Women in Contemporary Democratization

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Geneva 2000: The Next Step in Social Development, 26–30 June 2000, combines the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the Implementation of the World Summit for Social Development, and the Geneva 2000 Forum. Under the title "World Summit for Social Development and Beyond: Achieving Social Development for All in a Globalizing World", the Special Session of the General Assembly is being held to review efforts to implement commitments made at the Social Summit in Copenhagen in 1995. The Geneva 2000 Forum is intended to be a platform for a wide range of actors to share experiences on innovative social and economic development policies and activities.

In preparation for Geneva 2000, UNRISD is undertaking a wide-ranging inquiry into five areas of policy and institutional reform that are central to creating an enabling environment for social progress. These include initiatives related to financing social development; democratization and public sector reform; mainstreaming gender in public policy; strengthening the role of civil society; and promoting "people-centred" sustainable development. Selected papers from each thematic area are published in this series of Occasional Papers, and all papers are being synthesized in a special UNRISD report for Geneva 2000.

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Acknowledgements

Acronyms

ALOP	Asociación Latinoamericana de Organizaciones de Promoción (Latin American Association of Organization for Advancement)
ANC	African National Congress
CODESA	Convention for a Democratic South Africa
CUT	Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (Union Federation)
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (of OECD)
FMC	Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (Federation of Cuban Women)
HIV/AIDS	Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus / Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPU	Inter-Parliamantary Union
MP	member of parliament
n.d.	no date
NGO	non-governmental organization
NRM	National Resistance Movement
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ONG	organisation non gouvernementale / organización no gubernamental
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PAP	poverty alleviation programme
PDS	Partido Democrático Social (Democratic Social Party)
PH	Partido Humanista (Humanist Party)
PMDB	Partido Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement)
PPD	Partido por la Democracia (Party for Democracy)
PR	proportional representation
PS	Partido Socialista (Socialist Party)
PT	Partido dos Trabalhadores (Worker's Party)
SERNAM	Servicio Nacional de la Mujer (National Service for Women)
SUS	Sistema Universal de Saúde (Universal Public Health Programme)
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
US	United States
WID	Women in Development

Summary/Résumé/Resumen

Summary

Over the past two decades authoritarian regimes in many parts of the developing world, as well as in East/Central Europe, have been replaced by democracies. This paper looks at the issue of democratization from a gender perspective. While many of the problems afflicting the "new democracies" (such as the elitist character of political parties, and the failure of the state to guarantee civil and political rights or make a significant dent in poverty) affect all citizens, they are manifested and experienced in gender-specific ways. Women's persistent exclusion from formal politics, in particular, raises a number of specific questions about how to reform democratic institutions, since these institutions are not automatically gender-equitable.

In a democratic polity citizens are presumed to have equal rights, opportunities and voice in the governance of the public domain. All versions of liberal democracy link the right to vote with the right to stand for office. Yet women are hugely under-represented in national assemblies and governments. Women's political invisibility is particularly striking in those countries where their political mobilization contributed to the demise of authoritarianism and the transition to democracy.

The suppression of the conventional political arena under authoritarian rule very often shifts the political centre of gravity to "movement-type activities" and gives prominence to women's political mobilization. What very often unites the disparate groups constituting the women's movement in these contexts is their commitment to bringing about a change in government. Nevertheless, social, political and ideological heterogeneity of women's groups, tensions between the *feminist* and the *feminine* streams, and divisions over strategy foreshadow future difficulties in forging political coalitions and aggregating interests to effect change in more "normal" times.

The new wave of democratization has not had a feminizing affect on the parliaments and the governments of the new democracies. Deeply entrenched barriers exclude women from meaningful participation in political parties. In the post-transition period, the more established political parties in countries like Brazil and Chile have remained remarkably resistant to women's participation. Newly formed parties of the left have been more accessible to women, though participation in these smaller parties may arguably produce more symbolic than real benefits. The masculine construction of political authority makes it extremely difficult for women to be elected into office without some form of electoral engineering, such as quotas or reserved seats. The adoption of quotas and reserved seats for women by the South African ANC and the Ugandan NRM, which dominate politics in their respective countries, has produced a significant increase in women's political profile. But given the lack of any realistic political options for women outside these two parties, women's political leverage vis-à-vis the party hierarchy remains strictly limited.

Besides the issue of political equality and democratic justice, the argument for increasing women's representation in decision-making bodies also hinges very often on an implicit assumption that women can, more effectively than men, contribute to the formulation of woman-friendly policies because they are somehow better able to *represent* women's interests. But this is a controversial assumption. Questions continue to be raised about how such a diverse group as "women" can find meaningful representation in the polity in the absence of procedures for establishing what the group wants or thinks, and in the absence of mechanisms for keeping the "representatives" accountable to their constituents. Questions have also been raised as to why the growing presence of women in politics (in some contexts) is not translating into substantive change toward policies capable of making a positive impact on the lives of ordinary women.

Given the limited success to date in feminizing political parties and getting women elected, it is not surprising that other strategies are also needed for bringing women's interests into the policy-making process. One such strategy is to enter and work directly through the public administration. Democratic transitions, however restricted, represent propitious moments for making interventions because the state is potentially more fluid than at other times. But this space is often limited because of the top-down, elitist nature of the transition. Moreover, the ability of those working on the "inside" to push for change on a sustained basis depends less on having an institutional space *per se*, and much more on the relationships with autonomous women's organizations on the "outside" that they are able to establish and exploit. But it is very often difficult to establish effective inside-outside relationships—popular women's movements and groups, in particular, may feel alienated from the "women's machineries" in the public administration and from the women who staff these units. They may also deliberately distance themselves from public authorities because of recent experiences of corruption and co-optation. Moreover, the creation and staffing of women's spaces within the state may in itself weaken the women's movements outside the state.

Although in some contexts the state has incorporated the participants and the banners of the women's movements, it has been extremely difficult for those on the "inside" to translate even the watered-down goals of the movement into concrete policies capable of making a positive impact on the lives of female citizens. The efforts to induce change have been patchy and, in the realm of public expenditure decisions, extremely difficult. This is in part due to the lack of effective pressure from an organized women's constituency (noted above)