

# Tanzanian Women's Role in Decision Making Policy

By Tabu Ndziku

In Tanzania the number of women in high level decision making fora is very small. Women constitute over 51 percent of the country's population of 23 million but they are very few in both party and government decision making bodies.

Women have been participating fully to defend and maintain the right of every Tanzanian as part of their liberation struggle. However they have never been fully involved in decision making policy. Although before independence women were participating fully in raising the country's economic growth they were not fully involved in decision making on party and government issues.

There were many reasons why women were not fully participating in policy decision making. One factor was lack of education. Women were not valued in a society which maintained the myth that a woman was not equal to a man and therefore only men were entitled to education and inheritance. Women got their education from the Qur'an and Bible and not through formal education.

Religion also hindered women's participation in high level decision making. Some religions have been suppressing women to the extent that women regard themselves incapable of expressing their own views. Women were used to listen and accept decisions made by men. Cultural and traditional taboos have also humiliated and prevented the full participation of women in society. Women were seen as slaves to men.

Some women who have emerged in politics in Tanzania to defend TANU (Party) are Bibi Titi Mohammed, Lucy Lameck, Theda Mshau and Agnes Suza. These women have contributed to the attainment of the country's independence.

Although they have played a major role in the history of the country, many of their development proposals particularly on women were rejected. Few women were in top leadership positions to push these proposals.

The Tanganyika Women's Organisation (UWT), the national women's organization, was formed after independence to give women an opportunity to participate in nation building. It sensitized women in Tanzania to feel confident as women and to control their own organization.

Other organizations changed in their attitude towards women. Women took on leadership roles in these groups. They became active in political parties as chairpersons, committee members and secretaries.

In the 1990 General Elections, Kate Kamba and Shamin Khan beat their opponents in the race for constituency seats. In Zanzibar, all the women candidates who contested for the constituency seats won the election.

Of the 33 women who contested for parliamentary seats through the mass organisation only four were successful. Together with 15 special seats reserved for women, 23 out of 216 MPs of the Union Parliament are women.

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**Source:** *Sauti Ya Siti. Tanzania: TAMWA, (11) Oct-Dec 1990. pp.2-3.*