Africa at 42% (3rd in the world) Mozambique 39% (10th in the world). Other African countries doing very well with regards to numbers of women in national parliaments include Burundi (36%), and Uganda (31%)¹.

There are some African countries which, despite the existence of a significant female middle-class as well as active women's movements, continue to record very disappointing numbers. Examples include Nigeria (7.28%, 46th in Africa. This figure includes numbers in both lower and upper houses), Ghana (8.30%, 40th in Africa), and Kenya (9.8%, 36th in Africa).

Therefore, in 2011, thirty two years after the passing of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), eighteen years after the 1993 Vienna Human Rights conference, seventeen years after the Cairo population conference of 1994, almost sixteen years after the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing, and over 10 years after the Millennium Development Goals were adopted, we can celebrate the following as African women:

- √ There is now more awareness of women's rights and gender equality across all our communities. We have seen more acceptance of the need to address discrimination against women in terms of access to education, employment and also the need to prevent violence against women and girls.
- √ There are legal, policy, and constitutional frameworks in place to ensure that women's human rights are guaranteed and protected. There is CEDAW, the African Women's Protocol, Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, UN Resolution 1325 on Women in Peace and Security, the Millennium Development Goals, National and Sub-regional Gender Policies, national and State laws against violence, and many others.
- √ The notion of women as leaders has been popularized, and it is no longer strange to see women campaigning for very senior positions in public life. Due to the remarkable success of women in elected and appointed positions in some

countries, we have changed political landscapes, for example in Liberia, Rwanda, and South Africa.

- √ The women's movement has been able to build consensus around key issues of importance to women, such as rights to livelihoods and economic empowerment, access to decision-making, reproductive rights and health, non-discrimination and the critical importance of peace. In addition, scholars, activists, community leaders, writers, thinkers, professionals, rural women and politicians who are part of a progressive women's movement have been able to create a body of knowledge, thought and activism on women's rights and gender equality. An example is the success of the African Feminist Forum, a networking and reflection space for individual African feminists.
- √ We have strong women's organisations and networks who have been at the forefront of shaping these agendas, and who have used their organisations as a training ground for many inspiring women leaders on the continent today. Regional organisations such as the African Women's Communication and Development Network (FEMNET), Abantu for Development, Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA), Women in Law and Development, Africa (WILDAF) have worked consistently to provide a voice for women's movements at continental and international levels. National organisations such as NETRIGHTS (Ghana), national platforms of FIDA, The National Women's Lobby (Malawi) KIND (Nigeria), Forum for Women and Development (Uganda) have all played key roles in demanding for accountability towards women's rights.
- √ There are many powerful role models who inspire younger generations to greatness. We have women such as President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Mrs Graca Machel, Professor Wangari

Maathai, Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Professor Dora Akunyili, Professor Mamphela Ramphele, Professor Akua Kuenyehia, Mrs Georgina Wood, Chief Justice of Ghana, and Justice Joyce Bamford Addo the Speaker of Parliament. These women, and younger ones such as the famous writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Nigeria), Leymah Gbowe (Liberia), Prudence Mabele (South Africa) and many others, make it possible to showcase the amazing talents and power of African women leaders.

African Women and Democracy: Stagnation

In spite of all these successes and achievements, millions of women and girls still suffer from the feminization of poverty, lack of access to basic resources, disease, violent conflict and the complex use of culture, religion and tradition to render women voiceless. Crimes against women, young girls and children are on the rise. Gender-based violence, femicides, rapes, sexual assaults, harmful traditional and religious practices, voluntary and involuntary commercial sex work, trafficking, sexual exploitation, institutionalized gender-based discrimination, kidnappings, and so on, make private and public spaces in many of our countries very unsafe for women and girls. The gains of women are often eroded when faced with a combination of all these obstacles. These issues continue to hinder the progress of women for the following reasons:

Lack of political will: In spite of the fact that almost all of our countries in Africa have signed on to international agreements such as CEDAW and the African Women's Protocol, these instruments have not been domesticated. Without aligning these progressive commitments with national laws and policies, the rights of women and girls will continue to be undermined, and lip service will continue to be paid to gender equality issues.

Religious and cultural conservatism: One of the major obstacles women face in achieving full equality and freedom from discrimination is the entrenchment of patriarchal norms and values. Religion, culture and tradition have always been used as vehicles of women's oppression. At a conceptual and practical level, women's rights advocates have raised the issue of the construction of fixed identities for African women, which often put them in a place not believed to be subject to change, analysis, challenge or negotiation.

The contestation around these identities and the yearnings for alternative paradigms is what drives the movements for gender justice around the continent today. Even though policy and legislative frameworks exist to affirm these alternative identities, it is not easy to dismantle patriarchal power and privilege. In addition, where governments are incapable of fulfilling their social and political contracts with their citizens with regards to the provision of social services such as healthcare, education, transport, and social welfare, religious institutions step in to fill the gaps. What makes this problematic in the long-term, is the fact that these institutions then become the sole reference point for citizens, and for those religious establishments who are led by unscrupulous people, the results can be disastrous, particularly for women and girls.

Ideological differences: The women's movement in Africa is not homogenous. We have many differences which include class, age, social status, location, physical ability, education, etc. We are often able to build consensus around key issues of concern such as the need for peace, fighting poverty, rights to education, and many other issues, but our analysis of patriarchal power and the strategies required to address this tend to differ. For example, many women in key decision making positions are unwilling to '*rock the boat*' because this is a sure way to becoming a political orphan. This is why many are silent when women in their countries or communities suffer from abuse and neglect. It is also clear that these women leaders also realise that if you play by the rules set by those who are more powerful than you are, you either have to abide by the rules of the game or be prepared to be a casualty.

The fragility of the organised women's movement

As described above, we have a significant number of dynamic women's rights organisations and networks in every country of the continent, all of whom can boast of commendable track records

in securing rights for women. I call them the ‘organised women’s movement’ because I am speaking specifically here about formal non-governmental or community-based organisations as opposed to the many loose coalitions and associations who are also part of the women’s movement. Many of these women’s rights organisations are severely under-resourced, over-burdened and stretched to the limit. Many of them are on what we could call ‘life support’, - pull out one grant or one key staff member and the organisation might go under. Without adequate financial, material and technical support, these organisations who work in the trenches as advocates will find it very difficult to sustain gains and momentum.

The Perils of Claiming and Sustaining Political Space

Access to mainstream decision-making and political power for African women is a very difficult process. Most women I know do not want anything to do with partisan politics or running for office. Who can blame them? If you take a look at how we go about our political business in many countries you can't but wonder why anyone in their right senses would want to run for office. The terrain is tough enough for men, and for women, the odds are truly great. The indifference and outright hostility of party machineries, the outrageous costs of running for office, the logistics of coordinating an effective campaign, the fluidity of politicians' meeting hours, fear of violence and thuggery, the need for a political 'Godfather', the list goes on. All these factors serve to exclude most women from making a decision to serve their communities.

Women who want to run for office have to contend with the difficult process of seeking the support of husbands, family and friends, and acceptance from party leaders. Most of our political parties lack the internal democratic principles and practices which are required to address representational imbalances. As a result, getting the nomination to run on the platform of a leading political party is a herculean task. When women eventually emerge as party candidates, they have to mobilise the necessary campaign finances, and endure the harsh realities of political campaigns in Africa, which can break the toughest of men and women. The few who do survive the difficulties of running for public office find it extremely difficult to work within structures which are still hostile to the empowerment and equality of women. Party politics and agendas come first, and even when women are interested in building alliances with other women across party lines, they will have to bow to the wishes of the party leaders.

However we can't afford to give up. It is not easy to claim political space but we have to persist. The forces that try to keep women out of governance usually count on three things that they hope will deter us: *fear* (of violence) *money* (the vast amounts that need to be spent) and *indifference* (that we don't care enough about what happens).

Emerging Trends and Concerns

As we reflect on our achievements and challenges, we also need to pay attention to emerging trends which have serious implications for moving our democratic agendas forward. One of these trends is to do with the increasing levels of violence against women in political contexts. In addition to suffering from discrimination and exclusion, women who brave hostile political environments to raise their voices and seek engagement find themselves at grave risk. During recent political crisis in Kenya, Guinea and Zimbabwe, we have seen the premeditated and systematic sexual violations of female political activists. This, of course, is meant to serve as a deterrent to women who seek to lay claim to political space.

Considering the tremendous toll political engagement exacts on women, it is no surprise that some women are now using alternative routes to political power. Increasingly, we are seeing wives, daughters and sisters of prominent male political figures embarking on political careers with the support of their powerful male relations. Whilst on the one hand, this kind of support helps mediate the problems of financing, acceptability and the need to political capital from scratch, it raises questions about nepotism and the manipulation of political structures towards building self-serving dynasties.

In my opinion, for as long as we continue to have an uneven playing field, with competent and qualified women having to beg for recognition and opportunities all the time, we should not begrudge those who are able to use whatever help they can get to maneuver

political minefields and dead-ends. What is most important is the values and agendas these women bring to their respective political spaces. Are you seeking office because your father was a political leader and you feel a sense of entitlement to the same position? Or are you putting yourself forward as a servant of your people because you have the capacity to serve them with commitment and integrity?

In a world where we have free and fair elections, the final arbiter of these questions should be the voting public. A big challenge for these female political elites is usually showing evidence of a genuine connection with grassroots constituencies. Therefore, more emphasis needs to be placed on building visible and credible links with local constituencies, rather than counting on Daddy or Hubby to swing things. If this is not managed carefully, this group of women leaders, regardless of their skills or qualifications, will continue to be viewed with suspicion.

'It is our Turn' - To do What?: The Case for Transformatory Leadership

The women's movement across the African continent has done an excellent job of pushing for access of women to decision making. The case we have made is that the implications of women being excluded from decision-making are serious. It means if women do not have a voice where key decisions which affect their lives are made, then their capacity for full development and equality is severely limited. Women's involvement in decision-making contributes to redefining political priorities, placing new issues on the political agenda which reflect and address women's gender-specific concerns, values and experiences, and provides new perspectives on mainstream political issues. Without the active participation of women and the inclusion of their perspectives at all levels of decision-making, the goals of good governance and inclusive, transparent democratic processes cannot be achieved.

This eloquent case has been so successful; it has produced impressive percentages of women in decision making from local to national and regional levels. These successes however, raise a number of questions. When the case for women in leadership is made, and the argument is won, what is the next step? What assumptions are we making about the kinds of women we would like to see in leadership positions? What values are assumed or expected? What agendas are non-negotiable? How do we define genuine sisterhood and how does it work? What do we do with those who jump on our bandwagons and take advantage of our hard work? How do we support women in leadership positions especially when they confront the inevitable backlash? Whilst it is desirable to seek increased numbers of women in democratic structures, these questions need to be asked and answered.

In November 2006, 120 feminist activists, scholars and thinkers gathered in Accra, Ghana for the first ever African Feminist Forum. One of the key outcomes of the Forum, was the adoption of the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists. The Charter includes a section on Feminist Leadership, which can be interpreted to mean that whenever feminists call for women in decision making, they have explicit expectations. The Charter states²:

As leaders in the feminist movement, we commit ourselves to the following:

- √ *Disciplined work ethics, integrity and accountability at all times;*
- √ *The recognition that while feminist agency has popularized the notion of women as leaders, women leaders need to be able to make a critical difference;*
- √ *An understanding that the quality of women's leadership is even more important than the numbers of women in leadership;*
- √ *Ensuring that the feminist movement is recognised as a legitimate constituency for women in leadership positions;*
- √ *Familiarizing ourselves with relevant and up to date literature and information to help shape our analysis and strategies on an ongoing basis, hereby championing a culture of learning beginning with ourselves;*
- √ *Nurturing, mentoring and providing opportunities for young feminists;*
- √ *Being open to peer review and constructive feedback from other feminists*

These are the expectations we have of women in leadership positions, regardless of whether they got there by election, selection, appointment, birth, affiliation or marriage. The progressive women's movement has invested a lot of time, energy

and resources in a myriad of strategies to engage patriarchal systems, so we cannot afford to have critical successes undermined by those who have benefited from our efforts by accident or design. Most of the women I have worked with in civil society across the continent might not have immediate ambitions to hold mainstream political office or seek appointments for themselves, but we do all we can to support the women who choose to do so. We advocate, campaign, protest, make lengthy trips leaving our families behind, conduct research, mobilize resources and do all we can to make the case for our sisters to 'get there'.

Once they succeed, we are always ready to support them (if they feel they need us) with the information and tools they need to make a difference and add value to governance processes. We are always ready to jump to their defence when the ever present reactionary forces surface. All we ask of them in return is for them to remember that they have constituencies who count on them to do the right thing. Our support for other women is very passionate but definitely not unconditional. We will not support women who refuse to identify with the issues which affect the majority of African women such as the feminization of poverty, lack of personhood, lack of empowering choices, lack of access to basic resources, gender-based violence, and discriminatory laws, behaviour and attitudes. We will not support women leaders who are oblivious to the war on women going on around them because they are otherwise engaged. We will not support women who choose to do 'business as usual' with 'the boys'. We will not support women who normalise corruption, and we will not support women simply because they happen to be women.

The content of a lot of the recent high profile campaigns in various countries to get more women into decision making is devoid of an analysis of what difference women can make as leaders. Most of the debate tends to be focused on an entitlement agenda, i.e. '*we are women and it is now our turn*'. My response to this is '*Our turn to*

do what? To loot treasuries, make bad policy decisions, rig elections, sit tight in power or wage senseless wars? We need to be able to finish the sentence more logically than *'it is our turn'*. We should be saying *'It is our turn to lead because we will do things differently. We will serve with integrity, we will bring powerful visions of transformation and we will prioritise the needs and concerns of our citizens over and above anything else'*.

Women bring different leadership skills into the public space than men. Men have *learnt* (and are not born) to be leaders by seizing opportunities, competing with their peers, making themselves heard and not just seen, and building hierarchies and networks to get their agendas accomplished. Women have *learnt*, through their socialisation (as mothers, wives, daughters) to listen, to negotiate, to build bridges and consensus, to work in flexible ways, nurture friendships and relationships and to manage time better. We all learn these skills, we are not born with them. These skills that women have are undervalued as *'soft skills'* in the worlds of politics and business, and are not considered as important as the *'hard skills'* that men have. As a result, women are judged by men's standards and ways of doing things, and women start believing that unless they act like men they cannot move forward. In fact the highest compliment you can pay many women leaders is that they *'act and think like a man'*. This gives us strong clues about our leadership reference points. If we have a critical mass of women in leadership, especially in governance, we will hopefully start seeing some real changes in the ways in which our communities are managed.

Ways Forward

Legislative and policy frameworks

African women will continue to march on one spot if we do not ensure that there are constitutional guarantees for effective representation and participation specifically through affirmative action and quotas. We should always remember that in spite of the many constitutional guarantees of equality of citizens, there is no level playing field out there. Without concrete and proactive measures such as affirmative action and quotas, we will continue to see dismal statistics of women in politics and decision-making.

When we ask for affirmative action and quotas in business and politics, it is because we recognise that men and women are not starting the race as equal runners. Men always have a head start. Therefore we should not find ourselves advocating against affirmative action. When you argue against quotas and affirmative action for women, you are shutting the door on many women who, regardless of their qualifications and expertise, would not be given an opportunity to demonstrate their worth. By asking for these quotas, we are not saying women are not competent, what we are saying is there is now an obligation to ensure that more women get through the door, and usually they do have more qualifications and expertise than the men, they just don't have the opportunities.

Building a platform to make political demands

Regardless of our political affiliations, we cannot achieve equality for women without a focus on the specificity of women's needs and rights. We need to build a political movement to promote and protect women's rights, and craft demands to all political leaders which need to address, at a minimum, the following³:

- √ Political will and commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment

- √ Women's economic empowerment and livelihoods
- √ Commitment to women's participation in public life
- √ Women's health, security and safety

Violence against women is still endemic, there are many harmful traditional practices that affect the well being of women and girls, women's reproductive health and rights are seriously undermined, and poverty is deeply feminised. We have to continue to draw attention to abuses of women's rights, we need to make impunity unacceptable, and we need to continue to make our governments and relevant institutions accountable. Since our governments are signatories to all the international and regional agreements that are meant to guarantee women's rights, they have to commit serious resources to women's rights and needs. They need to put in place effective mechanisms for the implementation of the BPFA and other international agreements, particularly those that relate to poverty, anti-discrimination, health, human security (especially women's security), and the promotion and protection of women's rights. All these international and regional agreements have to find relevance in the lives of women in all communities.

I think we need to review the Women's Wings of political parties. They seem to either be waning in influence or have gone out of fashion because people feel that having Women's Wings is a way of further marginalising women within the party machinery. We need strong and effective Women's Wings, with women leaders truly committed to promoting the rights and interests of women. These women should be prepared to be honest and effective advocates for women within the party leadership and not use their positions to further their own interests. These Women's Wings can then be used as a basis for negotiating and monitoring internal democracy within the parties.

Our democratic engagement as African women needs to be deep enough for us to be able to make our concerns core election issues. If you want my vote, what will you do to ensure that I do not lose my life giving birth to my baby in my village? If you want me to vote for you, how can you help me the next time my husband beats the living daylights out of me? How will you go about ensuring that I am able to secure a loan on my own without my husband having to sign that he has given me permission to get a loan?

One of the innovations we have seen in recent years in this regard is the emergence of women's manifestos or 'Womanifestos'. The Women's Manifesto of Ghana which was launched in 2004, is a ground-breaking document which spells out clear political demands and a framework for acknowledging the citizenship and personhood of Ghanaian women⁴. Any political party seeking votes from the women of Ghana have to be prepared to address the demands of the Women's Manifesto. Specific demands addressed in the Ghana Women's Manifesto that have been met to date include the passage of the **Domestic Violence Law: The Trafficking Act: The Disability Act:** and the setting up of a **Local Governance Fund**. The manifesto takes a national perspective and in general promotes women's rights and well-being, thereby ensuring ownership and buy-in from diverse groups of women. Women in Nigeria and Uganda are also working on their own 'Womanifestos' as a way of securing political accountability.

Sustaining the gains of women in leadership

One of the difficulties women have faced, as far as these issues are concerned, is the high rate of attrition of women in key decision-making positions. Being part of patriarchal structures, most of which are immune to change or any attempt at transformation, usually leaves progressive men and women frustrated and demoralised. Many either chose not to continue their political careers or they simply get dumped by their parties who move on to more malleable characters. It is very important to ensure that

the few women we do have in positions of authority can count on our moral, technical, political, social, emotional, spiritual and financial support.

In the same vein, we also have the right to hold women in decision-making accountable. Many of them do not honour invitations from key women's organisations in their constituencies or their own countries, but would gladly fly out to Europe or the United States to address less influential audiences there. Many do not return the calls of those who worked hard to support them in their efforts to run. Every woman in a position of authority owes it to other women to do the best they can to strengthen links and build bridges.

Solidarity and strategic thinking

If we are serious about women's political participation, we need to be more strategic. Running for office or seeking to be a part of decision-making processes is not something that can be done overnight. I have had women come up to me six months before an election and say 'I am running for office'. We need to intensify our efforts to identify serious women who we can put forward and support. We have to think in terms of three-ten year plans, and this will also require cultivating leadership amongst young women.

Movement building

Across the African continent, we have more women in politics, business and public life now than we have ever had. Women now need to start translating positions of influence into positions of power. This power, however, has to be redefined differently, as not power 'over', but power 'to' – power to change, transform and support. We can only have this kind of power if we are committed to changing the status quo and moving away from stereotypes and behaviours which perpetuate discrimination against women. For example, people often say '*women are their own worst enemy*'. This is a narrow-minded analysis of power relations in our

society. Behaviour and attitudes that encourage discrimination are the real enemy of women, and those who are in control of these agendas are mostly men and not women.

We need strong movements to help fight gender injustices and fly flags of zero tolerance of all forms of abuse. The women we have in positions of influence today in business, politics or public life generally, should be able to use these positions to advance policies and laws that will protect women, provide for their needs and guarantee their well-being. That is when we can be said to be truly in power, when we are able to make a real difference in the lives of women in our society at large. We can begin by making a commitment that we will champion women's interests and concerns in all that we do. We have certain privileges and rights as women today because some women somewhere fought for them, and we are now the beneficiaries. The least we can do is use our skills and opportunities to support others.

As indicated above, we have a commendable list of role models and *Sheroes* who we can all look up to for inspiration. We need to commit ourselves to seeking them out and celebrating them and putting in place mentoring processes to be able to learn as much as possible from them.

Inter-generational organising

We need to keep mentoring young women in ways that nurture them and prepare them for the harsh world of politics and public life. In doing this, we need to be able to set an example for them because they will practice what they see and not what they hear from us.

Women in the corporate sector

There is a need to channel our positions of influence in the business sector into power in governance. Why are women in business not supporting other women to run for office? What stops us from

identifying credible candidates who are women, with integrity and a track record, and backing them with our financial resources and networks? Why can't we create and use our own 'girls networks' and use them to get other women into power the same way in which men use their 'old boys' networks? We will not resolve the leadership crisis in Africa today unless we get more credible women into leadership, with an emphasis on the credible.

The Role of Civil Society Organisations

Strong and vibrant women's organisations/networks are needed, in fact, they are needed now more than ever. Some people ask, "What exactly do women's organisations do, and what do they achieve?" The answer is simple. They empower women. We would not be where we are today without these organisations, most of them squeeze water from stone and move mountains with bare hands, just to create spaces and a voice for women. It is very important to continue to invest in building the capacities of women's organisations and networks, as well as the broader civil society structures which can help sustain these efforts locally.

Resource Mobilisation

One of the greatest obstacles women face in claiming democratic space is the issue of financial resources. This is usually the game changer for candidates who do not have political sponsors, and even if you do have a wealthy backer, a huge financial investment is required and this places most women at a huge disadvantage. This issue has been debated endlessly, and recently, we have seen some breakthroughs. Recently, the Nigerian government, through the advocacy of the Minister for Women's Affairs, Mrs Josephine Anenih, has set aside up to one million dollars for the launch of the Nigerian Women's Trust Fund. This new fund will provide financial support to female political candidates, regardless of their political affiliation. This is something most donor agencies are unable to do for fear of violating laws around political sponsorship.

With this new fund, we have a case study in what it means to offer direct financial, technical, and capacity building support to women who want to put themselves forward for leadership. The Trust Fund, which has been registered as an autonomous entity with a secretariat, will be launched on 24th March, 2011 in Abuja, Nigeria. I hope that other African countries will follow this example and enable these institutions operate as autonomous entities. There are plans for the Trust Fund to become financially independent through the support of a wide range of institutions and individuals, but most importantly, the ordinary women it seeks to serve.

Ultimately, if we want our agendas to thrive and not stagnate, we will have to fund our own revolutions as women. If every African woman who could afford it gave the equivalent of one dollar to sponsor a good woman or man into political office, then we will genuinely own our own political spaces and agendas. I am hereby calling on all the business and professional women to take note and bring out their cheque books in support of transformatory leadership.

The African Women's Development Fund (AWDF)⁵ has been actively engaged in supporting the women's rights movement on the continent for over ten years now with financial and technical support. One of the six thematic grant-making areas of AWDF is Governance, Peace and Security. Within this area, AWDF has supported hundreds of women's organisations across Africa with grants to enable them promote women in political participation, sensitise communities and engage in advocacy with policy makers.

One of the key capacity building strategies AWDF has used to support grantees is in the area of alternative resource mobilisation. Through training programs, technical assistance and dedicated grant-making for this area of work, AWDF has enabled a number of women's organisations think more strategically about their long-term financial security. As a result new strategies are being

developed in the movement which include investments in real estate, sales of services and social enterprises.

Conclusion

In April 2007, my husband, Dr Kayode Fayemi, former Executive Director of Centre for Democracy and Development Nigeria/UK, ran for the position of Governor of Ekiti State, Nigeria⁶. The elections of April 2007 were the worst ever in the democratic history of Nigeria. He was one of the victims of massive electoral fraud that was carried out with military precision, all aimed at keeping a very unpopular political elite in power. He had no option other than to head for the courts, together with his political associates. After months of inexplicable legal wrangling and delays, mostly orchestrated by the other side, on 28th August, 2008 his election petition was dismissed by the panel of judges due to, amongst other things, *'lack of proof of electoral malpractices beyond reasonable doubt'*.

Dissatisfied with this miscarriage of justice, he headed to the Appeal Court. On 18th February, 2009, the Appeal Court upheld his plea that the election of 2007 was not free and fair, and ordered a re-run in 10 out of the 16 local government areas in Ekiti State. Together with a formidable team of political associates, advisers, friends and family, we found ourselves engaged in the battle of a lifetime. There has never been anything like the rerun election in Ekiti State in April/May 2009 and I pray there will never be anything like it again. It was like a badly-produced Nollywood movie replete with a cast of villains, heroes, heroines and bullies, all acting out a bewildering script that kept changing by the hour. After all the drama, on 5th May, 2009, my husband found himself once again the victim of yet another electoral robbery. The one-minute heroine and next-moment villain who played a critical role in his story, Mrs Ayoka Adebayo, the Ekiti State INEC Commissioner, folded under pressure and declared the election in favour of his opponent.

On 5th May, 2010, exactly one year after the results of the re-run election were declared, he lost again at the election petitions tribunal. However, this time, there was a new dimension. Unlike the case in 2008, when the ruling against him was unanimous, the May, 2010 judgment was a split one, three judges ruled against him and two agreed with his pleas. This resulted in a majority and minority judgment. He headed for the Court of Appeal, yet again, and on 15th October, 2010, they unanimously agreed that he won the re-run election of April 2009. On 16th October 2010, Dr Kayode Fayemi was sworn in as the duly elected Governor of Ekiti State Nigeria, with a full four-year mandate which runs till 2013.

The three and a half years it took to have the mandate of my husband restored brought many lessons in perseverance, hope, determination, spiritual strength, solidarity of friends and loved ones and the true meaning of power to the people.

From being a feminist activist and social change philanthropy advocate, I have now found myself as the Wife of a State Governor. For many years, I have engaged in debates about the role of First Ladies and the pros and cons of the use of informal power structures. I have always been of the opinion that civil society needs to use these structures more proactively and strategically before they get hijacked by sycophants and hangers-on. The historical use and abuse of non-accountable, unconstitutional power has fuelled suspicion and hostility towards First Ladies, and rightfully so. We have, however, also seen a number of committed women leaders who also happen to be First Ladies and who are doing what they can to build a broad base of support in their communities.

From my own recent and therefore limited experience in this area, I think that people are prepared to judge each person on her own merit. There are a lot of expectations of First Ladies, and a lot of interests compete for their attention. It is precisely because they wield so much power and influence that it is very dangerous for such power to fall into the hands of unethical persons. My suggestion

therefore is that the women's movement should be proactive and develop strategies to provide support to First Ladies and their team of advisers. I do not believe that First Ladies should arrogate unto themselves the right to *become* the women's movement in their countries or States. I see their role as being a part of what the women's movement is trying to accomplish — social justice and equality for women. First Ladies should be able to use their voices, clout and connections to be effective advocates of the women's movement as opposed to stifling the autonomy of the movement. It is also very important to exercise informal power and authority with the utmost discretion, respect, sensitivity, and integrity.

A call to action

I believe we have to intensify our efforts at creating new identities for ourselves as African women. We need identities that affirm our rights as full citizens, with rights of participation, engagement and protest. We also need to assert our right to use the power of our numbers as a critical voting mass, and bring to power men and women who will truly transform our societies and create enabling environments for all marginalised people to thrive.

I would now like to put out a call to action to all of us here to take these issues forward. Our countries do not belong to big businesses, to political Godfathers, to all those who conspire to squander our Commonwealth. Our countries belong to the ordinary citizens who wake up every day wondering how they are going to create a better world for their children. Our countries belong to the millions of women who, in spite of the very difficult circumstances they find themselves in, always find a way of building and sustaining communities that survive wars, genocides, economic crisis and ecological disasters. Women of Africa are true survivors. They have made progress, they are pushing back the tides of stagnation, and for them, retreat is not an option. It never was and never shall be.

Thank you.

Endnotes

- ¹ All data on women's governance participation can be found on the Inter-Parliamentary Union database <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>
- ² See www.africanfeministforum.org or www.awdf.org
- ³ I was part of a small group of women who drafted a *Womanifesto* for the Action Congress of Nigeria party in 2010. This document contains five 'Asks' which form the basis of political demands from women who might consider ACN a party of choice
- ⁴ The Ghana Women's Manifesto, 2004
- ⁵ See www.awdf.org
- ⁶ See www.kayodefayemi.com